

Ukraine names ex-Georgian President Saakashvili governor of Odessa

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In a provocative move last Saturday, US- and EU-backed Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko appointed former Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili governor of the Odessa region, ramping up an already increasingly tense state of affairs with Russia.

The appointment of the ex-leader that presided over the Russian-Georgian war in 2008, comes only weeks after Poroshenko claimed that Ukraine was at war with Russia. The appointment of Saakashvili not only escalates tensions with Russia, but also installs as leader of one of Ukraine's most hotly contested regions a man who has no qualms about using dictatorial and violent means to suppress opposition in the working class.

It's not hard to understand why Poroshenko has such close ties to the former Georgian president; the parallels of their careers are endless. Like Poroshenko's rise to power following the US-EU-backed putsch in February 2014, Saakashvili came to power in Georgia in 2003, after a US-backed coup known as the "Rose Revolution." He immediately implemented a series of free market "reforms," slashing government spending and further undermining the social rights that workers retained in the impoverished ex-Soviet republic.

Saakashvili was hailed by the Bush administration as a leader of a bastion of democracy on the border with Russia.

In fact, amid mass opposition to his rule, Saakashvili quickly established dictatorial powers to crush opposition. In November 2007, tens of thousands of demonstrators crowded the streets of the Georgian capital, Tbilisi, demanding reforms and his ouster from the presidency.

Saakashvili sought to smash the opposition, deploying the state-police who violently cracked down

on protesters using tear gas, rubber bullets, water cannons and truncheons. He then declared a state of emergency and suspended democratic rights.

Saakashvili called for snap elections in January 2008, which were mired in intimidation and manipulation. He retained control of the media and organized petty disqualifications of opposition figures, while other political figures fled the country and one opposition candidate met a mysterious death. Months before it was voted out of office in 2012, Saakashvili's administration faced another scandal revealing extreme forms of abuse and torture used in prisons across Georgia.

The most striking similarities between Poroshenko and Saakashvili, however, are their political histories and connections, specifically their backing by Washington and the EU. Both represent a tiny financial elite which enriched themselves after the dissolution of the Soviet Union by looting the previously nationalized economy. This faction of the elite sees increasing their ties with the EU and US as a way to line their pockets with Western money and establish more efficient exploitation of the working class in their countries. These pro-NATO, pro-EU figures are then used as tools by the US and EU in their efforts to gain control over former Soviet states to surround and destabilize Russia.

Saakashvili's anti-Russian nationalism actually culminated in a six day war launched against Russia in 2008. After the Russian-Georgian war, WikiLeaks released documents exposing Washington's knowledge of the Georgian government's role in fomenting the war. It initiated the conflict when the Georgian army surrounded and shelled Russian peacekeepers in the break-away province of South Ossetia.

In an interview with BBC on Tuesday about his new appointment in a country in which he is only nominally

familiar, Saakashvili said, “The reality is for me today that the Georgian passport means guaranteed imprisonment for me in Georgia.” This did not prevent him from easily receiving Ukrainian citizenship from Poroshenko. It comes as no surprise that Poroshenko would install someone like Saakashvili as the Governor of the Odessa region.

In May 2014, Odessa was the site of a massacre by fascist thugs of dozens of protesters opposed to the Kiev putsch. Since then, despite not being directly in the war-zone, Odessa has continued to be a hotbed of clashes between regime supporters and opposition protesters. Poroshenko doubtless values Saakashvili’s experience in crushing dissent as vital to keeping control of the region.

Odessa also borders on the disputed Moldovan territory of Transnistria, where Russian peacekeepers have been stationed since 1992. Last month, the Ukrainian parliament voted to terminate a military agreement which allowed for the resupplying of approximately 1,500 Russian troops via Ukrainian territory. Given Saakashvili’s experience assaulting Russian troops in the 2008 war in South Ossetia, there are concerns that his appointment marks an initial step towards a provocation being prepared by Kiev against the peacekeepers in Transnistria.

Transnistria’s de facto Foreign Minister Nina Shtanski expressed concern earlier this week over the buildup of Ukrainian soldiers on the border. “It’s clear to everyone what is on the Transnistrian border: they are building tent camps, deploying soldiers. Imagine what panic this is causing among Transnistrians and especially people who live on the border with Ukraine,” she stated.

In addition to Saakashvili, who formerly oversaw Poroshenko’s advisory council of reforms, many other former Georgian government officials from his regime are now working as advisors to the Kiev regime. Georgians have become the second most prevalent nationality in the Ukrainian government.

Thus, not only are figures like Saakashvili seen as valuable in crushing political opposition but, as evidenced by the social and economic policies that he presided over in Georgia, his former regime aides also serve as advisors in the dismantling of what is left of the social and economic gains of the working class in Ukraine. Saakashvili was hailed by the financial elite

for his radical free market agenda in Georgia, in which he eliminated the progressive tax system and established a flat tax, among many other pro-business “reforms.” The attacks on the working class in Georgia now serve as a plan for increasing the exploitation of workers in Ukraine.

Poroshenko, a billionaire oligarch and chocolate magnate, and his now trusted subordinate, Saakashvili, exemplify the kind of filth that the US and EU back in their quest to gain control over countries surrounding Russia in order to reduce the entire region to a semi-colonial status.

Moscow has responded by mocking Saakashvili’s appointment, referring to it as a “*chapiteau* show” (circus show). Continued provocations by such reckless US-backed stooges could quickly escalate into a military confrontation between nuclear powers with devastating consequences.



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