

# The American Conservative

## The Errors of Democratist Enthusiasm

Posted By [Daniel Larison](#) On June 1, 2011 @ 8:41 am In

But the bloom has been off of the Rose Revolution for a long time. Mounting evidence implicates Saakashvili in political corruption and human rights abuses. Dozens of political opponents languish in his jails. Saakashvili's administration has brutally suppressed opposition street demonstrations, jailed dozens of political critics, and harassed or even shut down opposition media outlets, including the main television station. Such developments mock the breathless enthusiasm that Americans had for the Rose Revolution. ~[Ted Galen Carpenter](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

On top of this, there are reports of the potential abuse of power by the Georgian government in resolving commercial disputes, as Businessweek [reported](#)<sup>[2]</sup> earlier this year on the case of Rony Fuchs. According to the story, Georgia may have arrested Fuchs on bribery charges to avoid paying money owed to Fuchs under an arbitration judgment. Even if Fuchs' claim is not valid, the controversy over the case has significantly harmed Georgia's reputation as a place to do business:

Mamradze, the former Georgian Presidential chief of staff, says he doubts Fuchs and his co-investor deserve anything close to \$100 million. "They did absolutely nothing" during their time in Georgia in the early 1990s, he says, despite the findings to the contrary by the arbitration panel. On the other hand, Mamradze acknowledges that the unfolding trial is an embarrassment for his country and will hurt Georgia's reputation. According to Israeli media reports, business leaders there are warning investors to steer clear of Georgia. The Fuchs case has "made a lot of people furious around the world," he says. "The damage is huge." Now that the Georgian government has allowed its sting to blossom into a full-fledged trial, it would be difficult to compromise without admitting that the country's criminal justice system has been used as a tool in what amounts to a commercial disagreement.

The treatment of Fuchs and the chilling effect it is having on foreign investment in Georgia are worth noting here because the one thing that Saakashvili can legitimately claim during his tenure is that his economic reforms have been fairly successful, and since he came to power there actually has been some improvement in reducing corruption. The Fuchs case is one example of how even the Saakashvili's liberalizing, anti-corruption measures are not quite as credible as his Western cheerleaders have made them out to be. These developments do mock the "breathless enthusiasm" that Americans had for the Rose Revolution, but the real trouble is that a great many Americans who pay attention to Georgia continue to have much of the same enthusiasm despite all of this. Just a few weeks ago, four Republican Senators gushed about [how wonderful Saakashvili was](#)<sup>[3]</sup>:

The dynamic leadership of Mikheil Saakashvili is modeled on the economic principles of Ronald Reagan and Milton Friedman.

Presumably, the economic principles they had in mind don't include using government coercion to avoid honoring business agreements. Of course, the flaws of the Georgian government under Saakashvili are not so different from the flaws of many other "hybrid" and semi-authoritarian regimes around the world. Among those regimes, Georgia would not be worth special comment, except that its boosters want to pretend that it is a beacon of democratic reform. On the basis of this misrepresentation, these enthusiasts push for greater U.S. support for a regime that advances no U.S. interests and which has mostly become a liability for the U.S.

One thing in Carpenter's article that I would modify slightly is his emphasis on U.S. leaders being taken in by "sleazy" foreign opportunists. Yes, the foreign leaders he criticizes are certainly opportunistic and they are hardly the heroic figures their American supporters claim, but there's no question that equally opportunistic Americans are pursuing their own agenda in linking the U.S. to them. There would have been no enthusiasm for Saakashvili or Yushchenko, to say nothing of the thuggish Bakiyev, had some Americans not seen them as

useful anti-Russian pawns. The underlying error that these enthusiasts made was not that they misjudged the new “pro-American” leaders or engaged in wishful thinking about their desire for political reform, though they may have done those things as well, but that they identified with them because of a basically misguided desire to project U.S. influence into post-Soviet space where the U.S. has little or nothing to gain at the risk of unnecessary foreign commitments and entanglements.

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- [1] Ted Galen Carpenter: <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/good-revolutions-gone-bad-5387?page=1>
- [2] reported: [http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11\\_10/b4218058741193\\_page\\_7.htm](http://www.businessweek.com/magazine/content/11_10/b4218058741193_page_7.htm)
- [3] how wonderful Saakashvili was: [http://www.rollcall.com/issues/56\\_122/-205623-1.html](http://www.rollcall.com/issues/56_122/-205623-1.html)

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