

Saakashvili Era Is Over But Will Be Missed

By [Paul Rimple](#)

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Dear Misha, I am going to miss you. Don't get me wrong, I am glad your era is over. It is just hard to imagine Georgia without you.

I first came to Georgia in 2001 and caught the tail end of the dark years, and watched the growing collusion of discord crystalize into the anti-government movement. I remember you coming into the Nali Bar, and people pointing thumbs murmuring "Saakashvili." You had the guts, fire and ego to get to the top.

I was an election observer Nov. 2, 2003, a day that changed both our lives. Corruption had been one of those "exotic" Georgian characteristics until I witnessed the wholesale theft of the people's votes. I was outraged. Betrayed. I became Georgian that day. Remember the huge flag unfurled across the chancellery the day you stormed parliament? That was me, man. I supported you. Remember thinking, "Wow, is this really happening?" The entire nation rode the same euphoric high to a massive climax, as if everybody's lights instantly

came on after a 12-year blackout.

For the next couple of years, I was ready to forgive your shortcomings. But one day in 2006, a government goon squad in a black Land Cruiser overtook a taxi that would not pull over for them on a street right next to Freedom Square. They got out of the car and beat the old driver. Across the street, cops stood by smoking cigarettes. Wham! That nauseating feeling of betrayal returned, like a kick in the groin.

I know governing a country like Georgia is like herding 4.5 million cats, but I had hoped that you would have shown more respect for the people that supported you during those cold, drizzly days in 2003 and who voted for you and your vision the following January. Your downfall Misha, was that you and your inner circle were living in an intoxicating bubble of self-righteousness, totally insulated from reality. Remember your ire at a journalist who wrote that Georgia is an impoverished country?

The Georgia I entered in 2001 is a part of history thanks to you and everybody that voted for you. Your leaving is the best thing that has happened to this country since you became its leader. It will, though, be strange not having you around anymore.

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