

## **Georgia: State of Emergency**

### **RFE/RL Roundtable Discussion with Anne Applebaum and Vladimir Socor**

Conducted by Salome Asatiani and David Kakabadze on 17 November 2007

Broadcast on 19 November 2007 at 3:30 pm and repeated at 9:30 pm

RFE/RL: The first question we would like to post to both of you – what do you think, after everything that happened on November 7, does Georgia still have a chance for a European future, democratic future?

Applebaum: Yes, absolutely! Georgia has a chance for European and democratic future, and I think the interest that's been shown in Georgia – and what's been happening in Georgia for the last few days is an indicator of that – the enormous amount of concern in western capitals is an indicator of how much people have invested in Georgia, and how much people were hoping to see change in Georgia, and how much they hoped Georgia would eventually be a proper member of the West, proper part of Europe. I don't think anyone thinks that there has been some kind of a fatal reversal that can never be changed, that anything that's happened ends anything. I think on the contrary, people see this as a kind of growing pain, and they very much hope that Georgia will come out of it.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, what would you say about the prospect of Georgia's European future?

Socor: I think Georgian democracy has successfully defended itself – and is successfully defending itself – from challenges that reflect immaturity on the part of opposition groups, and direct threat to the security and stability of the state from one single all-powerful oligarch, with possible support from outside. Any state, especially a democratic state, is entitled to defend itself against subversion and threats to the democratic order. Western sympathizers of Georgia have an obligation to tell opposition parties that they are proceeding in an undemocratic way, that they are seeking to overturn a democratic order and a democratically elected government. Instead of catering to this opposition, and encouraging it in its mistaken ways, westerners should mentor it. The sad reality is that Georgia does not have a viable, democratic opposition. I know about most of these opposition leaders, I have been following their activities for many years, and they are no democrats – most of them, with few exceptions. And, with respect to their political and financial leader, Badri Patarkatsishvili, this is a case in which one, extremely rich, all-powerful oligarch – perhaps too big for this small country – is attempting to hijack democracy in Georgia.

RFE/RL: We will return to Mr. Patarkatsishvili later on, but now I would like to ask Ms Applebaum – your recent article in The Washington Post conveyed a conviction that through forceful dispersal of the protest rallies, and imposition of the state of emergency, President Saakashvili did if not irreversible - like you just described - then at least a very big damage not just to his country, but to American democracy promotion project in general. However, there are voices – and Mr. Socor is one of those – that defend Saakashvili's decision, even calling it a "brave" and "necessary" one. They say that at that moment, Georgia's very sovereignty, its statehood was at stake, and statehood should come first, before democracy. How would you respond to this kind of interpretation of the recent events?

Applebaum: I would sort some of these things into different categories. If you had a large, violent demonstration that was marching on the presidential palace – then of course you

are entitled to use tear gas, and defend yourself. However, some of the moves that Mr. Saakashvili chose to use – smashing up a television station, for example – strike me as above and beyond what you would expect. Whatever happens, destroying the television station, wrecking the equipment, and taking all television off the air cannot be the right way to defend your state. The right way is to have more television stations, more sources of news, if you feel that one is becoming dominant. The right way can never be to remove the news, and to remove free access to information and the media. That Georgia is in an extremely difficult position, I do not deny. That Russia is very interested in undermining Saakashvili, I would not deny either. That he faces challenges of the kind that most western democratic leaders in Europe and United States would never face is absolutely clear. There is military, there are financial attempts to undermine Saakashvili, coming from Russia, [and these] are extraordinary. Nevertheless, the way to fight them is not by removing the media; and the way to fight them is not by breaking up what appeared to have been, in fact, peaceful demonstrations. I'd like to return to a point that Mr. Socor made, which was about the opposition not being mature – that is absolutely the case. There is no disagreement; I've never heard anybody say that Georgia has a clear-minded, well-organized political opposition. Part of the reason for that is that Mr. Saakashvili himself has been so successful, that the flower of the Georgian intelligentsia prefers to work for him, than to oppose him. There's no question about that. But what seems to me is that since what we are talking about more generally is U.S. promotion of democracy, if Georgia does not have a democratic opposition, then one needs to be encouraged. Part of having a democracy is having more than one political option from which people can choose. American money, and foreign interest, help, assistance and so on, should go not only to Mr. Saakashvili and his government, but it should also go into the strengthening of the parliament, strengthening of parliamentary institutions, helping the opposition become real, as opposed to being supported by a single oligarch. Part of Georgia's development is going to have to be developing viable political alternatives. Saying that is not intended to diminish achievement of Georgia, but that's part of what it takes for Georgia to become a normal country. It needs to have a normal opposition, and Mr. Saakashvili needs to encourage, to allow for the evolution of that, and western foundations, western governments also need to be thinking about that. Because the creation of the situation in which Mr. Saakashvili is the only person who is the guarantee of Georgian independence and Georgian democracy is incredibly unhealthy. Something could happen to him, or he could make big mistakes. There has to be political alternatives.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, how would you respond to all this, and especially to the claim that these demonstrations were indeed peaceful?

Socor: Well, I agree in large part to what Ms Applebaum just said, I welcome a far greater balance in this comment compared to her Washington Post editorial that I read a couple of days ago. First, a general point – there is no inherent tension between democracy and stability. We should never get into a situation when the two come into a conflict. It is Badri Patarkatsishvili, political groups that he is financing, and probably behind them in some way Russia, who are interested in creating a situation in which democracy and stability come into conflict. And, it seems to me that the government has balanced the two considerations in a very effective and democratic way. The government tolerated, for several days, large-scale unlawful demonstrations without reacting. I was in Tbilisi during those days. I saw that the police did not carry riot gear, and the police was there in small numbers, with their hands in their pockets, in a rather benign mood. It all degenerated on the final day, when the die-hard opposition elements, bereft by that stage of public support, tried a desperate move – namely, to set up a permanent tent camp in front of parliament. This could never have been allowed, and I support the Georgian government's decision to clear the square.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, if I may...

Applebaum: But smashing up the television station...

Socor: Although, admittedly, there were cases of excessive and indiscriminate use of force, and that needs to be investigated, and those responsible do need to be brought to account. There was no smashing of equipment at Imedi.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, may I interrupt you there – it seems that smashing of equipment did take place at Imedi, there is evidence of that, there are pictures, one even published on RFE/RL website. Even Mr. Semneby, the EU representative who visited Imedi headquarters, stated that there were obvious traces of damage.

Socor: Yes, right. But no smashing of equipment. Certainly not systematic or deliberate smashing of equipment.

RFE/RL: There are a lot of eyewitnesses who say that the smashing did take place.

Socor: I prefer to believe Peter Semneby and the other Western diplomats who were with him. I understand the French ambassador was with him, and they made a public statement after that. They are credible in my view.

RFE/RL: Yes, but there is one perhaps interesting detail – Peter Semneby and the French ambassador had to wait for two days before they were allowed to go to Imedi's headquarters. But let's not go into this – I believe Ms Applebaum wanted to add something to our discussion.

Applebaum: Yes, I wanted to agree with Mr. Socor about the Russian provocation, and Russian attempts to unseat the Georgian government. But, to reiterate simply – there are ways to deal with that that will work and there are those that won't.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, would you say that Georgian government has produced credible evidence that in this particular case Russia was really planning a coup, an overthrow of the government, and there indeed was a conspiracy?

Socor: I think this would be an oversimplification – certainly we have no evidence, and it may well be an oversimplification to say that Russia was planning a coup.

RFE/RL: But that's what Mr. Saakashvili has said on numerous occasions, it seems.

Socor: No, he said it in a far more nuanced way. What we do know, and what the President and other officials have been saying, and what the government has been presenting as evidence is that several opposition leaders – I think maybe three, or four of them – were in contact with the Russian intelligence. And so what we know – although we don't know for sure, we cannot know for sure – it may well be that Russians jumped into this act only after the trouble had begun. That is also possible. But the bottom line is the following – the Russians want to overwhelm the Georgian government by staging a lot of hostile operations at the same time. In Abkhazia, internally, internationally on the diplomatic front. And the Georgian government's manpower resources and other resources are being overwhelmed. The Russians are infinitely superior in that regard. They can handle all these operations against Georgia, at one and the same time. And we don't know what really is happening. Is Badri Patarkatsishvili acting on Russia's behalf? Is he their agent, has he become their agent willingly or unwillingly? Is he being blackmailed? Does he have business interests in Russia? Do the Russians have a terrible

"kompromat" on him? We don't know any of these things. And it would be crucial to know these things.

RFE/RL: But would you say that justifies forceful dispersal of tens of thousands of demonstrators that might be protesting to simply demand better social conditions?

Applebaum: Can I just jump in here? That there is Russian interference, there is no question about it. However, there are ways in which Mr. Saakashvili can behave that would win him an enormous Western support, and will also win him credit within his own country. Clearly, thousands of people on the streets are not all Russian-paid agents. I'm sure, there is no doubt that some of them are. But that thousands and thousands of them are is very unlikely. And for him to dismiss them all as being that is not credible. And so he needs to act in ways that are credible, that will win him an outside support, and will draw positive, instead of negative, attention to his country to his enormous achievements.

Socor: Just a minute – the thousands of people, their numbers demonstrate that these particular opposition parties do not have a social base. The numbers plummeted dramatically - from the first day of mass attendance, the numbers kept going down and down. And by the final day, November 7, there were less than one thousand people there.

RFE/RL: So why disperse them violently then?

Socor: Because of the declared goal to set up a permanent tent city in front of the parliament.

Applebaum: Can I interrupt? This happened in Hungary in the last couple of years – I won't go into detail here, but there was a similar wave of popular unrest, there were big demonstrations...

Socor: Yes, but Hungary...

Applebaum: Let me finish, and they set up a kind of a tent city exactly like that, in front of the Hungarian parliament. And over years, day after day after day it got smaller and smaller, and became a kind of joke. Because of what you said – because it did not have popular national support. And if that was the case with this movement, than that was the right way to deal with it. Set up your tent city, let it marginalize itself, and go home.

Socor: I agree with you – except that there was this attempt to set up a tent city that could not have been allowed. This is what started the trouble, and then of course the question of Imedi...

Applebaum: Let it set itself up - if it does not have popular support, it won't have any impact.

Socor: It was a recipe for trouble that Georgia could not afford at this time. Remember, all the concurrent challenges that Georgia is facing are a form of Russian operation. A prospect of a possible small "victorious war" that Russians are in the habit of staging at election time; the upcoming vote on Kosovo and then Russian reaction in Abkhazia...

Applebaum: I agree with all of that, but...

Socor: So, to have a tent city in front of Tbilisi government building amid all of this...

Applebaum: Let it sit there! When it gets cold, they'll go home! If you don't have popular mass support for overthrowing the government, then people won't come out and sit there day in and day out. Just as Hungarians did.

Socor: You cannot take that chance. Hungary is in a far safer situation.

Applebaum: I know that, I recognize that, but nevertheless, there are ways to deal with this kind of opposition that will work and will have a long-term effect of strengthening Saakashvili and his government, and there are [also] ways to deal with it that will create trouble further down the road. He has now done something that nobody thought was possible – he has united the Georgian opposition against him. No one thought it could be done!

Socor: No, because Georgia is being held to higher standards. Remember, a democratic state is still a state!

Applebaum: No! Saakashvili has been given an enormous path on all kinds of issues...

Socor: Oh yes, that's very true. But up until now. Remember, a democratic state is still a state. Georgia is not a no-man's land anymore. You cannot afford anarchy in Tbilisi. Especially by elements that clearly intend to subvert the constitutional order.

Applebaum: I'm not disagreeing with that! But there are ways to deal with that that will win you an outside support, and will strengthen your government. And there are ways to deal with it that will weaken it in a long-term. And I think what he's just done is to weaken himself.

Socor: Well, I think the weakening comes from excessive editorial reactions from West – which, by the way, are becoming more balanced.

Applebaum: I don't think there've been excessive reactions at all! In fact, I think the American government's reaction was almost too mild, generally speaking...

RFE/RL: President Bush has not commented so far on the events in Georgia.

Applebaum: Not at all!

RFE/RL: To move on – Mr. Socor, you just said that Georgia could not afford trouble at this time...

Socor: It could not afford unlawful actions.

RFE/RL: That's right. But in the end, we might be facing much worse situation than during those demonstrations. In order to become a normal democratic country, Georgia certainly needs western support, as Ms Applebaum just said. And the criticism Georgia has been getting from the West during these last weeks is very strong and almost unanimous. The international community is criticizing Georgia on its actions on November 7 and also afterwards. Do you think this criticism is productive? Could it be sending a wrong message to Georgians – and maybe also to Russia?

Applebaum: From what I know, the criticism has been helpful. We see now that Saakashvili has lifted the emergency declaration – the state of emergency. I am told that he is beginning to react to it, and he is beginning to understand that you have to have television on the

air and you can't just run soap operas all day. It may be having a positive affect. If in the long term he learns how to deal with his opposition, and learns how to help the development of a normal opposition, then I would say it would be positive. I don't think there's been excessive criticism of Georgia at all. In fact, most of the articles have commented on how successful Saakashvili has been in restoring the economic and political fortunes of Georgia, most of them have acknowledged that he is under huge pressure from Russia. Most of them have acknowledged that he has achieved a great deal, and have simply mourned the fact that we thought he had moved beyond this kind of behavior. I don't think it has been excessive at all, and as far as I know, it's had a mostly positive reaction, and it's slowly having a good affect within Georgia. But you all may know better.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, do you have anything to add to this point?

Socor: Yes. First, I'm noticing with satisfaction that the tone of Western editorials is becoming more balanced. After the first article in *The Economist*, which was completely unbalanced, yesterday's article is far more balanced. The reason being that the correspondent went to Tbilisi. Unfortunately, the editorial coverage of Georgia in Western newspapers is in the hands of non-specialists, people who are not familiar with Georgia. All too often they oversimplify the situation, and believe this to be a conflict between a government – a democratic one largely – and a democratic opposition. This is not the case at all. The situation is infinitely more complex than Western editorialists - who are not area specialists and don't personally know Georgia - can grasp. But, as I said, the tone is becoming far more balanced. Not only in *The Economist*, but Ron Asmus had a very balanced editorial in the *Financial Times* the other day. Now the initial lashing out at Georgia and "Misha", was it productive? I don't think so. For what I know, the Georgian leadership is confident of its course – namely, defending the democratic institutions from an undemocratic challenge. This is the bottom line. The challenge to democratic institutions is being mounted by undemocratic groups. Now, we need an evolutionary development in Georgia also with regard to the opposition. The opposition needs mentoring. But these opposition leaders are beyond mentoring. Many of them are simple troublemakers, leftovers of the 1990s, and they have immeasurable personal ambitions. There is not yet a sufficiently rooted consciousness of statehood in Georgia...

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, if I may stop you there – most of the opposition that was protesting now were prominent players in movement that led towards the Rose Revolution. And in the first months after the regime change, they were standing there side by side with Mr. Saakashvili.

Socor: Some of them were. And here is a distinction. Indeed, some of the opposition activists are veterans of the Rose Revolution. The Rose Revolution was a work of a coalition of politicians and groups – some of them system-oriented, others anti-system. Opposition leaders, such as Tinatin Khidasheli and other Republican leaders – and of course the Gamsakhurdia brothers, Shalva Natelashvili and others – are by definition anti-system figures. Some of them took part in Rose Revolution in keeping with their personal, anti-system leanings. Then there was a split in their ranks. Saakashvili and the group around him – who are impeccable democrats in my view – set out to build a state system and state institutions.

RFE/RL: Would you call Salome Zurabishvili, for instance, an anti-system element?

Socor: No, she is not an anti-system element, and I know Salome Zurabishvili well. I respected her greatly when she was Foreign Minister. It seems to me that she never recovered from her fall from the office, and I think that her ambitions are out of proportion with her social and political support.

RFE/RL: Coming back to the western coverage of Georgian events, Ms Applebaum, do you think the fact of storming of the headquarters of Imedi, which is co-owned by Rupert Murdoch, can somehow influence the mood of western media while covering Georgia?

Applebaum: If you mean - "Will Murdoch's papers write about this differently?" – yeah, probably. Everybody certainly noticed that it was a Rupert-Murdoch-owned television station. And that made people sit up and pay attention. I don't know that it's an important enough part of Murdoch empire for Murdoch himself to turn all his forces against Mr. Saakashvili and I don't actually see that happening. But, as I said before, I think, in a way, the attack on a television station and the removal of free media, free television media of Georgia from the air, was a lot more damaging – I mean, a bit of tear gas in the streets, although he apparently overdid it with 500 people in hospitals, still doesn't do nearly as much damage as a removal of television from the air. And, yes, I think, probably most western media picked that up partly because a lot of us spent much of our time writing about the destruction of private media in Russia and the manipulation of television media in Russia. And one of the hopes of many of us for places like Georgia and Ukraine is that they would be able to develop some kind of independent television media culture, different from what we see further to the east. With one blow he did a lot of damage to that hope. So, yes, I do think it was an important [issue], many people noted that detail when they wrote about the situation.

Socor: I would like to respond to that point. The case of Imedi is no longer a case of media freedom; it is a case of defending media against abuse by owning oligarchs. Imedi Television used to be – and I know it personally, because I watched it many times – an opposition station in a normal sense of the word. It departed from that mission a few months ago when it became simply the political instrument of Badri Patarkatsishvili, of the opposition and went down to instigate political trouble and instigate calls for the unconstitutional overturn of the government. In the case of Imedi the standards of free, democratic media need to be defended against the corruption of such standards by an oligarch like Badri, by irresponsible opposition leaders. When Imedi reopens – and I'm sure, I hope and trust it will reopen soon – it needs an independent board of advisers, drawn from the media environment of Georgia, drawn from among Georgia's NGO community. Georgia has a wonderful NGO community – sophisticated and westernized and profoundly democratic. Imedi needs a competent, professional, independent board of advisers to protect Imedi from the corrupting influence of an oligarch, his political interest and from covert political agendas.

RFE/RL: To bring the discussion around Imedi to an end, just one short question: Would you agree with the notion that without Imedi the Georgian media environment would remain one-sided?

Socor: Without a station that reflects in a balanced way all the political points of view – of course. It does not need to be Imedi, to be called Imedi, does not need to be owned by Badri or by Murdoch. Of course, Georgia needs balanced, independent television. Of course, if – and when – Imedi reopens (I think, I hope – as soon as possible), it should have that board of advisers. And, by the way, I noticed the statement of Matt Bryza – he picked up on that theme. I made that suggestion in Eurasia Daily Monitor about a week ago and shortly thereafter Matt Bryza said something very similar. He said that Imedi AND Rustavi 2 – both of them – would need independent, competent, professional boards of advisers to ensure their objectivity and integrity. And I completely agree. I said this about Imedi, Matt Bryza said both Imedi and Rustavi need it.

RFE/RL: May we turn your attention to a bit more general aspect – there are people who have speculated that perhaps the reason why things went wrong in Georgia is that from the

outset, starting with the Rose Revolution, Georgia was celebrated almost unanimously in the West – especially in the U.S. – as a "success story", and was also put under spotlight somehow - the West was watching, so to speak. So would it be possible to say that Georgian leaders were perhaps denied a chance to run a "normal" country with "normal" problems – real problems and real challenges? Maybe the praise was too much, pressure too big and the young and inexperienced Georgian administration found all this too difficult to endure?

Applebaum: I think, there's a lot to that. Absolutely, Georgia has been held upon a kind of pedestal – in some ways correctly. The achievement of Georgia, as I say, is considered quite extraordinary even to this day. I think, part of the problem is the kind of western attention, which was all focused on the personality, and person of president Saakashvili. The aid all went directly to his office, the advisers all went directly to him, the western focus was all on him and what he was doing. There was not much thought about: shouldn't we also pay attention to who the opposition is? If we're talking about democracy, shouldn't we think a little bit about planning the next transition of power? President Saakashvili is not going to be alive forever, he's not going to be popular forever, there has to be something to which he hands over, whenever it's going to be – in two years, in four years or ten years. I think the attention was focused in a wrong way. The United States has a bad habit – and this was as true in Ukraine and, actually, in Central Europe ten years ago, as it is today in Georgia – of kind of declaring victory. You've had your first democratic election, you're democrats – goodbye! That's not helping, that's not how things work. As I wrote in my article, in Central Europe ten years ago there was a great wave of enthusiasm. Then everybody went home and a few years later many of the central European countries elected quite corrupt, nasty, communist regimes to power, which was totally unexpected – everybody thought communists were finished. However, in the following decade much of that reversed itself and we are now seeing in many of these countries more or less a return to normality – not everywhere but in many places. And we made the same kind of mistake in Georgia. We had the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili is in power, that's it, we won – end of story! The idea that democracy was not an event but a process, that it was something that was going to take a long time and we had to think about institutions like the parliament and the opposition as well as the presidency, is something everybody's realizing only just now.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, would you agree with what Ms Applebaum has just said?

Socor: Ms Applebaum identified a real problem: in terms of western mentoring, especially American mentoring of political forces it's very true. It is equally true that western editorial perceptions or media perceptions of countries in our part of the world, including Georgia, are often oversimplifying and superficial. Because, as I mentioned earlier, expertise on the region is in short supply and people who write these pieces are usually not experts on the region and the country.

Applebaum: [??] editorializing on the region is, actually, very important or influential. But, anyway, I don't think it has much effect on American foreign policy.

Socor: Yeah, I agree with you. It has a relatively small effect. Still the State Department sometimes has to fine-tune its positions to take accounts of editorials in...

Applebaum: That's not what happened in Georgia though. That's not what happened.

Socor: But I also think that Georgia – both in government and in opposition – overrates the importance of editorials in western media.

Applebaum: That's true to all small countries.

Socor: Of course.

Applebaum: Hungarians and Poles are also obsessed about what is written about them abroad even if it's only one tiny editorial once a month.

Socor: Yes, they overrate it. But I'd like to point to a number of deep-seated problems that the government must now address perhaps with greater attention than previously. One is to identify viable interlocutors within the opposition camp. The opposition is very diverse. Its parties and its leaders have quite varying interests. Certainly the authorities can identify viable interlocutors within this multicolored camp of the opposition. Secondly, it seems to me that the Georgian presidency, the government need to have a more orderly and more institutionalized advisory process, starting with the formation of a western-style National Security Council. This has long been missing. And as a result top level decisions have often been reactive, spontaneous, taken on a short term basis, they've even borne a stamp of improvisation. The Georgian leadership needs to institute a regularized advisory process. Thirdly, it seems to me that there needs to be a more clear separation of powers between the executive and the legislative. Nino Burjanadze has displayed outstanding leadership abilities in this crisis and not only in this crisis. It seems to me that the President and the Chair of Parliament can form a very effective team that could jointly decide on further steps regarding the opposition. Also, it would be necessary in my view to abandon the winner-take-it-all approach to the question of parliamentary elections. For example the electoral system regarding the ten electoral districts that coincide with Georgia's ten territorial provinces could be amended in such a way that the proportional system would also apply in those ten so-called "majoritarian" districts. Rather than have a winner-take-it-all system in the majoritarian districts as well.

RFE/RL: We have two more questions left if you allow: One is with regard to Georgia's NATO aspiration. You probably know that Georgia was hoping – and possibly is still hoping - to get the so-called Membership Action Plan at Bucharest NATO summit next April. Do you think with the recent developments these prospects have decreased, or even vanished? How do you assess the situation in this regard at the moment?

Applebaum: Yeah, it hasn't helped what's happened in the last two weeks. It didn't contribute positively to Georgia's image as a possible member of NATO. However, there is still lot of time to reverse that and a lot would depend on what Mr. Saakashvili does in the next few days. I think, ultimately the decision about NATO membership depends on a lot of things that happen outside of Georgia, like: What exactly is the new French policy towards Russia? And is Angela Merkel who is more skeptical of Putin really in charge of foreign policy, or is her foreign minister from the opposite party in charge? All kinds of things that really have nothing to do with Georgia and have more to do with western policy towards Russia are probably more important. But I do think it behoove Mr. Saakashvili to concentrate in the next couple of months on how to repair some of the damage that the actions of the last ten days have done. If this is what he is still interested in.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, please.

Socor: Well, the ultimate decision about Georgia's Membership Action Plan, was going to be taken at the last moment, on the eve of the summit, and almost certainly – or certainly – as a political decision, a result of arrangements among the most influential countries within NATO. So, it was going to be a decision on knife's edge, a very delicately balanced situation. Therefore the latest events have dealt clearly a setback to Georgia's aspirations. However, there is a great deal of sanctimoniousness in Europe and to some extent in the United States about Georgia.

Many Europeans will cite the existing internal situation in Georgia as a pretext or an excuse for denying Georgia a Membership Action Plan. That's why it seems to me that it's very important for the Georgian authorities to engage in a more effective outreach to Europeans. It is necessary for Georgian representatives and not only government representatives but also NGO leaders to travel to West-European capitals and explain what happens in Georgia, not diplomats, but representatives of NGOs. You have wonderful NGO people, such as Ghia Nodia, Davit Darchiashvili, Levan Ramishvili, who are eloquent spokesmen for democracy, respected and credible in western Europe. I think they could do a good job of explaining to European public opinion, mass media and governments what's really happening in Georgia. And this should be done well ahead of the April summit in Bucharest. It should be done immediately, it should be done during the upcoming presidential election campaign.

RFE/RL: The last question goes to Ms. Applebaum first. Your recent article in The Washington Post finished with what we all thought was an exceptionally poignant and very telling statement - that the West will be better off building and supporting institutions and not egos of individual leaders. However, on the other hand, if we're talking specifically about Georgia, perhaps its cultural context would make this a bit difficult. First of all, because there is a clear need for a "leader" that almost the entire nation votes for, as it happened three times in the post-Soviet period. And, also, perhaps in transitional societies such as Georgia, it is precisely individuals that play an instrumental role in building of those institutions. What would you say about this?

Applebaum: It would have been difficult although a few minutes ago Mr. Socor gave a list of things that could be done to strengthen democratic institutions. He spoke about defying more carefully the roles of the executive and the legislature and so on. I think it would have been possible and still is possible to support Mr. Saakashvili and at the same time think about what's going to happen after Mr. Saakashvili, because the danger is that even though he's clearly achieved a lot, he is not gonna last forever. And there have to be means of transferring power which is accepted as legitimate by the society and which will produce somebody who is not either a Russian agent or incompetent, or somehow unacceptable. So, in a way we don't have a choice. We might like to say – ok, let's give all our money to Misha and let him be in charge. But I just don't think that's a long term plan. It just simply will not work over the duration. It will not last for ten years. It will certainly not last for twenty years. And we want Georgia to be a member of the democratic Western community forever and not just for as long as Misha Saakashvili is in charge.

RFE/RL: So then it is the individual leader - with or without a big ego – who is obliged to make sure that there are institutions or structures in place after he leaves power...

Applebaum: You know, really great leaders, really great even autocratic leaders have to have it in them to see into the future and what's going to happen after them. If president Saakashvili wants to be remembered as the person who's been a founder of a democratic Western Georgia he needs to think about who's gonna come after him and how that transfer of power is gonna happen. Because that is incredibly important part of his legacy, really important. In fact, it's probably more up to him and up to the people around him than it is up to Western outsiders and advisers. At the end of the day this is Georgia, this is their country, not our country. And it's up to them to think through how their democracy is going to be sustainable over the long term.

RFE/RL: Mr. Socor, what would you say Mr. Saakashvili has done for his legacy?

Socor: Yes, I basically agree with all of this. But it's a bit too early now to think...

Applebaum: It's never too early.

Socor: ...about the post-Saakashvili government when Misha still has one presidential term to serve assuming that he will be reelected on January 5, which is highly likely. But of course the latest events perhaps jolted us into realizing that it's necessary to make arrangements for a post-Saakashvili period after president Saakashvili's second constitutional term will end.

RFE/RL: We all agree that the necessity is there but perhaps you could be a little bit more specific and tell us what concrete steps, in any, you think Saakashvili's administration has undertaken to ensure the proper institutional legacy?

Socor: He still has one more constitutional term to serve assuming that he is reelected, as he probably will. It's far too early to speak about legacy, or about post-Saakashvili period. The task at hand, as Ms Applebaum and myself mentioned, is to strengthen the institutions. And the prerequisites to that is internal stability, not allowing marginal opposition groups to assault the legal order as they did. They began calling since September for the president's resignation, for the abolition of the office of presidency, for installing a monarchy, "Out-Out-Out!" was the slogan, and "Georgia without a President" was the slogan. All this began in late September, well before the demonstrations. I don't think anybody called the opposition to account for this. The prerequisite to institutional development is stability; and that needs to be ensured as the basis for continuing institutional development.