

Former Georgia President Saakashvili's Appointment as Governor of Odessa, What Implications for Transnistria

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Discussing Mikheil Saakashvili's appointment as governor of Odessa, journalist Aleksandr Chalenko states that the promotion is not as absurd as might first appear. In his view, a key factor in Poroshenko's decision lies in how Saakashvili will deal with Transnistria, a breakaway Moldovan region whose stability is guaranteed by Russian peacekeepers.

"At first glance, Saakashvili's appointment by Poroshenko seems an absurdity –as something surreal," Chalenko, whose article was published in Izvestia on Sunday, notes.

"Opponents of the regime in Kiev have reacted to it with jokes on Facebook, saying that now the price of ties will go up in Odessa...But nevertheless, everyone is trying to provide a more or less rational explanation for this highly strange appointment."

Noting that the arguments in favor of the appointment coming out of Ukraine are based on Saakashvili's alleged success in creating the Potemkin-villagesque 'Miracle of Batumi', Chalenko argues that "while many in the corridors of power in Ukraine believe that 'things turned out in Georgia', it's hard to believe that Saakashvili has been appointed to Odessa to turn it into a paradise."

The journalist argues that the appointment must instead be considered from a wider perspective: "The main explanation, in my view, is the fact that [the Moldovan breakaway region of] Transnistria is situated next to Odessa," Chalenko argues.

"The events of the past months suggest that authorities in Ukraine and Moldova, with the support and guidance of the US, naturally, are preparing something bad for Transnistria and Novorossiia [the term used to denote the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics]."

Chalenko notes that "without war, Poroshenko's regime will come to an end. All the failures in the economy and society are presently being blamed on the war. It is the war, oddly enough, which preserves Ukraine from mass social upheaval. Similarly, the front keeps the country's most important revolutionaries –the nationalists from various radical pro-fascist organizations and the volunteer battalions away from Kiev."

“Poroshenko is not prepared to continue to adhere to the Minsk agreements and to implement all of its points. Yes, he may withdraw heavy weapons from the front lines, but the decentralization of Ukraine (its confederalization) and the legalization of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics is not something he is capable of doing. This will simply mean the death of Ukraine. And so there is only one way out, and that is war.”

Chalenko notes that sufficient evidence pointing to the idea that Kiev will resume hostilities against the Donbass republics during the summer, citing the fact that the army is already in the process of bringing up reserves, ammunition, fuel and supplies.

“However, Ukraine has a very big chance of losing once again, as happened in June and August of 2014, and in January and February of 2015. And this will likely result in new territorial losses for Ukraine, which, in turn, will jeopardize Poroshenko’s rule. Ukraine is interested in war, but in a war of position, without any serious offensives, when the warring parties simply fire at each other for months out of Grad rocket artillery and mortars.”

“And so, what can be done in this case?” Chalenko asks. “Restraining the DPR and LPR, and Russia, which stands behind them will, according to Kiev and Washington, be possible only via a threat to occupy Transnistria,” he answers. “Saakashvili’s appointment was arranged in order to demonstrate the seriousness of Ukraine’s intentions in this regard. The Georgian ex-president is associated with the war of 2008. Ukrainian authorities want to make clear: ‘if you Russians begin a large-scale offensive in northern Donbass or towards Mariupol, we, having blockaded Transnistria, will help Moldova conduct an offensive toward Bender, Tiraspol and Dubossary.’”



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In Chalenko’s view,

“the events of recent months clearly demonstrate the readiness of the pro-Romanian and pro-Western forces in Moldova to participate openly on the side of America and Ukraine in the great geopolitical game. Moldova has come to understand that Ukraine is serious. Judge for yourselves: over the past two months, troops and National Guard units have been building up in the Odessa’s Balta district [their numbers are set reach up to 60,000, ed.]...Ukraine has adopted a law scrapping earlier agreements providing for the transit of Russian servicemen to Transnistria. There are rumors that about three hundred Americans have been planted in the Television Center in Kishinev. The puzzle is beginning to form, revealing something very disturbing.” Ultimately, Chalenko concludes on an optimistic note. “

How Novorossiia and Russia will respond to all of this is unknown. The only consolation is Saakashvili himself, who serves as a symbol of defeat, and this time not only for Georgia and the United States, but also for Ukraine. And this means that Saakashvili’s arrival portends another victory for Russia.”

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