



# **The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After**

**March 15, 2005 – March 24, 2006**

**by**

**Erica Marat, Ph.D.**







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Published electronically in the United States by

**THE JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION**

4516 43rd Street NW

Washington, DC 20016

<http://www.jamestown.org>

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## **AUTHOR'S ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank Glen Howard, President of the Jamestown Foundation, for inviting me to publish in the *Eurasia Daily Monitor* since March 2005. While writing for *EDM* I had the opportunity to reflect upon events surrounding the March 24 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan both as a scholar and as a Kyrgyz. My work would not be possible without Ann Robertson, *EDM's* Managing Editor. Many thanks to Svante Cornell, the Research Director at the Central Asia - Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program for his professional support and encouragement. Finally, I am indebted to Kristi Marks and Christopher Swift from the Jamestown Foundation for their enormous help in organizing this volume.



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## FOREWORD

Few analysts are as well qualified to write about Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution as Erica Marat. A Kyrgyz citizen and regular contributor to The Jamestown Foundation's Eurasia Daily Monitor, Dr. Marat spent the last fourteen months examining the domestic, regional and international dynamics shaping radical change in this remote yet strategically critical Central Asian republic. *The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After* represents a comprehensive compilation of her reporting for Eurasia Daily Monitor during that period.

The timing of this report is particularly notable. Published on the first anniversary of the fall of President Askar Akayev's regime, *The Tulip Revolution: Kyrgyzstan One Year After* provides an invaluable reference for policy makers the American public. From street protests to political assassinations, Dr. Marat integrates indigenous media, local sources and personal observations to furnish timely, fact-based analysis of seminal developments. Her contributions to our understanding of Kyrgyzstan's color revolution are unique and unmatched.

This occasional report reflects The Jamestown Foundation's continuing efforts to provide in-depth coverage of emerging economic, political and strategic trends throughout the post-Soviet space. Those trends influence U.S. interests in the region and around the world. As Russia and China vie for influence in Central Asia, and as the U.S. military withdraws from Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan's importance as an ally in the Global War on Terrorism grows with each passing day.

Kyrgyzstan now stands at a critical geopolitical crossroads. With the U.S.-Uzbekistan relationship in crisis and Washington committed to building deeper ties with Bishkek, there now is a profound need to understand the dynamics that sparked the Tulip Revolution and continue to shape this fledgling democracy. Jamestown is proud to contribute to those crucial endeavors.

**Glen E. Howard**  
President, The Jamestown Foundation



✿ INTRODUCTION ✿





✧ LESSONS FROM THE TULIP REVOLUTION ✧

The year following Kyrgyzstan's March 24, 2005 Tulip Revolution proved very eventful. Virtually every week witnessed civil unrest, political assassinations and scandalous showdowns between government factions. For many Kyrgyz, this year has been the most difficult period since gaining independence in 1991. Some view the March 24 events as a coup d'état, believing that it disrupted the political order built by the previous president Askar Akayev during his 15-year leadership. Others argue that Kyrgyzstan experienced a revolutionary shift toward democracy, an open society and a legitimate state.

The majority of Kyrgyz now believe that despite bringing many hopes, the Tulip Revolution was ultimately undermined by the new government's inefficient and corrupt politics. Many were proud to remove the previous corrupt regime through collective political participation. Yet now many remain disappointed by rising instability and the lack of noticeable economic progress during the past year.

Though inevitable, the Tulip Revolution unfolded abruptly. The rise of political violence is one of several negative repercussions stemming from this sudden transformation. Kyrgyzstan now suffers from violent activity of organized criminal groups and widespread corruption in public and economic sectors. Similar conditions are commonplace in developing, post-colonial states where the majority of population lives in poverty. There are several encouraging signs, however. The fact that the Kyrgyz public worries about the rise of political violence following the Tulip Revolution demonstrates that the Kyrgyz society respects the rule of law and is now able to voice those concerns publicly.

This report is a collection of recent articles from Jamestown's *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. Organized chronologically and divided into several thematic sections, it examines Kyrgyz society before, during and after the revolution. These articles cite scholars, observers, and ordinary citizens from Kyrgyzstan, Central Asia, Russia and the West. They also illuminated significant, multi-directional phenomena. In addition to revealing peculiarities in the behavior of Kyrgyzstan's political elites, the Tulip Revolution and its aftermath also underscore the complex nature of social processes, political participation, inter-ethnic dynamics and political development in the post-Soviet space. As one Kyrgyz activist noted, developments in Kyrgyzstan may represent the future of other Central Asian states.



**THE REVOLUTION**  
**✿ MARCH 15, 2005 – MARCH 24, 2005 ✿**





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**MASS PROTESTS, LITTLE CHANGE AFTER KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARY RUNOFF**

✂ **March 15, 2005** ✂

Voters in Kyrgyzstan returned to the polls on March 13 for a second round of voting for a new parliament. The results confirmed majority representation for pro-presidential forces in the next single-chamber parliament. With six months to go before the presidential election, mass protests throughout the country have only begun to build momentum.

Candidates from 40 of the total 75 electoral districts who did not win a majority in the first round on February 27 returned for a runoff. Among the more notable candidates were Bermet Akayeva, President Askar Akayev's daughter and informal leader of the pro-governmental Alga Kyrgyzstan party, as well as well-known representatives from the opposition, including Adakham Madumarov and Omurbek Tekebayev. According to the early returns from the Central Election Commission, Akayeva received 42 percent of votes, while her opponent, Bolotbek Maripov, received only 13 percent, a few percentage points lower than in the first round. Akayev's son, Aidar Akayev, secured his seat in the first round and did not stand on March 13.

The political coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society" reported a number of violations in Bishkek's University and Uzgen districts, which were committed by competing candidates and Central Electoral Commission members. In particular, people were transported to polling stations in groups, making it nearly impossible for independent observers to inspect their documents. Turnout was a reported 51 percent, lower than in the first round.<sup>12</sup>

The controversial election generated a series of unprecedented statements from the opposition forces and mass protests that began in early March continued until the runoff. Contrary to expectations, protests began in remote areas far from the capital, Bishkek, and were concentrated mainly in the southern region of the country. The number of protesters ranged from a few dozen to 2,000 people in Naryn and the densely populated southern cities of Jalalabad, Osh and Uzgen. The protesters' demands included canceling the results of the allegedly fraudulent elections and Akayev's early resignation.

The People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK) coordinated the protests. Created in the months leading up to the elections, the movement comprised many of the opposition's most prominent figures: Bektur Asanaliyev, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Dooronbek Sadyrbayev, Usen Sydykov and Topchubek Turgunaliyev. The PMK includes the Ata-Jurt movement, the "For Fair Elections" bloc, Jany Bagyt, the National Movement of Kyrgyzstan and the National Congress of Kyrgyzstan.

PMK leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev has demanded early presidential elections and an extension of the current parliament's mandate. This suggestion was followed by a March 10 gathering of 23 parliamentarians outside the parliament building in Bishkek who passed a vote of

no confidence in the president and the Central Election Commission.

Law-enforcement agencies forcefully suppressed civilian demonstrators during the protests in Naryn. One woman was reported injured on March 10. The next day, as a response to the government's use of violence, protesters from Naryn began to march toward Bishkek until militia detained their leader, Tursunbai Akun, on March 13. On March 3 a bomb detonated in the Bishkek apartment of opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva, though no one was injured or killed. The government denied any responsibility for the incident, claiming that opposition forces intentionally set off the bomb as an attempt to attract the attention of the international community.

For the first time, the government simultaneously suppressed several newspapers in Kyrgyzstan, allowing state-financed mass media dominated election coverage. The only independent radio station broadcasting throughout the country, Azattyk, was closed on February 24. Two opposition news websites with servers located in Kyrgyzstan, *Moya stolitsa novosti* and *Res publica* suffered from massive hacker attacks that temporarily blocked access. According to the Open Net Initiative, a hacker group named "Shadow Team" deluged pro-opposition websites located outside Kyrgyzstan with spam.<sup>3</sup>

So far, the protests have not damaged Bishkek's interests abroad. On March 11 the Paris Club of creditors decided to write off about \$555 million of Kyrgyzstan's external debt. Another € 431 million will be restructured in line with the IMF's poverty reduction and economic development program.<sup>4</sup> Kyrgyz-Russian military relations also received a boost, with the Russian Ministry of Defense announcing its intention to increase funding of the Russian air defense base in Kant by one billion rubles in 2005.

Nonetheless, the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan received more international attention than did similar votes in neighboring Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The American ambassador in Bishkek, Steven Young, publicly expressed concerns about numerous violations of the election law in the first stage of elections and the two-week gap before the runoff.

The next parliament to be seated in Kyrgyzstan will consist of 75 seats and be dominated by pro-governmental politicians, including two of the president's children and members of the pro-government Alga Kyrgyzstan party. It is too early to tell if mass protests will continue in the country and if they will lead to any meaningful changes before the presidential elections in October. The time between the two rounds of voting showed the potential of the masses to challenge the government in a peaceful way. But at the same time, the Kyrgyz government responded with a number of undemocratic means to suppress the freedom of speech and prevent unwanted demonstrations.

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**KYRGYZ CRISIS REACHES BISHKEK – RUMORS SUGGEST AKAYEV HAS FLED COUNTRY**

↻ **March 21, 2005** ↻

One week after runoff elections for parliament, the government of Kyrgyzstan lost administrative control over all large cities in the southern part of the country to opposition protesters. On March 20, for the first time since the bloody events in Aksy in 2002, the Kyrgyz government deployed internal troops to suppress civilian protesters in Jalalabad and Osh. The clashes left dozens wounded. President Askar Akayev's government is now facing its biggest political crisis since independence.

The Kyrgyz public has never mobilized in such masses and the number of protesters is increasing every day. On March 19, 3,000 people gathered outside the capital, Bishkek, demanding cancellation of the elections and calling for Akayev's resignation. A record 50,000 people turned out in Jalalabad. The demonstrations coincide with Nooruz, a popular national celebration, on March 21.

In the morning of March 20, Kyrgyz OMON Interior Ministry troops stormed buildings occupied by protesters in Jalalabad and Osh. Opposition leaders Anvar Artykov and Dujshenkul Chotonov were among the more than 160 protesters arrested. The governor of Jalalabad oblast, Jusupbek Sharipov, denied reports of casualties, saying, "The opposition is dramatizing the situation."<sup>5</sup> The protesters subsequently re-grouped and deployed some 1,700 men on horseback in Jalalabad's suburbs.<sup>6</sup> According to recent reports, the protesters in the south are planning to occupy Osh-3000, a state-financed television station, and the Jalalabad airport.

Akayev has made no public statements since March 14, when he appeared on national television to declare the elections a success and condemn the opposition. According to *Res publica*, unconfirmed sources report that President Akayev has secretly fled the country with his family -- the first lady and the two children who recently won seats in parliament.<sup>7</sup> Opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva confirmed the news.<sup>8</sup>

Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev is ready to start negotiations with the Jalalabad protesters.<sup>9</sup> Meanwhile, opposition leaders are calling for the seizure of government buildings in Bishkek this week.

The Kyrgyz opposition has long been fragmented into personality-based groups rather than ideological factions. These rivalries prevent the opposition from realizing any major successes in the past. However, now some former presidential figures, including representatives of the Kyrgyz Foreign Service, are openly backing the opposition. Melis Eshimkamov, a newspaper editor and unsuccessful candidate for parliament, recently switched loyalty from Alga Kyrgyzstan, the party headed by the president's daughter Bermet Akayeva, and spoke out against President Akayev, accusing him of corruption and authoritarianism.<sup>10</sup>

In early March, Kyrgyzstan seemed to be divided into a politically active "south" and passive north, including Bishkek. To date, the protesters have occupied seven regional administrations in the southern cities of Jalalabad, Uzgen,

Osh, Kochkor, and the northern city Talas, the birthplace of First Lady Mairam Akayeva. One reason Bishkek remained calm is the fact that the country's major businesses are concentrated in the capital. High rates of corruption among business circles and informal ties with the government may discourage Kyrgyz entrepreneurs from protesting. There are also many state employees living in Bishkek who received increased attention from the government in the run up to the election.

According to the Bishkek police, 80 unsanctioned meetings were organized in different parts of the city during the last month.<sup>11</sup> City law-enforcement agencies are now on high alert, with militia units are spread across the main streets and connecting routes to Bishkek to thwart any mass movement of people from other regions. Earlier this year the Interior Ministry secretly conducted a series of special training exercises in techniques for crowd control and imposing a state of emergency.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, U.S. Ambassador Steven Young continues to be one of the most vocal critics of the elections and the Kyrgyz government's suppression of free speech. On March 19, several news agencies published a phony report allegedly from the U.S. Embassy in Bishkek that contained defamatory statements about the political situation in Kyrgyzstan and the activity of top Kyrgyz politicians. The U.S. Embassy officially denied the report, but the incident sparked broad discussion. A number of Internet journals in Kyrgyzstan are still suffering hacker attacks, including [cetrasia.org](http://cetrasia.org) and [gazeta.kg](http://gazeta.kg), two sites famous for their anti-Akayev publications.<sup>13</sup> Access to these websites has been intermittent since March 13.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan has already departed from the peaceful popular revolutions witnessed in Georgia and Ukraine. Reports of beatings, arsons, mass arrests, and deaths in the process of revolutionary mobilization against the current regime have raised immense distress among Kyrgyz at home and abroad. The Kyrgyz diaspora joined anti-Akayev protests on March 21 in front of Kyrgyz embassies and consulates in Washington, DC, Chicago, New York, Brussels, London and Moscow. As one Kyrgyz graduate student in Washington, DC recently observed, "I feel guilty of being a mere observer when the entire country is in protest."

## CROWD SEIZES GOVERNMENT OFFICES IN BISHKEK

✂ March 24, 2005 ✂

On March 24, 15,000 to 20,000 people gathered in Bishkek's central square demanding President Askar Akayev's resignation. The protesters then stormed the government headquarters. There are reports of severe fights between the protesters and hooligans allegedly hired by the government to stir up tensions in the crowd. State Secretary Osmonkun Ibraimov resigned his position citing disagreement with Akayev's politics. Ibraimov had been one of the president's closest allies. With his resignation, he hoped to encourage Akayev to start negotiations with the opposition, which he has refused to do.

After capturing the Kadamjai district of Batken Oblast this week, the Kyrgyz opposition now controls over two-thirds of the country's territory and one-third of its population, excluding the densely populated Bishkek and Issyk-Kul regions. The escalating political crisis that erupted on March 20 after the violent suppression of opposition protesters in Jalalabad and Osh generated international response to the worsening situation in Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz government was alternately criticized and offered assistance in creating a peaceful dialogue with the opposition forces.

The first large-scale, anti-government protests in central Bishkek began on March 23. Two youth organizations, KelKel and Birge, together with Bolot Maripov, a candidate who competed with President Askar Akayev's daughter Bermet Akayeva in the disputed parliamentary elections, organized a protest of 1,000 people in the center of Bishkek. After ten minutes of protest, a group of men wearing white caps—allegedly a team of hired provocateurs—attacked the demonstrators. The clash escalated when Interior Ministry troops arrived and selectively beat the protesters without harming the provocateurs.

In total, more than 20 students and journalists were hospitalized and 200 people were arrested in Bishkek, including Maripov, as well as other well-known figures such as NGO leader Edil Baisalov and film director Bolot Shamshiev.<sup>14</sup> This incident once again showed the Kyrgyz government's coercive means in suppressing unwanted demonstrations. New protests are expected in Bishkek in the coming days.

More sources now confirm that President Akayev spent several days in Moscow after the parliamentary runoff on March 13. His first public appearance since that date was only on March 22, at a session of the new parliament, where he made it clear that the government is not willing to launch any talks with the opposition because its actions have already crossed the legal line. Akayev claimed, "Everyone has his own requests and it is not clear with whom to lead negotiations".<sup>15</sup> He insisted that the new parliament must tighten control over the restive regions. Likewise, opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva, who is currently active in Osh, says, "There is no point for cooperation, the government lost the south to the opposition protesters and the north is supporting them".<sup>16</sup> Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir volunteered to me-

diate talks between the government and opposition. Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev is currently visiting Osh, but it is yet unclear with whom he is planning to meet.

At the first session of the new parliament, 10 deputies out of the total 71 refused to appear in a showing of solidarity with the opposition and protesters. According to the Chair of the Central Election Commission, Suleiman Imanbayev, the new parliament is comprised of 19 members of the pro-governmental Alga Kyrgyzstan party and five from Adilet.<sup>17</sup> This means at least one-third of the parliament belongs to the pro-presidential coalition. Akayev recently appointed a new interior minister, three deputy interior ministers, and a new attorney general.<sup>18</sup>

In the Russian Duma, Dmitry Rogozin of Rodina and deputy speaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy made a proposal to send peacekeeping troops to Kyrgyzstan in order to prevent the escalation of violence in its southern cities. Existing agreements within the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Russian air base near Bishkek facilitate fast, legitimate troop movements in times of emergency. The mood in the Duma was echoed in the Russian mass media. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, for example, published an article entitled, "Are We Loosing Kyrgyzstan?" Unlike in Georgia and Ukraine, the Kyrgyz public shares generally positive feelings toward Russian influence in their country's political, economic and cultural spheres. The Russian language is widely used and, in some cases, more popular than Kyrgyz.

So far, Kazakhstan, Japan, Russia and the United States have all called for a peaceful resolution of the crisis and urged against resorting to military force. Uzbekistan tightened control at the Kyrgyz border, citing the need to prevent the possible spillover of destabilizing elements. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and the Ukrainian ambassador in Bishkek both expressed support for Akayev's regime and spoke of their hope for an "evolutionary" resolution of the situation. U.S. Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns, in a meeting with Kyrgyz Presidential Adviser Alibek Jekshenkulov, stated that the U.S. government encourages immediate dialogue with the opposition.<sup>19</sup> Some Kyrgyz experts believe that Jekshenkulov may well be Akayev's chosen political successor.

On March 23, the French newspaper *Liberation* harshly criticized the Kyrgyz government's use of force in the southern cities, calling it an "extremely unpopular regime" with a highly mobilized opposition in a small, poor country. According to Oliver Roy, a French expert in Central Asian affairs interviewed by *Liberation*, "The Kyrgyz political regime is not capable of reform," to which a Russian columnist from *Vremya novosti*, Arkady Dubnov, suggested that the post-election tensions in Kyrgyzstan are "the result of the Kyrgyz government's low political professionalism."<sup>20</sup>

## TULIPS BLOOM IN KYRGYZSTAN, BRINGING HOPES FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT

✂ March 28, 2005 ✂

March 24, 2005, has become an important date in the history of Kyrgyzstan. On that day, in less than an hour, a crowd of demonstrators seized the Kyrgyz White House in Bishkek, opposition leader Felix Kulov was freed from jail and President Askar Akayev reportedly fled the country. Taken together, these three events signified the collapse of the Akayev regime.

Instead of celebrations, looting and arson overtook Bishkek. The destruction shocked Bishkek's residents and devastated the thin strata of middle-class entrepreneurs. According to opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva, former members of Akayev's government had deliberately set loose groups of hooligans to cause unrest.<sup>21</sup> But no state of emergency was declared in Bishkek as some 3,000 people volunteered to assist the militia in efforts to protect the capital.

Beyond the looting, citizens expressed their disappointment with Akayev's sudden disappearance: "If Akayev claims to be a legitimate president and refuses to resign, why is he not returning home and facing the opposition?" was a typical reaction. Many Kyrgyz think that if Akayev had left office in 2000, he could have been remembered as an honorable leader and quietly returned to scientific activities. Akayev and his family are thought to be in Moscow, because the Kremlin officially offered political asylum. The Russian Academy of Sciences reportedly has offered Akayev a position in one of its departments.<sup>22</sup>

The interim government announced that leaders would accept the legitimacy of the new parliament and set presidential elections for June 26. In the meantime, there is speculation that the acting government will find it difficult to function because its power is scattered among multiple leaders. The list of prominent opposition members with wide public support includes:

✂ **Kurmanbek Bakiyev**, the Acting Prime Minister, was Prime Minister in 2001-2002. He joined the opposition after being forced to resign in 2002, following the bloody demonstration in Aksy. Leading the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev organized many of the protesters in the south and Bishkek. He has publicly declared his intention to run in the upcoming presidential election and his opponents will likely be figures from northern Kyrgyzstan who previously supported Akayev. The new parliament, with a majority of pro-Akayev candidates, might form a new opposition coalition. While Bakiyev has absolute support in the south, Felix Kulov is more popular in the north.

✂ **Felix Kulov**, also a former Akayev ally, was imprisoned on corruption charges in 2001 after challenging Akayev in the 2000 presidential election. According to *Obshchestvenny reiting*, Kulov's popularity almost surpassed Akayev's in the late 1990s,

and many thought he would become the next president. Kulov has a background in military and security structures, worrying some Kyrgyz about his potential to be a hard-fisted, undemocratic leader. Others, however, think that Kulov's strong personality will not tolerate law breaking and corruption in the government. Kulov was an outspoken critic of Akayev's pro-Russian politics in refusing to join the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, arguing that an American military presence in Kyrgyzstan has strategic importance. His party Ar-Namys (Dignity) has members across the country, but he is most popular in the north. Kulov is currently in charge of security forces and was responsible for stopping the looting in Bishkek. The Kyrgyz Supreme Court will review Kulov's case soon and decide whether he must complete his prison term. Kulov will not likely run in June because his presence might split the new government.

✂ **Roza Otunbayeva** joined the opposition late last year.<sup>23</sup> An experienced diplomat, she was a Soviet representative to the UN, twice Kyrgyz foreign minister and Akayev's ambassador to the United States and Britain. She says she joined the opposition because she could no longer tolerate Akayev's corruption and growing authoritarianism. Otunbayeva helped consolidate the opposition and was instrumental in the people's protests in southern Kyrgyzstan, Talas and Bishkek. As acting minister of foreign affairs, Otunbayeva has insisted that Akayev must be given a free choice of whether he wants to return to Kyrgyzstan or "stay in Russia if he feels more comfortable there." Bakiyev and Otunbayeva have stated that Kyrgyz-Russian relations will continue as before. "We will cooperate with CIS, the West, and Southeast," Otunbayeva added.<sup>24</sup>

✂ **Bolot Maripov** is an outspoken journalist from opposition newspaper *Moya stolitsa novosti* who ran against Akayev's daughter Bermet in the parliamentary elections.

✂ **Adakhan Modumarov**, another unsuccessful parliamentary candidate, is a leader from south, who helped mobilize thousands of protesters in Osh. He became a deputy prime minister in the interim government.

Other opposition members have been offered various positions in the government but have not yet been confirmed by parliament. There are fears that Bakiyev, born in Suzak (Jalalabad Oblast), will give preference to southern cadres. However, current cabinet appointments suggest that Bakiyev is not only keeping a balance between north and south, but has also reassigned some former public employees in the new government.

The opposition leaders have converted their main weakness, fragmentation, into an asset by forming a government with many political activists to reach a reasonable balance among different executive agencies. The speed and relative smoothness of the interim government's appointments suggests a consensus has been reached among the key figures.

"The Tulip Revolution is more important to the modern development of

free Kyrgyzstan than the transition from the Soviet regime,” commented one Kyrgyz student in Bishkek. Opposition groups in other former Soviet republics have taken notice. Members of the unregistered Uzbek Ovoz Dehkhonlar (Free Farmers) party gathered in front of the Kyrgyz Embassy in Tashkent to show support for the opposition’s victory in Kyrgyzstan and on March 25 the Belarus militia violently suppressed hundreds of protesters in central Minsk.



**OLD AND NEW REGIMES: LEGITIMACY, CORRUPTION AND  
RECOGNITION**

**❧ APRIL 2005 – MAY 2005 ❧**





## AKAYEV OFFICIALLY RESIGNS WHILE KULOV DECLARES CANDIDACY FOR PRESIDENT

✂ April 5, 2005 ✂

Although the mass lootings in Bishkek have ended, Kyrgyzstan's political crisis is not over. The legacy of Askar Akayev's regime is patently apparent as the new government begins to revise the ownership status of the country's major businesses. At the same time, more and more political figures are announcing their intention to compete for the presidency. As Bishkek businessman Esenbek Abdyldayev remarked, "Now the looting begins on the governmental level."

President Askar Akayev did not reappear publicly until five days after the opposition declared its victory on March 24. He then refused to officially resign the presidency until various conditions had been met. He finally resigned on April 3, after negotiations with a special parliamentary commission at the Kyrgyz Embassy in Moscow. Before Akayev's interview with Ekho Moskvyy radio on March 29, there were no official statements about where he and his family had fled when the political opposition captured the Kyrgyz White House. Akayev and his daughter, Bermet Akayeva, gave several interviews to foreign media claiming they had been violently forced out of the country as a result of a coup d'état, not a people's revolution.<sup>1</sup> After submitting his formal resignation, Akayev asked for political asylum in Turkey.<sup>2</sup> This is the second country, after Russia, to which he has appealed for protection.

Akayev's refusal to resign quickly after fleeing Kyrgyzstan created a legal Catch-22. The interim government headed by Kurmanbek Bakiyev was recognized both domestically and abroad, but at the same time there continued to be an elected president who had lost access to state power. The status of the newly elected parliament was another point of concern for the interim government. While opposition protesters argued for its illegitimacy, opposition leaders such as Felix Kulov strongly disagreed with the idea of holding new parliamentary elections because the February 27 ballot had largely met international standards. Instead, he proposed repeating elections only in some disputed districts.

Meanwhile, Acting Prime Minister Bakiyev is watching as members of Akayev's former opposition and pro-Akayev candidates come forward to compete in the presidential election in June. But most importantly, Bakiyev now has to confront Felix Kulov, the country's best-known politician. After being freed from prison, Kulov has managed to regain popular support surpassing that of Bakiyev. Kulov's prison term was scheduled to end this September and a special working group has been formed to review his legal case. The original charges against him will likely be dropped within the next few months. It is also evident that Bakiyev's interim government is not pleased with Kulov's freedom.<sup>3</sup> Frictions between Bakiyev and Kulov are mounting and though the two have avoided any harsh statements about the other, both candidates have made indirect accusations in public.

Bakiyev has a reputation as a clean politician from the south. He has an even

temper, yet strong respect for the rule of law. Southern residents, including the Uzbek population in Osh Oblast, have great hopes for their leader. But there is one more southern candidate, Adakhan Modumarov, who was active in mobilizing the crowds that ousted Akayev's government. Modumarov refused a deputy prime minister position in the interim government and declared his intention to compete for presidency.

Nurbyek Turdukulov, a Kyrgyz businessman, has also registered to run for the presidency and has Akayev's support. Turdukulov is CEO of Bitel GSM, which controls mobile telephone service in Kyrgyzstan. Bitel has over 200,000 subscribers and over 200 employees, a high number by local standards. Although it is unlikely that Turdukulov will win the presidency, he is laying the groundwork for a future career as a politician.

The new government will have to face the same problems that led to the Akayev regime's ouster: rampant corruption, widespread poverty and unbalanced political representation between the northern and southern halves of Kyrgyzstan. In the long run, Bakiyev, or any other elected president, may find it difficult to lessen the economic cleavage between the more prosperous north and the poorer south. The economic problems are complicated by general underdevelopment, scarce resources, and overpopulation in the Ferghana Valley. If the government cannot increase southern living standards in the near future, mass tensions might arise again.

Unlike in Ukraine, where the Leonid Kuchma regime lost much of its support overnight when evidence of official corruption was revealed to the public, there is no substantive evidence of Akayev family involvement in Kyrgyzstan's largest businesses or embezzlement. However, Akayev's personal diaries have recently been discovered, along with records about positions for sale at government agencies, bribe rates, and bought parliamentary candidates; these papers might shed light on the real state of affairs. However, it is already evident that some large businesses, such as Bitel GSM, are ready to be sold to foreign buyers without the consent of the new government.

There are dual-power situations at some state institutions, where old leaders are refusing to yield their positions to newly appointed officials.<sup>4</sup> For now, the interim government, declared presidential candidates and post-revolution policies are under close scrutiny by the Kyrgyz media. The former opposition's online editions have recovered from massive hacker attacks and state-funded television and newspapers are loosely regulated.

## KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT STRIPS AKAYEV OF PRIVILEGES

✂ April 12, 2005 ✂

During his presidency, Kyrgyz leader Askar Akayev had secured guarantees of immunity for himself and members of his family by means of two referenda. Akayev officially resigned on April 3, but his departure did not become official until it was accepted by the Kyrgyz parliament on April 11. During the intervening days, the opposition's most outspoken leaders, particularly Azimbek Beknazarov, demanded the cancellation of the basic privileges Akayev and his family should have been granted after his resignation.

According to a parliamentary decision on April 8, Akayev was denied the historical status of being the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan.<sup>5</sup> The parliament also deprived him of the right to a personal security guard (provided by the state) within the territory of Kyrgyzstan, the right to take part in the political life of the country and diplomatic immunity for his family members.<sup>6</sup> This last clause is especially significant, as Akayev's wife Mairam, daughter Bermet, and son Aidar, had reputations as particularly corrupt figures within the government. In legal terms this means that Akayev's family members can now be investigated on corruption charges.

In his recent address to the Kyrgyz public via videotape, Akayev blamed the new government for taking up a dangerous path, stating, "Defending my presidential and civil rights, as well as human dignity, if needed, I will be bound to appeal to the international community that, by no doubt, will condemn the activities and the conduct of those responsible, hold them up to shame."<sup>7</sup>

However, there seem to be few pro-Akayev supporters left in the government or the parliament. Once steadfast supporters have either moved in favor of the opposition or vacated the political scene altogether. For example, former prime minister Nikolai Tanayev is seeking a new position in Russia, while state secretary Osmonakun Ibraimov abandoned Akayev in the last minutes of his regime. Even the world's "most famous Kyrgyz," as locals know him, writer and diplomat Chingiz Aitmatov has spoken against the previous government. There are also former ministers, deputies, and secretaries who rushed to publicly criticize Akayev, as his regime collapsed. In effect, the new parliament elected in February-March, a body intended to become a major pro-Akayev force, has turned against him. Ultimately, 60 out of 63 parliamentarians voted to cancel Akayev's presidential privileges.

Meanwhile, tensions continue in Bishkek. Usen Kudaibergenov, a close ally of former political prisoner Felix Kulov, was shot dead in his home on April 10. Kudaibergenov played a key role in halting the widespread lootings in Bishkek by dispatching more than 200 people on horseback and protecting the capital's strategic sites. His assassination was likely a contract murder and his death will increase instability among the new leadership.<sup>8</sup> The Bishkek City Council has urged the acting government to take action against mass disorders throughout the capital, as

there are hundreds of people from rural areas illegally seizing land in the city's parks.

The Kyrgyz revolution, which originated in the country's southern half, has spurred even the most indifferent citizens toward increased political participation. Some Kyrgyz are anxious that members of the former regime will instigate troubles similar to the lootings and pogroms that took place after March 24. And although these assumptions are part of a post-revolution discourse among the locals, the general public is now expecting the state budget to increase after eliminating corruption within the country's major industries and businesses such as customs, energy, tourism and the services sector. The country is also busy resolving agricultural problems as the political revolution delayed the regular spring planting campaign. This problem is especially acute for the southern residents. The Russian government has agreed to help by donating grain to Kyrgyzstan.

On the international scene, the interim government has secured official support from Russia and the United States. Roza Otunbayeva, acting foreign minister, is planning to visit Moscow in the coming days to meet with Russian officials. She has also conducted meetings with most of the foreign ambassadors in Bishkek. Zamira Sydykova, editor-in chief of Res publica newspaper and the leading candidate to replace the current Kyrgyz Ambassador in Washington, DC, testified at the U.S. Helsinki Commission on April 7 about the developments in Kyrgyzstan. According to Sydykova, Kyrgyzstan will continue to rely on U.S. assistance for the country's long-term democratic development. An active presence by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the United States will be especially important in the new leaders' efforts to carry out political reforms and build transparent governance.

U.S. Department of State deputy spokesman Adam Ereli confirmed that Washington would continue to assist Kyrgyzstan in 2005, with \$31 million earmarked within the Freedom Support Act. If necessary, the government could allocate additional financial aid.<sup>9</sup> There are also reports that the U.S. Congress will appropriate \$6.6 million to Kyrgyzstan for the immediate needs of the country.

Parliament announced that new presidential elections will be held on July 10.

**KYRGYZ INTERIM GOVERNMENT CRITICIZED FOR POLICIES, LACK OF ACTION**

✂ April 21, 2005 ✂

One month after the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, the new government headed by interim president Kurmanbek Bakiyev is facing extensive criticism of its slow and sometimes ambiguous political program. The Kyrgyz mass media has condemned Bakiyev for taking foolish steps in building the interim government and failing to satisfy the expectations of the ordinary people who made regime change possible. Yet others blame former president Askar Akayev for multiple mistakes that have led to a turbulent beginning for the new political order.

First, Bakiyev's interim government has been accused of a lack of transparency in appointing new cabinet members. Bakiyev is criticized for distributing cabinet seats based on a desire to strengthen his personal status in the emerging political regime rather than making choices that would help to build an efficient government. For example, his decision to appoint Adakhan Madumarov, a potential presidential candidate, as a fourth deputy prime minister raised intense public discontent. This move is regarded as an attempt to balance political forces and shield preferred candidates from potential rivals. After assuming the new post, Madumarov became the third deputy prime minister to support Bakiyev, along with Daniyar Usenov and Ishenkul Boldzhurova. In response, Bakiyev announced that he would suspend appointments for now in order to avoid escalating grievances.<sup>10</sup>

Second, the Kyrgyz parliament and the Bishkek City Council have criticized Bakiyev for his inability to restore order in the capital following the political upheaval. In the last two weeks, up to 50,000 peasants seized land plots in Bishkek and demanded ownership rights. The squatters have created an atmosphere of chaos throughout Bishkek, disturbing the normal life of city residents by blocking roads, pitching tents, and increasing crime rates. The government has been slow in responding to the accumulating problem. The Bishkek city militia could not prevent the spontaneous land seizures, so a people's guard comprised of several hundred volunteers are also patrolling Bishkek's main streets. The situation considerably worsened, however, when unknown shooters murdered Usen Kudaibergenov, the leader of the civilian patrols, on April 10.

Third, rumors have spread about alleged discrimination against the ethnic Russian minority in the wake of the Akayev regime's collapse. The number of Russians and other Slavic nationalities seeking immigration at the Russian Embassy in Bishkek has noticeably increased. The Russian Ambassador to Bishkek, Yevgeny Shmagin, confirmed that the number of applications for immigration has tripled since the recent political changes in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>11</sup> But the ambassador also confirmed that the influx is at least partly explained by Russians' uncertainty over the future. The ethnic Russian population would prefer to see former vice president Felix Kulov become president, rather than Bakiyev. The Uzbek minor-

ity in southern Kyrgyzstan, in turn, trusts Bakiyev more than other candidates.

On April 14, Bermet Akayeva, daughter of the ousted president, returned to Bishkek to claim the legislative seat she won in the February 27 parliamentary elections. Her return provoked mixed reactions among other legislators as well as the general public. Members of the pro-Akayev “Alga, Kyrgyzstan” party labeled her sudden appearance an act of courage deserving admiration.

Yet others, such as MP Dooronbek Sadyrbayev and Speaker of Parliament Omurbek Tekebayev, called her decision to return to Kyrgyzstan an attempt to destabilize the situation in the country. Several hundred people gathered in front of the Kyrgyz parliament building on April 15 to demand Akayeva’s resignation.<sup>12</sup> Anti-Bermet Akayeva riots also erupted in Talas, the hometown of former first lady Mairam Akayeva.

Parliamentary Speaker Tekebayev publicly announced that the Central Election Commission will examine the cases of the Akayev children elected to parliament, namely Bermet and her brother Aidar, and that the investigation will be finalized in three days. He hinted that the CEC decision might not go in favor of the Akayevs and that both parliamentarians might lose their mandates.<sup>13</sup>

The National Security Service has launched a legal case against Akayeva’s husband, Kazakh businessman Adil Toigonbayev, accusing him of high-level corruption in the Kyrgyz business sector.<sup>14</sup> Acting President Bakiyev signed a decree ordering a legal investigation into the Akayev family’s properties and those of his political team. According to acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva and other Kyrgyz public figures, the government will crack down on property illegally owned by previous regime activists and Akayev family members, but at the same time avoid re-privatization.

Amid the criticism and numerous legal actions against the former regime, the Kyrgyz interim government is showing signs of greater consolidation. Two visible political forces are emerging on the country’s political scene led by Bakiyev and Kulov, for whom Madumarov and Atambayev agreed to renounce their personal ambitions and back the more popular candidates for the presidency.<sup>15</sup> Whereas Bakiyev has stronger support in the newly formed cabinet and within the southern region, Kulov is supported by the majority of the Kyrgyz population. For now the two leaders are not engaged in open confrontation, but as the election date nears, the competition between the two will inevitably become more pronounced.

## EXTENT OF AKAYEV REGIME CORRUPTION BECOMING CLEARER

✂ April 26, 2005 ✂

Representatives from Kyrgyzstan's interim government and mass media are gradually revealing the content of former president Askar Akayev's secret diaries, which were found after the capture of the Kyrgyz White House on March 24. The Kyrgyz public is finding out more about the degree of corruption undertaken by Akayev and members of his family during his 14 years ruling the country.

On April 21, the Kyrgyz news agency Akipress published an updated list of 42 enterprises controlled by Aidar Akayev and Adil Toigonbayev, the former president's son and son-in-law, respectively. The list includes some of Kyrgyzstan's most profitable businesses, such as Kumtor, Bitel GSM, cement factories, banks, gas stations, mass media outlets, restaurants and more. Even the most modest estimates assert that the Akayev family illegally pocketed hundreds of million dollars every year.

It had been difficult to prove the extent of the Akayev regime's corruption while it still controlled the country. Individual experts only guessed at the real numbers, and newspapers such as *Res publica* and *Moya stolitsa novosti* occasionally published journalistic accounts. Thus it is no wonder that one of the first steps undertaken by the new regime was the creation of a commission to investigate Akayev's personal property and real estate assets for signs of corruption. The commission is comprised of parliamentarians, state employees, the state Ombudsman, bankers, NGO workers, and ordinary citizens. It is headed by Daniyar Usenov, a parliamentarian with a long record of anti-Akayev positions, whose large business went bankrupt several years ago, presumably due to adverse relations with the Akayev regime. Usenov says that the interim government is trying to satisfy the people's demand to examine the Akayev family's involvement in the national economy.

Before his resignation on April 4, one of the conditions Askar Akayev put before the parliament was a request to stop persecution of his family for past instances of corruption. But the Kyrgyz parliament refused to accept his terms. In response, daughter Bermet Akayeva complained to Azattyk radio on April 21 and *Vecherny Bishkek* on April 22 that any investigation of her family's property would inevitably lack objectivity. She insisted that no member of her family is involved in economic activities, except for her husband whose business is mostly located in Kazakhstan. Almost simultaneously, *Moya stolitsa novosti* issued a special report exposing her rigged campaign for a parliamentary seat. Unlike Bermet, her brother Aidar Akayev has not appeared in public since the February 27 elections, although he also won a parliamentary seat. Before his father was ousted, Aidar had regularly appeared in public places and was a familiar face among the residents of Bishkek and Issyk-Kul, especially with younger people.

Another shocking truth revealed in the course of regime change is the fact that the old government, including the security structures, organized mass pogroms

and looting to interrupt peaceful demonstrations. Many experts and politicians, including acting foreign minister Roza Otunbayeva and NGO leader Edil Baisalov, believe these charges. According to them, on March 24 groups of aggressive provocateurs armed with stones and metal debris attacked demonstrators on the main square in Bishkek to provoke a fight. The government had hoped to end the protests with mass arrests after demonstrators and provocateurs clashed. According to Res publica, the “spontaneous demonstrators” arrived armed with stones collected from the outskirts of Bishkek and improvised metal bludgeons. It follows that Akayev’s government foresaw the March 24 protests in Bishkek, as anti-revolutionary actions were prepared in advance. However, the attack on the White House on the first day was not anticipated either by the opposition or the government.

Ordinary citizens are trying to understand what the revolution means to them personally and, more importantly, to decide how they will vote in the upcoming presidential election. There are some supporters of the previous regime, mostly in Bishkek, who feel nostalgia for the Akayev era, saying it was a stable existence, without lootings or spontaneous appropriations of land by peasants. Uncertainty about the future has become the main reason for the rapidly increasing exodus of ethnic Russians. Others say that the true revolution has not materialized yet, so far only a mere shuffle of political figures has taken place. The revolution, according to this view, will be evident when the government is no longer suspected of corruption and the economy begins to prosper.

High political standards and economic efficiency are a tall order for a new government. But it is yet unclear who will be next president in Kyrgyzstan. Felix Kulov is the most popular figure across the entire country, gaining over 50 percent in Internet polls. On April 25 Kulov announced that he would enter the presidential race. Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev polls about 20 percent, but has formed a coalition government in the past month. According to Omurbek Tekebayev, the speaker of parliament, “On July 10 we are choosing not only a new person, but a new era of Kyrgyzstan.”

## KYRGYZSTAN'S NORTH-SOUTH AXIS SHIFTS AHEAD OF ELECTIONS

✂ May 4, 2005 ✂

Worries about Kyrgyzstan's north-south divide have increased following Felix Kulov's April 25 announcement of his intention to run for the presidency. Although there are ten potential presidential candidates, acting president Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Kulov will be the two major competitors in the elections scheduled for July 10. Many voters associate both candidates with the rival political factions pitting the two halves of the country, the poorer south and the more prosperous north, against each other.

Kulov, a northerner, rapidly gained wide public support after he managed to stop the looting that swept Bishkek in the aftermath of the Tulip Revolution. Despite serving five years in prison on politically motivated charges, Kulov was not forgotten by the Kyrgyz public, thanks to his political party Ar-Namys, which continued to function. In addition, opposition newspapers such as *Res publica* and *Moya stolitsa novosti* closely monitored developments around his case. But Kulov has polled lower numbers in recent weeks as he remained suspiciously muted about former president Askar Akayev's politics, explaining that he believes in the "never strike a man when he's down" principle. Kulov has not met his potential voters' expectation that he would become Akayev's strongest antagonist after the collapse of his regime. Kulov's rather gentle condemnation of the former government is perceived as ambiguous.

As dissatisfaction with Kulov grows, *Moya stolitsa novosti* published a damning article accusing Kulov of secretly contacting Akayev during his recent trip to Moscow.<sup>16</sup> According to the newspaper, northern candidates are likely to be informally backed by members of the former regime because Kyrgyzstan's largest television stations, *KOORT* and *Piramida*, formerly controlled by Akayev, are intensively promoting Kulov. The newspaper warns that if Kulov is elected a president, his rule will be a continuation of the Akayev regime and former government members will retain political and economic influence. Kulov's military background is another disturbing factor for locals, many of whom worry about his noticeable respect from the national security structures.

Bakiyev, in turn, has been criticized for being a weak and ineffective politician, unable to face the challenges of the post-Akayev era. The north-south divide is also evident in his cadre politics. The local mass media are closely monitoring Bakiyev's attempts to balance geographic representation in the government. As he stated in a recent speech on the national television channel: "It is clear that Akayev, while escaping from Kyrgyzstan, did not take along the problems he created."<sup>17</sup>

While southern residents support Bakiyev as a leader who will encourage development to help the poor, some northerners see him as the only alternative to Kulov. Bakiyev also scores some support for the fact that northern candidates have occupied key state positions for over four decades, includ-

ing the fourteen years of Akayev's regime. But many see an optimal solution only if the two most popular candidates, Bakiyev and Kulov, work in tandem, as president and prime minister. Bakiyev has commented that both leaders would remain partners whatever the outcome of the elections.<sup>18</sup>

Other presidential candidates, depending on their geographical origin, will likely pull some votes away from Bakiyev or Kulov. For example, Jenishbek Nazaraliyev, a candidate from Bishkek and a well-known businessman and doctor, could take away some of Kulov's votes. The failed April 29 contract murder of Bayaman Erkinbayev, a parliamentarian and successful businessman from the south, damaged Bakiyev's political image. Erkinbayev, also running for the presidency, insists that the assassination attempt had political and not economic motives.

Meanwhile, the list of businesses revealed to be controlled by members of Akayev's family has grown from 42 to 75. Akipress continues to disclose the content of Akayev's personal diaries, which shed light on the extent of corruption in the government.<sup>19</sup> Recent reports trace payments made by parliamentary candidates, state employees, and foreign service workers in order to receive government positions. Fees ranged from \$30,000 to \$200,000, depending on the desired position. The "shame list" includes Kyrgyz ambassadors, parliamentarians, former ministers, and deputy ministers. Based on these findings and other investigations, more members of the Kyrgyz foreign service, including diplomats in the United States, Turkey, and Russia—including several Akayev relatives—are being recalled by the interim government. Bakiyev confirmed that the government has sought additional resources to increase the salaries of public workers by up to 50 percent and that the state budget will continue to rise in the coming months.

In the midst of intra-ethnic rivalries, several thousand non-titular nationalities, mostly Russians and Germans, are opting to leave Kyrgyzstan. A number of local German businessmen have asked for political asylum at the German consulate in Bishkek. The Kyrgyz government is urging ethnic minorities not to rush decisions to leave the country. This trend, if it continues at the same pace, will signify the third sizable wave of out-migration from Kyrgyzstan, with the first one in the early 1990s and second after conflicts in Batken in late 1990s.

**KYRGYZ INTERIM GOVERNMENT STILL CLEANING UP PROBLEMS LEFT BY AKAYEV**

✂ May 12, 2005 ✂

Kyrgyzstan's Acting President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, joined other CIS leaders for an informal meeting in Moscow on the eve of the celebrations for the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II. Bakiyev raised a series of bilateral issues with Russia, including dual citizenship, Kyrgyzstan's external debt to Russia and the meaning of the Tulip Revolution for Kyrgyzstan's future development. Bakiyev argued that dual citizenship between Kyrgyzstan and Russia would slow the exodus of ethnic Russians from Kyrgyzstan while also helping the 400,000-500,000 Kyrgyz working in Russia. The Kyrgyz leader also planned to meet with several Russian businessmen to discuss possibilities for economic cooperation.

During a May 9 press conference, Bakiyev reminded journalists that it is unfair to characterize the recent political changes in Kyrgyzstan a mass riot or a coup d'état. According to Bakiyev, "The March events were a final stage of a countdown that began on March 17, 2002, the date of Aksy tragedy" and the people were protesting the gap between the government and society, widespread poverty and corruption. "We saw that different international mass media in particular accentuated mass robberies and looting. It was painful to read and watch depiction of the events, so one-sidedly and tendentiously presented," observed Bakiyev.

When asked about the opposition figure Felix Kulov, Bakiyev answered that they are on good terms and had discussed Kulov's recent decision to run for the presidency. The two are actively engaged in an open debate over whether to establish a presidential-parliamentary or pure parliamentary state. Bakiyev thinks that, since Kyrgyzstan is currently undergoing a political transformation, all branches of state power must be equally involved in the political process. Kulov, however, believes that Kyrgyzstan needs a parliamentary system in order to strengthen democracy, increase transparency, and meet the concerns of all residents.

Meanwhile, in an interview with Vecherny Bishkek on May 7, Kulov denied maintaining any connections with deposed president Askar Akayev, as *Moya sotlitsa novosti* had alleged on April 29. He also replied to public concerns that he possessed a military mindset because of his background in the security sector: "I was lucky – I am not only a jurist, but also have a second higher education as an administrative manager. I became a manager early, carrying out tasks not connected with militant specificity."

Many of Kulov's supporters worry that the Kyrgyz language commission could become a formal weapon against Kulov, whose Kyrgyz is not fluent. Nonetheless, a significant number of potential voters believe any president must be able to speak the Kyrgyz language in order to communicate with rural population. Kulov has already made several public attempts to speak in Kyrgyz.

Despite their obvious differences, both Bakiyev and Kulov publicly maintain a positive attitude towards each other. From their interviews, it is clear that nei-

ther candidate wants instability in the country. Bakiyev does not exclude the possibility of a union between the two leaders, while Kulov says that it is not appropriate to judge which leader is better, because they have different political agendas.

The Bakiyev team faces a long list of pressing issues, ranging from an ineffective constitution to a failed attempt at passport reform. Bakiyev's government has also been criticized for its reticence to address the spontaneous land seizures in Bishkek by thousands of villagers during the Tulip Revolution. The interim president replied that the process is slow because he wants the government to negotiate a solution with the people rather than impose a decision.

Many businesses in Bishkek are pressing the government to reimburse them for economic losses incurred during the popular revolution. A number of Chinese businessmen demanded 1.5 billion soms from the Kyrgyz government. Since the state budget cannot afford full compensation, the government offered special terms for customs control on the Kyrgyz-Chinese border.<sup>20</sup> The government also introduced a special fund for the victims of looting on May 24-25 in Bishkek to help small and medium businesses recover some of their losses.

In May 2004 the Akayev government introduced a new passport system to meet international standards. The shift had not been completed by the time of regime change and the need to issue a new system of documentation has produced numerous difficulties for the interim government. The new passports were scheduled to be introduced in August 2004. Now there are no new passports and no old passports that could be re-issued temporarily. New information has revealed that former prime minister Nikolai Tanayev allegedly pocketed millions of soms through a sweetheart deal to print passports in Kenya.<sup>21</sup> Notably, the United States and EU no longer issue visas for old Kyrgyz passports.

As a result of the passport vacuum, at least half a million Kyrgyz citizens cannot receive valid documents. Students studying abroad, people living in border areas and labor migrants are particularly affected. At the same time, thousands of Kyrgyz citizens outside the country might not be able to vote in the upcoming presidential elections due to severe shortages of state funds and problems with official documentation.

The interim government cannot address all the accumulated problems at once and thus remains an easy target for harsh criticism from international and local journalists. In particular Russian and Kazakh mass media tend to be saturated with negative reports about the post-revolutionary developments in Kyrgyzstan. At times, the criticism is based on mistaken facts, minimal details and mistaken views about events on the day of the Tulip Revolution.

**CITING NEED FOR STABILITY, KYRGYZ LEADERS FORM POLITICAL UNION**

✂ May 17, 2005 ✂

On May 13, Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Felix Kulov signed an agreement to form a political team for Kyrgyzstan's July 10 presidential elections. Kulov agreed to withdraw his candidacy with the stipulation that he would become prime minister in case Acting President Bakiyev wins.<sup>22</sup> This long-awaited move will allow political developments in the country to be more predictable. Previously, it was not clear which of the two leaders would become the next Kyrgyz president, as both had a good chance of winning a majority.

According to Kulov, this agreement was necessary because Kyrgyz society was polarized around two leaders and recent unrest in neighboring Uzbekistan had encouraged Kyrgyzstan's political forces to act collectively.<sup>23</sup> Since Kulov and Bakiyev are promoting a state with a strong parliamentary system, as prime minister Kulov would play a key, if not leading, role in the government. He would have the right to appoint ministers, and heads of oblasts and rayon administrations, while the president will control the security forces and guarantee an independent judiciary.<sup>24</sup>

Kulov, freed from prison as a result of revolution on March 24, rapidly became Bakiyev's strongest rival. Many were awaiting an official announcement of a suspected informal agreement to act in concert in order to prevent any mass riots. Kulov's agreement to return to prison while legal charges against him are reviewed, together with Bakiyev's attempts to solve the problems of spontaneous land seizures by means of compromise and not suppression, suggest that both leaders also are trying to act within the legal system. According to one representative of the Kyrgyz Embassy in Brussels, the partnership will improve the political climate in Kyrgyzstan and improve stability in the region.

Before the agreement, Kyrgyz citizens were anxious about the Bakiyev-Kulov rivalry. The respective supporters argued either that "Kulov owes Bakiyev his freedom" or that "Kulov helped Bakiyev to establish order after rioting." Some associated the rivalry with the north-south cultural divide in the country, while others argued that the main issue is the rural-urban income gap. Still others saw a state-society discrepancy, where the government backed Bakiyev, while the majority of the population preferred Kulov. In any case, the partnership should eliminate the regional tensions that might have intensified if the two had faced each other in a runoff.

Some people were undecided on their votes because Bakiyev and Kulov seemed to offer different, but not competing, agendas. While the interim president was promoting poverty alleviation, Kulov sought a strong parliamentary state. Their partnership agreement considerably decreases the chances for the other 11 declared candidates unless new political unions are formed. There has been a trend in the last few weeks among presidential candidates, such as Adakhan Modumarov, Jenishbek Nazaraliyev, Almaz Atambayev,

and Nurbek Turdukulov to group around Bakiyev or Kulov. Some candidates from southern cities such as Azimbek Beknazarov and Bayaman Erkinbayev, tended to compete with Bakiyev because of disagreements with his policies.

Following the regime change in March, Kulov addressed the old parliament and strongly insisted that the newly elected parliament must remain in power “whether we like it or not”.<sup>25</sup> Allowing the new parliament to be seated would help stabilize the county by forestalling mass protests by the new parliamentarians. Instead, the Central Election Commission and the Supreme Court considered individual cases of rigged elections, including victories by Bermet Akayeva and Aidar Akayev, children of the deposed president Askar Akayev. As prime minister, Kulov will likely introduce more changes in the structure of the existing parliament.

Although most Kyrgyz are satisfied with the outcomes of the March 24 Tulip Revolution, recent events in Uzbekistan are raising new fears. As Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir notes, “Kyrgyzstan might sink under increased flows of Uzbek immigrants.”<sup>26</sup> As a result of escalating conflict in Andijan, approximately 600 people crossed the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border this weekend and about 20 people were hospitalized in Kyrgyz villages.<sup>27</sup> In recent days Uzbeks have rebuilt a wooden bridge in Karasuu—a town straddling the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border—that was destroyed by Uzbek President Islam Karimov in 2002.

Kyrgyz military units have mobilized at the southern frontier, but the border will remain open to Uzbek refugees for the next five days.<sup>28</sup> Residents of Kyrgyzstan’s southern cities are protesting Karimov’s use of force, and there have been riots in front of the Uzbek embassy in Bishkek. Some Kyrgyz leaders worry that criminals and militants may slip into Kyrgyz territory along with the refugees.

The Kyrgyz interim government does not need instability in Uzbekistan ahead of the presidential election. Refugee and security issues continue to divert human and financial resources from the multitude of pressing domestic problems, such as organizing voting stations and investigating the extent of Akayev’s corruption.

**THE ANDIJAN REFUGEE CRISIS AND KYRGYZSTAN'S  
TROUBLED SOUTH**

**❧ MAY 2005 – JUNE 2005 ❧**





## KYRGYZSTAN EXTENDS RELUCTANT WELCOME TO UZBEK REFUGEES

✂ May 19, 2005 ✂

Reports about the number of Uzbeks fleeing the Andijan and Pakhtaabad massacres for southern Kyrgyzstan range from 500 to 6,000. Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir predicts the refugee flows will increase up to a million if the Uzbek conflict continues to intensify.<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to estimate the real scope of international migration following the bloody events in Uzbekistan because the Kyrgyz-Uzbek frontier is several hundred kilometers long and densely populated. It is likely that Uzbek citizens from other parts of Uzbekistan migrated to Kyrgyzstan as well.

At a May 17 press conference Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov said that many insurgents slipped into Kyrgyzstan along with civilians. Karimov suggested that the Uzbek border guards in Karasuu did not halt the flow of people in recent days in order to avoid human casualties, "Since women, children, and elders were among them." He is also careful of the terminology used for the Uzbeks entering Kyrgyzstan. He explained, "I don't consider them refugees. On what basis do they call themselves like that? Is it some kind of a sect, some Mormons in the state of Utah?"<sup>2</sup>

Official Kyrgyz militia records reveal that former inmates from the Andijan prison have entered Kyrgyzstan. Several dozen guns and submachine guns were taken from Uzbek refugees. At the same time it is unclear how many Uzbek refugees were directly involved in the Andijan or Pakhtaabad riots. But refugees are revealing new details about their escape. They claim that not all of the refugees from Andijan, located forty kilometers away from Kyrgyzstan, were able to reach the Kyrgyz border, because dozens were killed or injured by the Uzbek military. Many of the refugees do not wish to return to Uzbekistan. Some have already applied for political asylum in Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyz officials have avoided granting any formal status to the Uzbek immigrants, delegating responsibility to international organizations such as the Red Cross, UN, and OSCE. The head of the Kyrgyz Border Service, Colonel-General Myrzakan Subanov, thinks that bilateral treaty on "Eternal Friendship" obligates the Kyrgyz side to return the Uzbek citizens.

However, Uzbekistan has infringed this treaty many times. During the Batken conflicts in 1999-2000, Uzbek security structures conducted unsanctioned military actions on Kyrgyz territory. Uzbekistan has mined the borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and in recent years shot dozens of Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Tajik citizens at border areas. Uzbekistan also was the only Central Asian state to completely close the border to Kyrgyz citizens for several days during the Tulip Revolution. Some Kyrgyz experts predict the Uzbek government may take further unilateral actions inside Kyrgyzstan if the Uzbek refugees remain in the country.

Karimov is equating all Andijan protesters with terrorists in order to justify the killing of hundreds. He is also blaming the Kyrgyz government for hosting criminals. If the Kyrgyz government rejects Tashkent's official position, Uzbekistan might

impose economic sanctions against Kyrgyzstan. Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has already made a statement supporting Karimov, saying that the bloody events in Andijan were organized by terrorists.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, the Kyrgyz government will likely face widespread public criticism if the refugees are forced to return to Uzbekistan.

Kyrgyz human rights activists have appealed to the government to allow the refugees to remain inside Kyrgyzstan for the duration of the crisis in Uzbekistan. "The Kyrgyz government by no means should allow the extradition of peaceful citizens, including those injured, back to Uzbekistan," according to the activists.<sup>4</sup> Several think tanks agree, noting, "Only by showing kindness and realizing its international responsibility can the Kyrgyz government confirm its long-term interest in the Kyrgyz-Uzbek friendship."<sup>5</sup>

The Andijan and Pakhtaabad massacres have provoked discussions in the Kyrgyz parliament about the need to improve communications between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in order to increase local trade. The local bridge rebuilt within several hours for Uzbek refugees in Karasuu not only helped civilians escape from Uzbekistan, but also instantly boosted inter-state trade in fruits and vegetables. After meeting with Uzbek and Kyrgyz citizens in Karasuu, the Kyrgyz Ombudsman asked parliament to provide all possible means for facilitating trade at border areas: "This would accord with the hopes of ordinary Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens".<sup>6</sup> There are already thousands of Uzbek and Tajik seasonal workers in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan has a long history accommodating large flows of refugees. During the civil war in Tajikistan approximately 20,000 Tajiks fled to Kyrgyzstan. Several thousand refugees from Afghanistan moved to Kyrgyzstan in the 1980s and 1990s. Many of the Tajik refugees were repatriated to Tajikistan after the peace accord was reached between the government and opposition in 1997. However, it is also evident that many refugees see Kyrgyzstan as a transit point en route to Russia, Europe and North America.

Popular attitudes toward human-rights abuses in Kyrgyzstan changed following the Aksy riots in March 2002, when six civilians were shot dead by law-enforcement agencies. The incident provoked a deep and lasting political crisis in the country. Many local NGOs openly criticized President Askar Akayev's politics and the Kyrgyz security structures. Some experts believe that the March Tulip Revolution was the culmination of public dissatisfaction with the government's actions in 2002. Yet no Kyrgyz NGO leaders think that the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan was the main reason for the Uzbek uprising. Civil society activists such as Edil Baisalov, president of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, discount Karimov's accusations that residents of southern Kyrgyzstan inspired Uzbeks to revolt against the government. Rather, the Karimov regime's total suppression of civil society and mass media led to the devastating clash between impoverished crowds and armed government.

**REPORTS SUGGEST MOSCOW WANTS NEW BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN**

✂ May 24, 2005 ✂

On May 19, a Russian delegation led by Andrei Kokoshin, chairman of the State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States, met with Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Bishkek. According to Russian news agencies, the two discussed many bilateral issues including the introduction of dual citizenship and stationing a new Russian military base in Osh under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).<sup>7</sup> During his visit to the Russian consulate in Osh, Modesta Kolerov, head of the Russian President's Department of Interregional and Cultural Relations, noted that a new Russian military base would house up to 1,000 personnel.<sup>8</sup>

However, representatives from Bakiyev's administration and from the CSTO secretariat deny that a new Russian base in Kyrgyzstan is under consideration.<sup>9</sup> The Kyrgyz interim government likely hopes to delay such important decisions until after the presidential election on July 10. Other candidates and voters could certainly take issue with the government's alleged agreement to allow another foreign military base in Kyrgyzstan.

Bakiyev emphasized that dual citizenship with Russia would benefit Kyrgyz citizens. But in order to reach agreement on this issue, the Kyrgyz government will likely need to allow a new Russian military base on its territory in the future. First Deputy Prime Minister Felix Kulov has already indicated that he would support plans for the new Russian base. Kulov has always argued for a multi-directional foreign policy that allows cooperation with Russia, the United States, and China. He was an outspoken critic of the Akayev government's opposition to the U.S.-led war in Iraq that undermined Kyrgyz-U.S. relations.

The Russian air force base in Kant, located 30 kilometers from Bishkek, was inaugurated in October 2003 following the increased U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan. The Russian base was instrumental in organizing large-scale regional military exercises in 2004 and 2005 between CSTO member states. The military exercises were organized on the basis of the "Batken-3" scenario, in which Russian combat planes participated in the exercises, allowing many Central Asian soldiers the chance to acquaint themselves with the latest technology. Such military activities were met with enthusiasm from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Several countries, including Uzbekistan, regularly send observers to the CSTO exercises.

However, local experts have criticized the presence of the Russian base for its general incongruity with the security situation in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region, as it has never served any practical function since its introduction and its primary function appears to be symbolic and economic. In fact, the only time the military base in Kant has played a political role was to facilitate the escape of ousted president Askar Akayev and his family members on March 24, the day that

protesters seized the government headquarters in Bishkek. In addition to symbolizing better international relations, the Russian and U.S. bases have boosted trade in Bishkek and its environs. Hundreds of local residents are employed at the bases.

Many analysts have argued that instead of welcoming more foreign bases, Kyrgyzstan should develop better intelligence-sharing mechanisms with neighboring states and increase the level of professionalism among its border guards to prevent insurgents from entering Kyrgyz territory. Accordingly, local military personnel must be trained for small-scale counter-unsurgency activities in mountain ranges as opposed to large-scale military operations involving heavy armament.

Kyrgyzstan is unlikely to see any more border conflicts instigated by small armies, similar to those in Batken in 1999-2000. Military analyst Aziz Soltobayev and others argue that the series of suicide bombers in Uzbekistan last year showed that individual terrorist attacks are more likely to take place across the region.<sup>10</sup> There are reports that religious leaflets are being distributed throughout Bishkek, and already five Kyrgyz citizens have been arrested for promoting the Islamic group Hizb-ut-Tahrir.<sup>11</sup> The number of incidents between Uzbek citizens and Kyrgyz border guards has recently increased at border checkpoints.

After thousands of Uzbek refugees fled to Kyrgyz territory following the May 13 crackdown in Andijan, the Kyrgyz parliament instructed the government to enhance border security, especially at the southern frontier.<sup>12</sup> On May 23 Bakiyev signed a decree to transform the Kyrgyz border guards into border troops.<sup>13</sup> This, according to the acting president, will allow for better protection of national borders. The government likely will launch a more extensive reform of the border regime in the coming months.

Meanwhile, the situation inside Kyrgyzstan appears to be stabilizing after the Bakiyev-Kulov agreement to form a political union rather than compete as rivals in the presidential election. In his speech on May 21, Bakiyev said that the new government would need two or three years to improve the economic well-being of the poorest strata of society. Bakiyev and Kulov also mentioned that they had agreed to ban their family members—wives, children, brothers, and sisters—from leading any business activities inside Kyrgyzstan.<sup>14</sup> This move should help prevent the corruption and nepotism that contributed to the downfall of the Akayev regime.

**KYRGYZ INTERIM GOVERNMENT ATTACKED BY PREVIOUS REGIME, SUPPORTED BY INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY**

✂ May 31, 2005 ✂

The electoral alliance between Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and First Deputy Prime Minister Felix Kulov is gaining credibility domestically and receiving positive reactions from the international community. According to recent polls in Bishkek, about 55 percent of the population will vote for Bakiyev in the July 10 presidential election, while other presidential candidates will receive no more than 2-5 percent each. The alliance was brokered to prevent a bitter race between the two popular leaders. However, in recent days ousted president Askar Akayev and his family have tried to attack the interim government through legal means.

Akayev's Russian lawyers sued Daniyar Usenov, deputy prime minister for economic affairs and head of a special commission investigating the former regime's corruption, and Ludmilla Jolmuammedova, a journalist from the Kyrgyz *Moya stolitsa novosti* newspaper, for defamation.<sup>15</sup> Akayev's lawyer, Maxim Maximovich, claims that many of the corruption charges against the former president are flawed, and he speculated that the lawsuit might bring in a new editor-in-chief at the newspaper. He also refuted rumors that Akayev plans to make a public statement that will considerably rearrange the country's political regime.<sup>16</sup>

Akayev's daughter, Bermet Akayeva, is suing the Central Election Commission (CEC) for canceling her parliamentary mandate based on charges of campaign fraud. Akayeva gave several interviews saying that the CEC's decision was illegal and she intends to claim her rightful place in the parliament. She also announced that her brother, Aidar Akayev, also a member of parliament, would soon return to Kyrgyzstan to continue his political activities. Ownership rights of Bitel GSM and other large businesses in Kyrgyzstan that formally belonged to Aidar Akayev are currently under consideration at the London International Arbitration Court. Furthermore, Bermet said that her father is planning a series of lectures across different countries, working on a new book, and planning a return to Kyrgyzstan after the presidential elections.<sup>17</sup>

The former president appears to still have some political influence in Kyrgyzstan, based on how readily the interim government returned some of the personal belongings. It is unclear exactly what items were returned to Akayev, but his archives, photographs, and personal diaries, containing evidence of widespread corruption, were the most scandalous findings after he fled the country on March 24. Many Kyrgyz believe Akayev's increased attacks on the interim government are based on his family's economic, rather than political, interests. Azamat Aidarov, a Kyrgyz student in the United States, has labeled described this situation as the beginning of Akayev's counter-revolutionary movement.<sup>18</sup>

Twenty-two candidates have officially registered to run in the presiden-

tial elections on July 10. Among them there are three women, the Kyrgyz ombudsman, businessmen, musicians and physicians. Many of the competitors have accused Bakiyev of using state administrative recourses in his campaign.<sup>19</sup>

Osmonkun Ibragimov, a state secretary under Akayev, voluntarily returned \$13,500 to the public treasury to assist the new government in tackling corruption.<sup>20</sup> Ibragimov hopes to set an example for other public employees to join efforts to clean up politics in Kyrgyzstan. Thanks to the drop in corruption since the regime change in late March, Bakiyev has promised that monthly salaries for teachers and doctors will be increased by 30-40% in the near future.<sup>21</sup>

Bakiyev and Kulov have agreed to add 30 more seats to the parliament from party lists. According to Kulov, this will strengthen political parties and allow women and young candidates to participate in the political process. These seats are likely to be filled primarily by members of Ar-Namys, a party headed by Kulov. The enlarged parliament is expected to shift the political system in the country from presidential to semi-presidential, allocating more powers to the prime minister.

The interim government is trying to maintain a balance between Russia and the United States. Both Bakiyev and Kulov implicitly approved bilateral security cooperation within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) after plans for a new Russian military base in Osh were reported in the Russian mass media. Kulov told *Kommersant* that Russia remains “Our best friend and friends must not be changed.”<sup>22</sup>

*Akipress* is reporting that China might station a military base in Osh.<sup>23</sup> Again, as with the Russian base, such reports have not been confirmed by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, only published in a Chinese newspaper, *Huasya Shiabo*. However on May 25 Bakiyev did say that he sees a need for increased cooperation with the CSTO and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, particularly considering the situation in Andijan.

At the same time, while the meeting with U.S. Senators in Bishkek, Kulov stated that Kyrgyzstan would seek to strengthen relations with the United States. U.S. Senator John McCain (R-AZ) said he believes recent developments in Kyrgyzstan will be the beginning of democracy in the entire Central Asian region.<sup>24</sup> The senator mentioned that Washington will send \$3 million to help cover expenses related to the “March events” in Kyrgyzstan and that the U.S. Congress is considering allocating an additional \$4 million to support the election process. But U.S. senators also insisted that the Kyrgyz government allow refugees from Andijan to remain in Kyrgyzstan. If Bishkek considers this recommendation, it will likely harm relations with Tashkent.

At a recent OSCE meeting in Vienna, Bakiyev called upon international donors to invest in Kyrgyzstan as well as the Central Asian region. “In strengthening regional integration processes we see the foundation of secure and stable development of all Central Asian states,” he said.<sup>25</sup> A number of EU states subsequently allocated millions of Euros to the Kyrgyz presidential elections.

The Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya gazeta* sees the Bakiyev-Kulov pact as a positive example that should encourage other Central Asian politicians to act in accord.<sup>26</sup> In particular, the governments of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan

should adopt the Kyrgyz model of political compromise.

## KYRGYZSTAN ADOPTS GEORGIAN MODEL TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

✻ June 7, 2005 ✻

The Kyrgyz government is determined to investigate, prosecute and eliminate corruption in the state. Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov recently announced that more associates of former president Askar Akayev would find themselves in prison. "Kyrgyzstan will adhere to the Georgian experience of coping with corruption by the former regime," declared Adakhan Madumarov, another deputy prime minister. Interim Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov agrees with the anti-corruption drive, giving it a motto: "Return what was stolen and sleep calmly."<sup>27</sup>

According to Madumarov, the new regimes in Georgia and Ukraine have shown impressive results in fighting corruption, even increasing state budgets by up to six times since in the respective revolutions. Therefore he favors adapting Georgia's relevant legislation to deal with corruption in Kyrgyzstan. "By not inventing the bicycle, we can learn from them, and if Georgia achieved this in one and a half years, why don't we, using the moment, reach the same results in a shorter time," he observed.<sup>28</sup> Madumarov disclosed that he had already passed along copies of documents on fighting corruption given to him by the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Prosecutor-General.

The government's most-wanted figures include former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev and Akayev's son-in-law, Adil Toigonbayev, who is a Kazakh citizen. Both men are accused of extreme instances of corruption and face legal prosecution. There are concrete embezzlement charges against Tanayev. Kyrgyzstan's top prosecutor has issued an arrest warrant, but his current location is unknown.<sup>29</sup> Toigonbayev's case might prove especially difficult to prosecute, because his influence on local businesses was effectively veiled by legal means. Many of the enterprises he controlled were registered under different owners. The Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General is waiting for the Kazakh embassy in Bishkek to recognize the charges against Toigonbayev.

A number of prominent individuals have been accused of paying bribes to Akayev, including the head of the National Bank, Ulan Sarbanov, who is suspected of illegally transferring \$480 million to the president's account in 1999. Sarbanov denies any charges, saying he acted within the law and that it is Akayev who must be held responsible for the money. Some politicians voluntarily returned large sums to the state, as they believe the funds were illegally distributed to them during Akayev's rule. Yet until the 800 kilograms of gold reserves that disappeared in 1995 are found, the Augean stables of the previous regime will not be completely clean. According to preliminary investigations, the reserves might have been exported to a European state. Kyrgyz officials have not ruled out the possibility of appealing to Interpol.

Kyrgyzstan's external debt currently stands at \$2 billion and exceeds the state budget several times over. Credits and investments received by Kyrgyzstan in the last fourteen years were "effectively vandalized by the previ-

ous regimes,” noted one member of the state commission on stabilizing the country. According to the commission’s conclusions, inconsistent economic reforms in recent years practically destroyed the Kyrgyz economy.<sup>30</sup> Although land was provided to farmers, no financial or methodic assistance followed the land distribution. According to Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, this half-reform wasted vast agricultural territories and destroyed many light industries.<sup>31</sup>

The Kyrgyz government hopes that cracking down on corruption will increase the state budget. The government has repeatedly explained that, thanks to reduced rates of corruption and voluntary repayments of government money, teachers, doctors and police could see their monthly salaries increase by up to 50 percent. Further, a number of enterprises paid higher taxes in May, including the Kyrgyz-Canadian gold mining company and the Bitel GSM cellular operator. With the present conditions set by the Paris Club of Creditors, the Kyrgyz Ministry of Finance believes that Bishkek should reach debt sustainability by the end of 2008.

Some Kyrgyz think that the interim government’s efforts to fight corruption are unrealistic and that talk of increasing the budget and cleaning up government are merely pre-election rhetoric. According to local experts, the current activities of the Kyrgyz officials represent outright state extortion and a fiscal fleecing of the private sector that, in the long run, might be positive for the country’s development. However, the effort presents a moral dilemma at the present. “Eradicating corruption cannot always be fair and transparent, but will involve slinging mud at the government’s unwanted forces,” notes one former civil service employee in Bishkek. Those against such an extensive drive to end corruption also point to some members of the interim government, who also have private businesses that allegedly started-up with state funds but whose records will not be investigated. Others decry the fight against corruption as a mere “state racket” lacking legitimacy.

Compared to other Central Asian states, the Kyrgyz interim government still functions amid a higher degree of transparency, thanks to the local and foreign press and the NGO sector. Whether than transparency continues through the July 10 presidential elections remains to be seen. There are 22 presidential candidates registered for the race, but reportedly only half of them fulfilled all the necessary registration requirements.

**INSTABILITIES IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN BURDEN GOVERNMENT WITH MORE PROBLEMS**

✂ June 14, 2005 ✂

Roughly four weeks before the July 10 presidential elections, violent clashes in Osh and uncertainties around Uzbek refugees in Jalalabad have rocked Kyrgyzstan. On June 13 six people in Osh were hospitalized with gunshot wounds following a brutal fight between protesters and parliamentarian Bayaman Erkinbayev's personal security service. This is the second attack on Erkinbayev since April linked to ousted president Askar Akayev.

The conflict began on the morning of June 13 when several dozen men armed with wooden and metal bludgeons gathered in front of Erkinbayev's Osh office.<sup>32</sup> The crowd grew and a few hours later a group of 350-400 demonstrators demanded that Erkinbayev give up his parliamentary seat and return illegally owned property to the state. Another group of 100-150 men, dressed in white shirts emblazoned with Erkinbayev's likeness, attacked the demonstrators with Molotov cocktails and gunfire, injuring three. Nearly half of the protesters and attackers were women. Local militia stabilized the situation and began an investigation.

Three days earlier, on June 10, parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev was shot dead in central Bishkek. According to Kyrgyzinfo, Surabaldiyev—a former sportsman and a successful businessman allied with Akayev—helped organize the provocateurs who rallied in March against anti-Akayev protesters in Bishkek.<sup>33</sup> His murder is under investigation by the national security service.

On June 11 two security guards of Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev were severely beaten by unknown assailants. The attackers also tried to obtain travel itineraries for Bakiyev and Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov.

Many Kyrgyz experts believe that these attacks stem from intrigues among various crime groups guided by economic interests. One Kyrgyz NGO leader thinks that the involvement of women in the violence also shows that the crowds are easily manipulated. The attacks target both current government figures as well as the former regime's closest allies. They might be a reaction from members of Akayev's political circle to the government's tough stance against corruption, or ordinary people dissatisfied with influential businessmen, such as Erkinbayev.

According to Acting Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov, corruption by Akayev's family cost the Kyrgyz economy more than \$50 million, and 80 criminal proceedings have been launched since March 24.<sup>34</sup> Examples of the Akayev government's patronage can be found everywhere from business to the arts and was even evident during the 1999-2000 conflict in Batken. *Delo nomer* reports that, during the armed clashes in southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999, the presidential administration requested \$420,000 from the National Bank to transfer to the Ministry of Defense.<sup>35</sup> The ministry never received the funds. Beknazarov called upon anyone still holding ill-gotten state funds to voluntarily return them by July 15.<sup>36</sup>

OSCE Ambassador in Bishkek Marcus Mueller is hopeful about the situation in the country. "The fact that people have their own opinion, that they can openly express it and that they have the right to do so – is a positive sign. Changes that took place in the mass media are also of a positive nature," he observed.<sup>37</sup> The Ambassador also notes that Kyrgyz citizens still need to learn peaceful ways to satisfy their interests.

Meanwhile, about 400 Uzbek refugees still remain near Jalalabad city one month after the Andijan massacre. The Kyrgyz government will soon assign a legal status to each refugee with help from the international community. Since May 13, UNICEF, the Red Cross, and the UN have built special camps that provide clean drinking water, hot meals, medical service, clothing and electricity. Refugees were also relocated into tents in groups of 8-10 people. About 100 refugees returned to Uzbekistan voluntarily, including several women who had left their children.<sup>38</sup> Not all refugees have identity documents, however, and this will further complicate the registration process in Kyrgyzstan.

On June 9 Kyrgyz security services deported four Uzbek citizens at the request of President Islam Karimov's government. This provoked harsh condemnation from the UN office in Bishkek. Carlos Zaccagnini, Chief of the UNHCR mission in Kyrgyzstan, said the Kyrgyz government had infringed the Refugee Convention of 1951. According to the UN officials, the returned refugees will inevitably be persecuted and tortured by the Uzbek special services. In total, the Uzbek government wants 13 refugees returned from Kyrgyz territory.

According to Kyrgyz civil society activists, the deportation of refugees harms Kyrgyzstan's reputation as a country that respects international law. The Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society has demanded the immediate resignation of Tashtemir Aytbayev, head of the Kyrgyz national security service.<sup>39</sup>

While Acting First Deputy Prime Minister Felix Kulov agrees with this argument, he also believes that refugees persecuted for religious and political reasons will not be sent back to Uzbekistan. Kulov said that a special investigation of the incident will be conducted, but he is certain that only refugees accused of rape and murder were extradited to Uzbekistan.<sup>40</sup>

Meanwhile, Andijan television is reporting on the alleged difficulties Uzbek refugees face in Kyrgyzstan, such as unclean water and poor living conditions. Uzbek politicians are appealing to the refugees to return to Uzbekistan, promising no further persecution.<sup>41</sup> However, the majority of refugees prefer to stay on Kyrgyz territory. "Fear holds them [refugees] in Kyrgyzstan, most of them hope to receive an official refugee status," an Andijan refugee told *Vecherny Bishkek*.<sup>42</sup>

Currently the Kyrgyz government is dealing with numerous complaints from various state and private institutions that are experiencing financial and administrative difficulties left over from the Akayev era. Yet despite these difficulties and the recent incidents in Osh, Bakiyev's political ratings are still high and he remains the presidential front-runner. Registration for presidential candidates closed on June 13.

Only seven candidates out of 22 fulfilled all requirements and will run on July 10.

**OSH STILL TENSE, BUT SITUATION BECOMING CLEARER**

✂ June 16, 2005 ✂

After the June 13 clashes in Osh between hundreds of parliamentary Bayaman Erkinbayev's opponents and supporters, in which seven people were hospitalized, the city has apparently divided into two conflicting halves. The following day, 500 people gathered at the central square in Osh to oppose the shootings and demand Erkinbayev's resignation. Osh Mayor Mamsadyk Bakirov openly accused Erkinbayev of shooting peaceful protesters. Bakirov claimed that 12 people were injured and that Erkinbayev must be prosecuted for the crime.

Erkinbayev claims that Usen Sydykov, head of the presidential administration, organized the riots against him.<sup>43</sup> He also thinks that the current conflict in Osh is nothing more than an attempt to redistribute his property among people possessing money and power.<sup>44</sup> He denies the accusations that his supporters opened fire first.

Sydykov, in turn, says that criminal groups trying to give a political veneer to the events triggered the Osh turmoil. "We are not enemies to ourselves to undermine stability in the country, the provision of which, we think, is our main, primary goal," he told *Radio Azattyk*.<sup>45</sup>

"The question now is who will be the mayor of the largest city after Bishkek, our southern capital Osh," noted Edil Baisalov, head of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, in an interview with *Voice of America*. Baisalov insists that the recent Osh events are not something atypical for counties in transition. This type of "skirmish takes place in any Russian provincial city almost every week," he observed. Baisalov does not deny the fact that Erkinbayev is connected with drug dealings. Baisalov also emphasized that it is the people, not the state, who have challenged this incredibly influential politician in Osh, who was once supported by the regime of former president Askar Akayev. Baisalov summed up the situation, noting that "Now the country's future is in the hands of the peoples of Kyrgyzstan, who will elect a strong president on July 10 who will finally restore order and will lead our country with confidence, in accordance with the law."<sup>46</sup>

Meanwhile, the National Security Service detained three suspects in the June 10 murder of Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev. Kyrgyz parliamentarians have promised substantial rewards to anyone helping the investigation.

Surabaldiyev's daughter, Elvira Surabaldiyeva, claims that her father was murdered by members of the interim government for economic reasons. "My father was offered a deal: to hand all his enterprises to a number of people occupying quite high positions, but he rejected it," she said.<sup>47</sup> She believes that the real criminals in the government will get away with the crime by imprisoning contract killers. Surabaldiyeva also said that her family has been continuously threatened by security forces and threatened since March 24. Surabaldiyeva also announced that she would sign all necessary documents to give her father's property to the state

in one year. Surabaldiyev was a prominent businessman who owned auto dealerships and ceramics factories. He represented part of Akayev's team in parliament.

Tashtemir Aitbayev, head of the National Security Service, thinks that the assassination was not merely motivated by economic interests, but also has political connotations.<sup>48</sup> Contract murder is not a new phenomenon for Kyrgyzstan. A year ago a series of assassinations took place within several days in Bishkek. These crimes were motivated by economic rivalries between criminal groups. Mounting criminality confirms that the professionalism and efficiency of Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement structures deteriorated during Akayev's rule.

Meanwhile, international interest in the Andijan riot is increasing. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees sent four representatives to Bishkek to investigate the Andijan massacre in neighboring Uzbekistan. The representatives will visit the Uzbek refugee camp in Jalalabad to interview refugees. Uzbekistan's government is blocking an international inquiry into Andijan.<sup>49</sup> On June 6 the U.S. Peace Corps announced it was stopping its activities in Uzbekistan. The Uzbek government had recently refused to extend the visas of 52 U.S. volunteers, including a regional director, and a total of 126 U.S. volunteers were evacuated from the country, says Peace Corps spokesman Gaddi H. Vasquez.<sup>50</sup>

U.S. National Security Council Spokesman Sean McCormack told reporters that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice had sent an official letter to Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov in which she insisted on an international investigation into the events in Andijan.<sup>51</sup> McCormack added that official Washington is actively seeking international support to begin an inquiry. But both Karimov and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov denied the need to conduct an international investigation in Uzbekistan.

UNHCR spokesman Jennifer Pagonis stated that Uzbekistan is putting pressure on its refugees in Kyrgyzstan. There are more and more relatives coming to the camp to persuade the refugees to return to Uzbekistan and this, according to the spokesman, is not done voluntarily.<sup>52</sup> Some Jalalabad residents object to granting legal status to Uzbek refugees because of the possibility that they might belong to radical religious groups. Pagonis emphasized that each case must be thoroughly examined before any of Uzbek refugee is denied legal status.

## KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT BLAMES AKAYEV FOR COUNTER-REVOLUTIONARY UPRISING IN BISHKEK

✂ June 21, 2005 ✂

On June 17 an angry crowd of about 5,000 people gathered in central Bishkek to support Urmat Baryktabasov, who had been refused official registration for the July 10 presidential election. For Bishkek residents this riot was puzzling. How could Baryktabasov, an unknown politician, a citizen of Kazakhstan and an ally of ousted president Askar Akayev, gather such support in a short period of time? The Central Election Commission officially denied him registration, but instead of using legal means to challenge the commission's decision, Baryktabasov organized a violent protest. Kyrgyz law-enforcement agencies will soon start an investigation of Baryktabasov. He is already under surveillance by the Kazakh security structures.

The government had to resort to armed force to break up the crowds. Five militiamen were injured and the police detained 216 people. Most of the detainees confessed that they had each received 300-1,000 soms (\$6-20) to come to the main square in Bishkek.<sup>53</sup> According to the police, about \$28,000 was spent to raise a crowd against the government. Aidar Akayev, son of the ousted president, also reportedly was present in Bishkek on June 17.<sup>54</sup>

The government's official version of the June 17 events indicates that the Akayev family, including Akayev's son-in-law Adil Toigonbayev, organized the riot in order to suspend presidential elections for several months and field their own candidate.<sup>55</sup> Deputy Prime Ministers Daniyar Usenov and Adakhan Modumarov announced that the party founded by Baryktabasov, "Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan" (Motherland-Kyrgyzstan) was organized in parallel with "Alga, Kyrgyzstan," the pro-Akayev bloc led by Bermet Akayeva.

Shortly after the Baryktabasov riots, the Kyrgyz parliament began discussing the possibility of postponing the presidential elections. The government strongly opposes this option. Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev harshly criticized the security structures and top security officials for not preventing the riot. Acting Prime Minister Felix Kulov officially promised to stop skirmishes while state security structures will maintain strict control over situation in the country until the presidential election. "I will myself take up arms to defend the White House and the current power," declared Bakiyev. The parliament, which was not dissolved after the March 24 revolution, is comprised of influential businessmen and remains a source of Akayev's support.

The possible origin of the current crisis around Baryktabasov can be traced to early April when a number of infamous Kyrgyz politicians and businessmen abruptly announced their intentions to run for the presidency. Baryktabasov and Nurbek Turdukulov, head of Bitel GSM, were believed to be protégés of Askar Akayev in the new political regime. Before Bakiyev and Kulov agreed to join forces in May, Baryktabasov had backed Kulov, because evidence suggested that Kulov was also secretly allied with Akayev and had the strongest chance, after Bakiyev, to become the

next president. After Kulov allied with the acting president, however, Baryktabasov decided to run independently. Baryktabasov needed to quickly broadcast his candidacy to the wider public and mass riots were the best opportunity for that. Two factors helped Baryktabasov stage the riots: his Kazakh ties and the CEC's refusal to register his candidacy. Rated among top businessmen in Kazakhstan, Baryktabasov possesses enormous funds to execute his political plans.

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The assault on the government building must be interpreted as an organized attempt to violently seize state power. It has nothing to do with democracy or freedom of association, noted Edil Baisalov, leader of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society. Mekenim-Kyrgyzstan uses pseudo-political mottos, possesses vast financial resources, and enjoys popularity thanks to the material support of its members, according to Baisalov.<sup>57</sup>

Akayev and his children have challenged the interim government in local and foreign courts. So far they have not been successful in any of their lawsuits. Akayev's lawyer, Maxim Maximovich, continually baits government figures, raising their own legal responsibilities. In his numerous interviews to Russian newspapers, Akayev blames the new government for the deteriorating security situation in Kyrgyzstan.

After widespread looting in Bishkek and organized aggressive provocations of protesters on March 24, local residents realize what resources the previous regime can still wield to revenge its humiliating downfall. With ample financial assets and some supporters in Kyrgyzstan, the ousted president's family members are still able to resort to sophisticated means to destabilize the country. In the days immediately following the March 24 revolution, rumors that Toigonbayev had contaminated the city's tap water quickly spread across the city, causing mass panic. Similarly, the June 17 riots provoked a new wave of nervousness among Bishkek residents. A number of Bishkek shops and offices temporarily closed on June 17, frightened by the possibility of another spate of mass looting.

## ANDIJAN REFUGEES BECOME INTERNATIONAL ISSUE FOR BISHKEK

✂ June 28, 2005 ✂

Bishkek faces a difficult decision regarding the legal status of refugees who fled to Kyrgyzstan on May 13-14 following the riots in Andijan, Uzbekistan. The UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) expects the Kyrgyz leadership to comply with international standards and assign the Uzbek immigrants official refugee status. Uzbekistan's government is demanding repatriation of its citizens while Kyrgyz NGOs are calling for the government to expedite the decision and follow the recommendations of international experts. Finally, residents of Jalalabad, living close to the refugee camp, worry that the Uzbeks are mostly criminals who escaped when the Andijan jail was liberated and who will inevitably bring instability in Kyrgyzstan. While all parties present their strong reasons and convincing arguments to voice concerns about Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan, the Kyrgyz government is playing for time.

In total there are 426 citizens of Uzbekistan residing in the refugee camp in Jalalabad. All of them received identification documents and are waiting for the official refugee status that would allow them to leave the camp and apply for Kyrgyz passports. Around 30 people from international organizations and local experts work with each refugee to examine their personal situation. Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov implicitly made it clear that he considers the Andijan refugees to be criminals. Some Uzbek legislators have openly warned that Kyrgyzstan should not try to undermine its bilateral relations with Uzbekistan for the sake of several hundred refugees.

Uzbekistan's government officially insists on the return of more than 100 escapees to face charges of terrorism. After repatriating four refugees wanted by the Uzbek government two weeks ago, Bishkek was harshly criticized by international observers, local NGOs and the Uzbek opposition. The Kyrgyz security service sent 29 people accused of organizing riots in Andijan on May 12-13 to the Osh prison.<sup>58</sup> When the Kyrgyz side decided to return these convicts to Uzbekistan, it was assailed by criticism internationally and domestically. As a result, neither the 29 imprisoned, nor the additional 56 people who were suspected in criminal charges, none will leave Kyrgyzstan.

According to Kyrgyzstan Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, the question of further extradition of Andijan refugees, including imprisoned convicts, will be discussed among the Kyrgyz Foreign Ministry, UNHCR representatives, and the Uzbek security structures. "We are in a tough position. We have difficult neighbors. We want to remain friends with Uzbekistan. But we are under international pressure as well," says Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva.<sup>59</sup> She also stressed that future skirmishes are possible in Uzbekistan and the Kyrgyz government must do everything it can to prevent destabilization in the region. One of the ways to alleviate tensions between Bishkek and Tashkent and to calm Jalalabad residents is to send refugees to a third country, Otunbayeva argued.<sup>60</sup>

Jalalabad residents worry that Uzbek immigrants might spread religious radi-

calism in Kyrgyzstan. Many doubt that the Uzbeks escapees were innocent, ordinary citizens. Summing up a popular sentiment, one young man told a Kyrgyz newspaper, "Could a good man abandon his homeland, leave behind his children, wives and husbands, parents?"<sup>61</sup> While some Kyrgyz demand the Uzbeks be deported to a third country or a neutral territory, others think that the refugees must stay under firm control and not be allowed outside the camp. But the local mood is getting angrier by the day. There are rumors that some Uzbeks are associated with the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Party of Liberation. Amid widespread poverty and unemployment in southern Kyrgyzstan, the Uzbek refugees hosted in camps are deemed to be free riders.

According to Kyrgyz NGOs, the Uzbek security service regularly sends buses to Kyrgyzstan loaded with relatives of the refugees, who are under orders to take their family members back to Andijan, using violence if necessary. Tolekan Ismailova, director of Civil Society Against Corruption, says that Uzbek law-enforcement agencies are trying to misinform the refugees by promising them safe return to Andijan and a bleak future if they remain in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>62</sup>

Meanwhile, in addition to Andijan refugees in the Jalalabad camp, there are numerous Uzbek citizens in southern Kyrgyz cities who fled from Andijan and Pakhtaabad to their relatives' homes in Kyrgyzstan on May 14. The precise number of unregistered Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan is unknown. As director of the Human Rights Monitor Program Vitaly Ponamoryev suggests, the position of Uzbek refugees outside the camp is even less stable. Most of them have given up the idea of returning to Uzbekistan.

There is no easy solution to solve the problem of the Andijan refugees. With only days left until the July 10 presidential election, the Kyrgyz interim government must satisfy the UNHCR, the Uzbek government and the local electorate with a balanced decision. Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev needs both international recognition and domestic support to score votes on July 10. The decision on refugees will likely be delayed until a new president is elected, as there is no easy choice for Bakiyev's government at the moment. If the Kyrgyz leadership follows the demands of international organizations, it will join a Western-driven, anti-Karimov campaign. However, such a position is rather inconvenient for the interim government in the near future. It is unclear how long the Karimov regime, which is economically and militarily superior to Kyrgyzstan, will remain in power. But disagreeing with the Uzbek leader will only harm bilateral relations.

**PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS**  
**Ꞥ JULY 2005 – AUGUST 2005 Ꞥ**





## TENSIONS RISING AHEAD OF KYRGYZ PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

✻ July 5, 2005 ✻

June 17 marked the peak of Kyrgyzstan's counter-revolutionary movement, which appears to be organized by Urmat Baryktabasov, a politician allied with ex-president Askar Akayev. The three months since Akayev's ouster in the March 24 Tulip Revolution have been very intense for Kyrgyzstan. There were two contract murders, several riots against and in favor of parliament members, hunger strikes by civic workers, and numerous political figures have faced accusations or lawsuits on corruption charges. The former president, his son, daughter and son-in-law Adil Toigonbayev are suspected of destabilizing the situation in the country by intentionally financing protesters. New riots are expected in the wake of the July 10 presidential election. For the first time since 1991, the Kyrgyz people will vote for a new president on Sunday.

According to Kyrgyz experts, the same core group of people frequently participates in multiple riots against the new government. They are paid up to \$20 to gather in central squares in Bishkek and Osh. Leila Saralayeva, a Bishkek reporter, labeled them "rent-a-mob".<sup>1</sup> According to her, only unpopular politicians must resort to paid demonstrators. At the same time, they are usually uneducated and economically impoverished people, who are generally not politically active, but are ready to execute any task for a monetary reward. Almost half of the paid picketers are women.

In his June 30 interview with the *Associated Press* Akayev openly accused the United States of financing the Kyrgyz opposition and thus contributing to his ouster. The United States, according to him, was unhappy with his friendly politics towards Russia.<sup>2</sup> Akayev blamed international organizations, including Freedom House, for bringing democratic changes to Central Asia but failing to consider the local mentality and traditions. He thinks that the new Kyrgyz government will inspire Islamic fundamentalist movements in the region to step up their activities.

But Akayev's accusations prove anything but wrong. Both acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, and other government leaders, have stated many times that the new government is willing to maintain established relations with Russia, the United States, and China. In response to Akayev's commentary on the U.S. presence in Kyrgyzstan, U.S. Department of State Spokesman Sean McCormack told journalists that he is not aware of any facts that substantiate the charges the ex-president has made against the United States.<sup>3</sup>

It seems that Akayev's family is trying to improve their damaged reputation in Kyrgyzstan by denying any accusations against them. As *Gazeta.kg* reports, Akayev sent an unofficial letter to the government demanding public apologies for accusing him of corruption and of organizing counter-revolutionary movements.<sup>4</sup> If his claims are not acted upon, he threatens to disclose important information affecting all members of the new government—information that could dramatically reconfigure the political situation in the country. This ul-

timatum is not the first time Akayev has tried to intimidate the new government.

After losing in the Kyrgyz courts, Bermet Akayeva, the former president's daughter plans to appeal to an international court to regain her parliamentary seat. Aidar Akayev, the ex-president's son and a current member of parliament, recently appeared publicly to thank other parliamentarians for canceling the investigations of him for corruption, despite the fact that special state commission collected considerable evidence of his numerous violations in the business sphere. Aidar told *Akipress* that he thinks all charges against him were fabricated and are politically motivated. "This is an absolute provocation: never had I threatened anybody, nothing did I seize. I believe my conscience is clean," he said. Comprised mostly of the country's richest businessmen, the Kyrgyz parliament evidently still supports Askar Akayev.<sup>5</sup>

There are mixed expectations about the upcoming elections. Most parliamentarians think the vote will inevitably be rigged. They argue that despite all efforts to secure honest voting by inviting international observers and supplying transparent ballot boxes, Bakiyev's team has already subtly used administrative resources in his campaign. "There will certainly be falsification, because there is a long line of office-seekers in front of the White House," noted former parliamentarian Bakyr Kerimbekov.

However, there are also optimistic predictions. "I want to highlight once again that, compared to the parliamentary elections this year, the presidential elections will be clean," argued sociologist Ainura Sagynbayeva.<sup>6</sup>

Still others think that the new government is gaining more credibility and capacity every day. "Relatively fair elections will take place because the Kyrgyz people have been given a chance to show the entire world that Kyrgyzstan can develop in a democratic way," said another parliamentarian.

Although Bakiyev's approval rating has fallen since March 24, his electoral alliance with Acting Prime Minister Felix Kulov should give him a majority of the votes. Elections will likely end after the first round, with Bakiyev supported by about 55% of the population. If the percentage is higher, many observers will question the overall validity of the elections. In the 2000 election, for example, Akayev's political allies "overplayed" their hand giving him the surprisingly high support of 74% of the votes, thanks to numerous falsifications.

**BAKIYEV WINS PRESIDENCY IN ONE ROUND — HOW LONG WILL THE HONEYMOON LAST?**

✻ July 12, 2005 ✻

With roughly 90 percent of the vote, Kurmanbek Bakiyev won Kyrgyzstan's July 10 presidential elections in the first round. Bakiyev had served as acting president since the March 24 Tulip Revolution. He was able to unite many former opposition figures—including Azimbek Beknazarov, Daniyar Usenov, and Adakhan Modumarov—who had been unable to work together during the reign of Askar Akayev. Bakiyev was also able to win the elections with the support of Kyrgyzstan's most popular politicians—Acting Prime Minister Felix Kulov and Acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva.

Not all of those who voted for Bakiyev genuinely supported his candidacy. Many voted for stability in the country, fearing the fragile situation could unravel if a national leader was not clearly defined. The Bakiyev-Kulov partnership was a key factor in Bakiyev gaining nation-wide approval. Nonetheless, the Kyrgyz capital was especially skeptical about the elections, as looting and numerous demonstrations have plagued the city since March 24. Indeed, about 3 percent of Bishkek's registered voters voted "against all" candidates. "None of the candidates deserves the presidency. I voted against all, although this is not the way out," said one 32-year old entrepreneur from Bishkek. For some Kyrgyz the presidential race represented a choice between the lesser of two evils. Bakiyev was generally regarded as the best possible figure among a field of rather unfamiliar candidates. His wide support is, therefore, susceptible to sharp decline.

The new president will have to satisfy popular demands by improving the economy and eliminating corruption. However, as the Georgian and Ukrainian "color revolutions" suggest, anti-corruption policies often divert the government's attention from other important problems such as agriculture and social services. Georgia's economic problems have worsened since the 2003 Rose Revolution despite the arrest and imprisonment of numerous political figures on corruption charges. The recent disagreement between Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko and Yulia Tymoshenko on the re-privatization of state property shows that addressing corruption can be an ambiguous undertaking and raises controversies within the government. In Kyrgyzstan, recent tensions in Osh between supporters and opponents of Bayaman Erkinbayev, a well-known businessman and parliamentarian, are just one example of anti-corruption policies sparking armed clashes.

According to Bakiyev-Kulov pre-election promises, the legislative branch must become a leading political actor in the country. However, the current parliament stands as an uncompromising opposition force that still supports Akayev. It is possible that Prime Minister Kulov will dissolve the parliament. Such a move would meet the expectations of the population that rioted against Akayev's regime and rigged parliamentary elections in February and March. But if Kulov continues to

strongly support the parliament's legitimacy, his popularity will inevitably decrease.

Sunday's elections employed a variety of techniques to guarantee the fairness of the balloting, including transparent ballot boxes, marking voters and exit polls. About 340 international observers from 45 countries participated in the elections nationwide. No major disturbances were recorded on election day. All national law-enforcement personnel were mobilized on July 10 as a precaution. Military training exercises were carried out in central Bishkek on the eve of the elections. The Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Kimmo Kiljunen, reported that the elections were a "step forward" and indicated tangible progress carried out in an unrestricted environment.

But along with such approving comments, Kiljunen acknowledged that the abnormally high turnout—reaching 75-95 percent in every precinct—seems rather dubious and requires additional investigations.<sup>7</sup> The Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society has reported individual cases of voters illegally transported to their polling place, but such reports are not widespread. Unsuccessful presidential candidate Jypar Jeksheev adamantly contends that mass falsification took place during the elections. According to Jeksheev, the government deployed its administrative resources to the maximum extent. Students, pensioners and public workers were allegedly forced to vote for the interim president.<sup>8</sup>

Russian newspapers were quick to label the Kyrgyz outcome as a victory for Moscow. As *Moskovsky komsomolets* reports, unlike the new Georgian and Ukrainian governments, Bakiyev clearly favors intensifying ties with Russia at the expense of other international actors currently active in the country.<sup>9</sup> For example, Kyrgyz Ambassador Apas Jumagulov declared that the U.S. military base must be gradually withdrawn from Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, he notes that the Russian base must remain in Kyrgyzstan due to its strategic importance.<sup>10</sup>

Ousted president Akayev, currently living in Russia, continues to seek ways to influence the political situation in Kyrgyzstan. According to *Moya stolitsa novosti* he deliberately supported the Bakiyev-Kulov team to create direct ties between his regime and the new government.<sup>11</sup> Akayev claims that Bakiyev is a product of his leadership -- "I raised him from the head of a regional administration to governor of the two most important oblasts, to prime minister," the former president told *Kommersant* on July 11.

In the early and mid-1990s Akayev was supported by the overwhelming majority of the government and the Kyrgyz people. But Akayev failed to satisfy popular expectations for economic prosperity and liberal democracy. Although there is a chance that Bakiyev will exhaust his current popularity during his first term as president, Kyrgyzstan's civil society institutions and mass media have evolved over 14 years of independence and will be able to provide better oversight of government policies. As one faculty member at Kyrgyz-Slavic University noted, "Bakiyev might not be the Kyrgyz Ataturk, but as long as there is stability in the country, he is the right candidate."

**KYRGYZ EXPERTS OPPOSE BISHKEK'S DECISION TO LIMIT U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE**

✂ July 19, 2005 ✂

At the July 5 Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana member states agreed to request a deadline for ending the U.S. military presence in Central Asia. This request inevitably concerns Kyrgyzstan not only because the U.S. military has been stationed at the Manas International Airport in Bishkek since 2001, but also because many analysts think that the increased U.S. influence on the country's political life made the March 24 revolution possible.

The influence of the SCO's major members—Russia and China—on the Kyrgyz government is evident. Russia's desire to increase its military presence in Kyrgyzstan became public this May after Interim President Kurmanbek Bakiyev met with Andrei Kokoshin, the chairman of the State Duma Committee on the Commonwealth of Independent States. The two men discussed an additional Russian military base in Osh, among other issues. Shortly after the SCO summit Bakiyev first stated that it is necessary to know the approximate duration of the U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>12</sup>

The government's sudden demand for the United States to set a deadline sparked a mixed reaction among Kyrgyz experts.

Atyrkul Alishева, director of the Institute for Regional Studies in Bishkek, writes in *Obshestvenny reiting* that it is not a question of “to be or not to be” that is relevant in the current situation, but the way the Kyrgyz government posed its request on the U.S. presence.<sup>13</sup> Alishева questions Bishkek's diplomatic acumen in raising such questions and their ability to predict long-term effects. She thinks that today Kyrgyzstan's stability is important not only for the local population or the Central Asian region, but for the greater world. “Any instability might be used by extremists, non-state terrorist organizations for terrorist acts and to capture control,” he observed. Alishева believes that the U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan represents a response to a global challenge of terrorism and drug trafficking.

Ishenbai Abdurazakov, co-chairman of the Justice and Progress party, told *Radio Azattyk* that the request for a deadline conveyed the SCO's desire for the American troops to leave the county. This inevitably will affect Kyrgyz-U.S. relations, and he warned that established bilateral ties might deteriorate fundamentally.

As Joomart Otorbayev, leader of the Moya Strana party, points out, the presence of the U.S. military base in Manas did not harm anyone; instead, it brought a sense of stability and paid millions of dollars into the state budget. “At its expense we were able to repay [our] Japanese loans,” Otorbayev told the *Kabar* news agency.<sup>14</sup>

Otorbayev and other Kyrgyz experts agree that the U.S. has been a generous investor in Kyrgyzstan. The United States supported civil-society development by allocating numerous grants to independent media outlets, opening a non-governmental publishing house, and financing the local *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty* service. The

U.S. government finances Kyrgyzstan's most active NGO, the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society led by Edil Baisalov, through the National Democratic Institute.<sup>15</sup>

Despite such intensive assistance to civil society and the political opposition before and after March 24 events, Bakiyev clearly favors Moscow. Many members of the government support the newly elected president's views on the U.S. military presence in the country. The Kyrgyz Ambassador to Moscow, Apas Jumagulov, insists on increasing the Russian influence in the country at the expense of the U.S. presence.

Acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva says that the Kyrgyz government's request must not be considered as an ultimatum. Similar to Bakiyev, Otunbayeva thinks that the base is not important in Kyrgyzstan or regional security politics, and it is only natural to ask for a clarification on the duration of the Manas installation.<sup>16</sup>

Orozbek Duisheev, leader of the Communist Party, has adopted the most radical stance. "This base is not needed in Kyrgyzstan. Since its establishment the CIS and Chinese attitudes towards us have been changing. There was more harm. Compared to the U.S., Russia and China are more helpful. With China, for example, once relations were enhanced, discussions began immediately on the problem of railway construction," he argued.<sup>17</sup>

Although the question of a foreign military presence in Kyrgyzstan might be a government-level issue, on the societal level, both the U.S. and Russian presence clearly improved the job market. Dozens of locals work at Manas and the Russian base. Local trade and services are boosted along the perimeter of the Manas airport and in the city of Kant, near the Russian base. Contrary to speculation by international and local experts, there is no strong anti-American mood among the locals because of the foreign military presence.

Noting the U.S. bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard Myers, commented earlier this year that the United States had "developed good relationships and good partnerships in this part of the world, not only in Afghanistan."<sup>18</sup> General Myers also criticized Russia and China for pressing Kyrgyzstan, which is much weaker than either regional power, to make decisions on security. He made it clear that the U.S. military presence is a stabilizing factor that benefits Central Asia far more than the United States.<sup>19</sup>

**BISHKEK RESISTING TASHKENT'S PRESSURE TO RETURN ANDIJAN REFUGEES**

✧ July 28, 2005 ✧

On July 27 more than 300 refugees from the May riots in Andijan, Uzbekistan, were transported from Jalalabad oblast to Bishkek Manas International Airport en route to a third country. The head of the Kyrgyzstan mission of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Carlos Zaccagnini, hopes to ultimately transfer every single Andijan refugee from Kyrgyzstan to a host country that prefers to remain unnamed. On July 29 the refugees will be sent to Romania for the next leg of their journey. Earlier reports suggested that their destination is likely Canada, the Czech Republic, or Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> According to the UN agency, there is an urgent need to remove the refugees from Kyrgyzstan before Uzbek authorities try to forcefully repatriate them.

The Kyrgyz government is still under pressure from the international community not to relinquish 29 convicts that are currently held at the Osh jail. Representatives of the Kyrgyz and Uzbek Defense Ministries are in the process of negotiating the convicts' status. Zaccagnini, however, made it clear that at least 25 of them will be ultimately sent to a third country. Tashkent insists on the immediate handover of the other four, as they are wanted in connection with the murder of an Uzbek attorney. Their fate should be decided in the coming days.<sup>21</sup> Zaccagnini acknowledged the Kyrgyz government's good treatment of the refugees, noting Bishkek's great understanding and collaboration.

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has informed the Kyrgyz government that it should not send back any more refugees. If Kyrgyzstan's newly elected President Kurmanbek Bakiyev fails to meet this demand, Rice is unlikely to attend his inauguration ceremony on August 14.

Another issue discussed on the ministerial level is the Uzbek authorities' capture of Kyrgyz journalist Erkin Yakubjanov on July 18. Uzbek border guards detained Yakubjanov, a student at Osh State University and journalist for *Azattyk* radio service, while he interviewed Uzbek citizens crossing the border. The Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs sent an official note to the Uzbek Foreign Ministry requesting a legal investigation of the case. After negotiating with the Uzbek Ambassador in Bishkek, Alisher Salahitdinov, both sides agreed to convene a meeting between security agencies to discuss broader issues of border politics.

During the two and a half months since the Andijan events, Uzbekistan—a country five times larger than Kyrgyzstan in terms of territory and population—has continuously pressured the Kyrgyz government through various means. The Uzbek officials referred to bilateral treaties on “Eternal Friendship” as the basis for denying the Andijan escapees refugee status. Tashkent arranged for the refugees' relatives to visit Jalalabad to persuade the Uzbeks to come back. The Uzbek government also considerably expanded the activities of its secret services in southern Kyrgyzstan.

Tensions continue to grow between long-time residents of Jalalabad and the asylum seekers. There is an increasing likelihood of a violent clash, as the Andijan refugees have introduced a sense of instability in the local villagers. Numerous international reports have described the refugees' fears and anxieties about returning to Uzbekistan and being punished by Uzbek President Islam Karimov.

Both sides have considerably tightened the border regime at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek frontier. The Uzbek government has also increased its visibility in Andijan by organizing cultural events and providing monetary credits. According to the Uzbek National Information Agency, Tashkent has set up two credit funds for local enterprises, totaling some \$73 million and 5 billions Sums (\$4.4 million) respectively.<sup>22</sup> The funds reportedly will provide employment for 15,000 people.

At the same time, the Uzbek security forces have detained more people accused of religious extremism. On July 25 the Tashkent City Court sentenced three members of Akramiya to 16 years of imprisonment. According to the defendants' lawyers, all three were psychologically and physically pressured by the Uzbek court. Further, the Uzbek secret service detained 14 men suspected of participating in the Andijan riot in the Russian city of Ivanovo on July 18, including both Russian and Uzbek citizens.<sup>23</sup> Russian NGOs, not the security structures, publicized the arrests.

Russia and China were among the few international actors to accept the Uzbek government's official version of the Andijan events. All three countries are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. As noted by the head of the Kyrgyz Committee on Human Rights, Ramazan Dyryldayev, the organization is comprised mainly of authoritarian states that supported former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev's government.<sup>24</sup>

However, by revoking the SCO's demand that Washington set deadlines on the U.S. military presence in Central Asia following U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's visit to Bishkek on July 25-26, and by maintaining international standards for granting political asylum at the expense of bilateral relations with Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz government has displayed its stiff opposition to the SCO's recent activities.

## KYRGYZSTAN, UN DISAGREE OVER REMAINING ANDIJAN REFUGEES

✂ August 2, 2005 ✂

Uzbek human rights activists officially thanked Kyrgyzstan, the UN, and the OSCE for allowing refugees from the May riots in Andijan to find asylum in a third country. Last week 439 Andijan refugees were sent to Romania en route to host countries that had agreed to provide political asylum. However, debates on whether Bishkek should repatriate the remaining 15 refugees held in the Osh jail for criminal charges are heating up among Kyrgyz officials, the Uzbek government and the international community.

According to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees, which Kyrgyzstan has observed since gaining independence, criminals charged in another country cannot receive refugee status and must be sent back to their country of residence. However, the Kyrgyz government has been clearly pressured by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the U.S. Embassy in Kyrgyzstan to take a political approach to the issue, rather than a legal one.

A group of Andijan refugees previously repatriated by Bishkek in June faced severe treatment from the Uzbek security services. One of them reportedly died from torture. Observers believe that if the remaining 15 men are sent back, they will face even harsher punishment. U.S. Ambassador Steven Young warned Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov that he would be responsible for the fate of the 15 men.

Beknazarov claims that the UN's demands to leave the criminals in Kyrgyzstan contradicts the 1951 Convention. According to the prosecutor, it is against the UN law to grant refugee status without a fair trial. Further, if the criminals are not defined as "refugees," Kyrgyzstan has no right to send them to a third country.<sup>25</sup> "As prosecutor-general of Kyrgyzstan, I am executing precisely the demands of the convention on refugees. Without violating any clause, we are [placed] under unprecedented pressure," he said.

Beknazarov added that under ex-president Askar Akayev, representatives of regional powers had become accustomed to pressing Kyrgyzstan to take political decisions in place of legal ones. He argued that it is now time for Kyrgyzstan to assert greater independence in decision-making, with a preference for upholding the rule of law.

"We, as a neutral side, must find the truth that is somewhere in the middle. It is not necessary to politicize the situation," says Deputy Prosecutor General Nurlan Jeenaliyev. He maintains that the convicts committed criminal, not political, offenses. Three of the 15 have already been denied refugee status by the UNHCR. The remaining 12, according to the Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General, committed crimes long before the Andijan crisis.<sup>26</sup> The Kyrgyz Prosecutor-General has sufficient evidence to prove the men's guilt on charges of terrorism and murder.

The fate of the remaining refugees has generated controversy among the

Kyrgyz public. Kyrgyz human rights activist Tursunbai Akun says, “Beknazarov is making a huge mistake that will damage the positive image of Kyrgyzstan and [newly elected] President Kurmanbek Bakiyev” before his inauguration ceremony on August 14.<sup>27</sup> “Why are similar demands not presented before [Uzbek President Islam] Karimov?” asks a Kyrgyz NGO leader. Another expert argues, “Kyrgyzstan has become an arena for SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization] members, the U.S. and the Uzbek government to advocate their own interests. Kyrgyzstan is the only country to suffer this turmoil.”

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice officially approved the Kyrgyz government’s decision not to return most of the refugees to Uzbekistan. Nonetheless, she reportedly wanted the 15 convicts to leave Kyrgyzstan with the larger group. Rice is expected to attend Bakiyev’s inauguration ceremony, as are the presidents of Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. The presidents of Russia and Uzbekistan will send representatives.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyz journalist Erkin Yakubjanov, captured by Uzbek security agents for conducting unsanctioned interviews of Uzbek citizens crossing the border, was released on July 30 after ministerial-level Kyrgyz-Uzbek negotiations reached an agreement. Yakubjanov was held in Uzbekistan for twelve days.

As a response to the U.S. stance regarding the Andijan refugees, on July 29 the Uzbek government sent an official note to the U.S. Embassy demanding that Washington withdraw its military from Uzbekistan within 180 days. According to U.S. officials, closure of the U.S. military base in Uzbekistan will not be a significant loss. The forces will be relocated to Manas Airport in Bishkek.<sup>28</sup> The only difficulty the U.S. forces could face is longer flight time to Afghanistan should Uzbekistan also close its air space to U.S. aircraft. U.S. payments for its current contingent at Manas already represent a significant part of the Kyrgyz GDP. Relocating the U.S. troops from Uzbekistan will make those contributions even higher.

If any of the remaining 15 Andijan refugees are eventually sent back to Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz judiciary will have exercised its independence, which Bishkek believes was too frequently violated in the past by international forces. However, Prosecutor-General Beknazarov faces harsh criticism at home and abroad as he tries to solve the refugees’ status within a legal framework.

## BAKIYEV'S CABINET CRITICIZED FOR CORRUPT CADRE POLITICS

✂ August 9, 2005 ✂

Among the first tasks Kyrgyz president-elect Kurmanbek Bakiyev faced after winning the July 10 election was to assemble his cabinet. Already the process has revealed cracks in the new ruling regime.

According to Bakiyev's prior agreement with Acting Prime Minister Felix Kulov, the president would appoint members of the security structures and the Foreign Service, while the prime minister would be in charge of the economic sector and local governments. Thus, the government would consist of two teams—one supporting the president and the other the prime minister. However, disputes over cadre politics began well ahead of the August 14 presidential inauguration and official approval of the prime minister. In particular, the new government has been criticized for not including a third team: the independent ministries.

According to the Kyrgyz media, the new president is already disappointing voters with his clumsy, ineffective cadre policies.<sup>29</sup> In particular, Bakiyev's government has come under fire for its continuity with the reign of former president Askar Akayev. A number of former Akayev allies modified their political orientations "overnight" and joined the new government. "It was a bargain of one trouble for another. I think all those who were especially desperate to retain power stayed in the government despite the change of presidents," says a 45-year old engineer from Bishkek.

On July 18 Bakiyev demoted Bishkek Police Chief Omurbek Suvanaliyev for failing to prevent counter-revolutionary events on June 17. When Suvanaliyev resigned in protest, the president appointed Moldomusa Kognatiyev, a close ally of his own brother. This replacement generated widespread criticism of Bakiyev. Suvanaliyev openly argues that his resignation was a political act and has nothing to do with his professional qualifications.<sup>30</sup> Suvanaliyev believes that Bakiyev wanted to replace him with a representative from the south in order to place the capital under control of his clan.

Suvanaliyev said that the deteriorating situation in the Kyrgyz capital in recent months placed a particularly high burden on the Bishkek police. Suvanaliyev also took credit for averting a mass protest following his resignation by up to 2,000 police personnel, claiming that he took this preventative action to protect the image of Kyrgyzstan and its newly elected president. Acting Prime Minister Kulov was against Suvanaliyev's departure. Kulov could have prevented the resignation, but only after Bakiyev's formal inauguration and his official appointment as a prime minister.

According to a Kyrgyz journalist, Bakiyev made too many promises to too many office-seekers in order to gain popularity before the elections. As a result, there may be up to five people expecting to occupy any given position. Further, the president's list of potential cadres does not match with the preferences and needs of ministers and local governments. Some experts think that personal rivalry between Kulov

and Bakiyev is preventing effective state staffing. The future alignment of various state structures, will therefore depend on balanced coordination between the two leaders.

Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, the politician leading the fight against state corruption, is widely blamed for prosecuting only undesirable political figures. Prior to the presidential elections Usenov promised that cracking down on state corruption would lead to an increased state budget. But some Kyrgyz analysts question if it is possible to fulfill such promises, since competition for government positions is mounting by the day.

Kulov has been criticized for defending the new parliament to protect his own interests. In the event of disagreement with the president, Kulov wants to have strong support among the MPs. Now it is arguably too late to consider invalidating the parliament—the demand set by the popular demonstrations in March—because the current parliament has approved numerous legal acts and the president was elected legitimately.<sup>31</sup>

Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov has been extensively criticized for damaging Kyrgyzstan's image by resisting international pressure to allow the disputed 15 Andijan refugees to remain in Kyrgyzstan. Although twelve of them were given official refugee status, Tashkent fiercely demanded the return of the other three. On August 4, following numerous international and inter-ministerial meetings, Beknazarov set a deadline of ten days for any third country to agree to host the remaining refugees. Holland, Sweden and Finland expressed their interest on August 8.<sup>32</sup>

Deputy Prime Minister Adakhan Modumarov, who recently won a parliamentary seat in a re-run election on July 31, is facing accusations of campaign fraud. Modumarov's opponent, Mamat Orozbayev, has alleged that the deputy prime minister used government resources to promote his candidacy during the election.<sup>33</sup> According to critics, the government wants to slip its own representatives into the parliament.

The Kyrgyz public currently supports the government over the parliament. However, the government might lose its approval rating if it fails to meet the public's high expectations. In this case, only a few figures in the parliament, government, or opposition will be able to retain their political popularity. Despite widespread criticism, there are some signs of independent governmental appointments. For instance, Kyrgyz Ambassador to Germany Askar Sarygulov, a brother of State Secretary Dostan Sarygulov, was dismissed on August 8. This news took many by surprise. As one Kyrgyz student observed, "It is not easy to get rid of all Akayev's former allies in the government; they still possess great influence in the political and economic spheres."

**CADRE POLITICS AND KYRGYZ-UZBEK RELATIONS**

**❧ SEPTEMBER 2005 – OCTOBER 2005 ❧**





**AS WINTER APPROACHES, KYRGYZSTAN FACES TOUGH CHOICES IN ITS ENERGY SECTOR**✧ **September 6, 2005** ✧

Following this summer's Andijan refugee crisis, when the Kyrgyz government transferred 440 Uzbek citizens to a third country to satisfy its obligations as a UN member, Tashkent canceled a bilateral agreement on supplying 350 million cubic meters of natural gas to Kyrgyzstan. In past years a protracted crisis in the energy sector has brought significant losses due to poor and corrupt management. Kyrgyzstan is now facing another financial and logistical stalemate in importing gas and exporting electricity as winter approaches.

After Uzbekistan cancelled its gas supply agreement, Kyrgyzstan had to rely on Kazakhstan's KazTransGaz, which re-sold Uzbek gas at higher prices. As one of the new contract's conditions, KazTransGaz demanded that Kyrgyzstan repay a three-year debt totalling \$17.5 million. Since the beginning of August, Kyrgyzstan has overpaid the normal gas price by 20 percent, thus sliding further into a budget deficit.<sup>1</sup>

Although electricity exports have led the Kyrgyz economy, electricity is among the sectors least reformed since 1991. Remaining under the centralized control of KyrgyzEnergo, the industry gas deteriorated during the reign of former president Askar Akayev. Annual electricity losses under KyrgyzEnergo exceeded 50 percent, when the average estimated loss should not normally be greater than 12-13 percent.

In the late 1990s it was already apparent that Kyrgyzstan would need to decrease its dependency on Uzbek gas and move towards using own resources. Uzbekistan often restricted gas exports to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on political rather than economic grounds. During the 1999-2000 conflict in Batken, the government of Uzbek President Islam Karimov shut off gas supplies to Kyrgyzstan while Kyrgyz troops fought guerillas from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The entire northern part of Kyrgyzstan, including Bishkek, suffered from natural gas shortages. Gas scarcity created an increased reliance on electricity and frequently resulted in the breakdown of the power grid, thus exacerbating the deterioration of basic public utilities.

Most local experts expected that the Uzbek refugee crisis would worsen relations with Uzbekistan. But as noted by a journalist from *Vecherny Bishkek*, "If the preference were to be given to gas – wait for a demonstrative flogging of Kyrgyzstan from the European Union and NATO with lingering financial sanctions and even worse".<sup>2</sup>

During the Akayev era, current Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was among the few policymakers to speak against granting concessions to the energy sector. As president, however, he quickly changed his position. Without prior parliamentary consent, Bakiyev stated that the entire sector should be handed over to Russian control. This proved to be yet another clumsy attempt by Bakiyev to please Moscow. Bakiyev earlier sought to comfort Russia by demanding deadlines for the U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan. At an official meeting with President Vladimir Putin on September 5, Bakiyev called for more extensive bilateral cooperation, listing a num-

ber of strategic economic sites in Kyrgyzstan that are ready for Russian investment.<sup>3</sup>

Newly appointed Prime Minister Felix Kulov has taken a different approach. During a series of meetings with representatives from the World Bank, Kulov welcomed the idea of an open competition to attract more investment.<sup>4</sup> The World Bank also recommended that the Kyrgyz government decentralize KyrgyzEnergó's control over six companies to enhance management on a micro level. This could reduce losses and improve payment collection rates within the government's broader anti-corruption policies.<sup>5</sup> Domestic and regional barter transactions could be changed into cash payments to promote a competitive market. Besides the World Bank, there are other potential U.S. and European partners willing to assist Kyrgyzstan's energy sector, including the Asian Development Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.

The concession plan sparked extensive discussions among local politicians, with most of them coming out against any foreign involvement in the country's most important economic sector. They cite the Georgian example of failed energy reform, when in 1991 a concession to the U.S.-based AES Corporation led to a rapid price increase and resulted in a dramatic collapse of the energy sector. The crisis made Georgia deeply dependent on Russia. Based in Virginia, AES is active in 27 countries. Georgia was one of a few failures among a generally successful record of that company's international activities. It will likely become one of the leading competitors in the Kyrgyz tender.

Because the energy sector is so important for Kyrgyzstan's GDP, it raises controversial opinions whenever its future is considered. The new government is seeking to solve the problem with old solutions: namely, barter or quick concession. Bakiyev's opponents have actively resisted any possibility of falling under foreign economic dependence by pointing to the vivid example of Georgia. But the new government needs to find a solution before the start of the cold season to maintain its popularity.

**KULOV OPTIMISTIC ON EFFORTS TO DELINEATE DIVISION OF POWERS BETWEEN PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER**✂ **September 13, 2005** ✂

Latent conflicts between the president's and prime minister's supporters in the Kyrgyz parliament became public during the September 12 debates on the draft legislation "On the Government Structure."

Deputy Prime Ministers Daniyar Usenov and Adakhan Modumarov voted against Prime Minister Felix Kulov's version of the bill, which, according to him, would clarify the respective duties of the president and prime minister. Kulov interpreted this protest as a demonstrative attempt to "bring me up against Bakiyev," to which he added, "If you notice that I'm maneuvering, usurping power, then do not spin intrigues, tell me openly to my face, and I will officially resign."<sup>6</sup>

Yet contrary to expectations, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev also disagreed with Kulov's bill. Pro-Kulov parliamentarians regarded the president's veto as Bakiyev's attempt to secure control over key sectors of the national economy. The president currently has jurisdiction over Kyrgyz Railways, Kyrgyz Airlines and financial intelligence agencies. During heated parliamentary discussions of the bill, Kabai Karabekov questioned the president's real intentions in wanting to control these sectors. "I don't understand why the president is not willing to control the ministries of culture, education, and health? Why is he only taking under his custody the energy sector, drugs, alcohol, etc.?" he asked.<sup>7</sup>

As Bakiyev's representative in parliament, Daniyar Narymbayev, observed, "It is absolutely wrong to assume that the president is trying to undermine some structures," because the points of contention in the bill are administrative units that were created directly by the government.<sup>8</sup> But Professor Nur Omarov of the Russian-Slavic University thinks that the government will be stocked with pro-presidential cadres so that Kulov will eventually be pushed aside. "All he will be able to do is bang on the door and Bakiyev's team would be glad to see that," notes another Kyrgyz analyst.

Despite such murky forecasts for his political future, Kulov himself shows greater confidence in the viability of his partnership with the president. He has brushed aside suggestions that a political crisis could result from disputes over the government's structure. Kulov referred to the current disagreements among him, the president and the parliament as a positive development, "There is nothing bad in this and such deliberations should only be welcomed...the more parliamentarians, the more opinions. Out of respect for their views, a conference committee will be formed to develop an approach that will reflect our real economic situation."<sup>9</sup>

Meanwhile, the Erkindik (Freedom) party has collected some 100,000 signatures for a petition to dissolve the parliament. Statements from Erkindik's chair, Adylbek Kasymov, suggest that by the end of October the party will have collected the 300,000 signatures required for initiating the dissolution of parlia-

ment. The party's chief leader, Topchubek Turgunaliyev, an active opponent of the current parliament, thinks that the Tulip Revolution will not be fully realized until the results of the February-March 2005 parliamentary elections are canceled.<sup>10</sup> Yet, neither Kulov nor Bakiyev supports the idea of annulling the parliament. To the contrary, this December an additional 30 parliamentarians will be elected.

Despite a bigger parliament, there will likely be fewer ministers and deputy prime ministers. The bill now under consideration suggests 12 ministries instead of the current 14, which would be achieved by merging the Ministry of Economic Development, Trade and Production with the Ministry of Finance. Several ministries would be rearranged, with more functions added to the ministries of Tourism, Ecology and Education. The current five deputy prime ministers would be reduced to two. The shrinking number of deputy prime ministers may well be the source of Usenov and Modumarov's discontent with Kulov.

Many parliamentarians would welcome the government downsizing. Jantoro Satybaldiyev, for example, says that the government structure has been changing over the last 14 years, but it has never decreased its size; instead the same structures were merely renamed.<sup>11</sup> Kulov's press office claims that the proposed changes would no longer be mere window dressing, but aimed at actually transforming internal arrangements.<sup>12</sup>

Though Kulov is optimistic about reaching a fair division of powers between him and Bakiyev, the peaceful resolution of his disagreement with the president and deputy prime ministers appears to be vital for avoiding a political crisis in Kyrgyzstan. According to Acting Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva, Ukraine's problems have served as a warning to all political groups in Kyrgyzstan that they must find the right balance of powers for constructive collaboration.<sup>13</sup>

Bakiyev's approval ratings have significantly declined since the presidential elections on July 10, even among his own voters. His recent appointment of his brother, Marat Bakiyev, as Ambassador to Germany generated wide criticism of his flagrant nepotism. At the same time, Kulov remains the most popular politician in Kyrgyzstan. Depending on how the government's structure evolves, the Bakiyev-Kulov team will either be regarded as a shrewd calculation from the start or a short-sighted move to win the elections.

**KARIMOV ACCUSES KYRGYZSTAN OF ASSISTING TERRORISTS**

✂ September 20, 2005 ✂

Tashkent's latest pronouncement blames Kyrgyzstan for the bloody Andijan riots on May 13. At a parliamentary meeting on September 5, the Uzbek Prosecutor-General accused the Kyrgyz government of allowing up to 70 religious extremists to train on its southern territories ahead of the Andijan riots, claiming that 60 professional gunmen actively participated in the riots and were Kyrgyz citizens. Deputy Secretary of the Kyrgyz Security Council Vyacheslav Hah denied these allegations, saying the Kyrgyz side had not found any evidence to back the charges.<sup>14</sup> Naken Kasiev, Governor of Osh, dismissed Tashkent's allegations as nothing less than fantasy.

Uzbekistan's accusations and its recent refusal to supply gas to Kyrgyzstan this winter point at a deepening Kyrgyz-Uzbek rift. This cooling of interstate relations reflects the deteriorating security situation in Uzbekistan. Uzbek President Islam Karimov routinely described armed opposition to his regime as a phenomenon originating in neighboring territories, not at home. He openly blamed Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for their inability to adequately insulate their territories against guerilla groups, thus contributing to spread of regional terrorist networks.

While official Tashkent insists on the validity of its allegations, leaders of the unregistered Uzbek opposition party "Ovoz Dehkhonlar" (Free Farmers) doubt that the new anti-Kyrgyzstan charges will be accepted internationally. According to the party's official declaration, authors of such 'information' submitted assessments and conclusions that in reality represent poorly and badly fabricated disinformation.<sup>15</sup>

Kyrgyzstan may respond to the gas deficit by reducing the amount of water released to Uzbekistan during irrigation periods. Kyrgyzstan's water management policies are critical for Uzbekistan's cotton-dependent economy, especially during summer and winter. Although water released in southern Kyrgyzstan risks flooding Uzbekistan's flatlands, the country still needs to generate hydroelectricity.

With talks of a possible reduction in the water supply, Kyrgyzstan is openly confronting Karimov. The former Akayev regime in Kyrgyzstan rarely took such radical measures. As one website notes, "The difference between gas and water is that gas requires production and transportation that bear costs. But water runs by itself, not necessitating any labor or expenses".<sup>16</sup>

The Kyrgyz government enjoys wide public approval for its handling of the Andijan refugee crisis. Despite the full awareness of the looming gas shortage this winter, there are few regrets about following requests from the UN refugee agency and ignoring pressure from the Uzbek government. Amid rapidly falling support for President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and his cadre politics, the refusal to repatriate the Andijan refugees issue arguably stands as the most popular accomplishment of the new government. As a member of a local NGO summed it up, "It is doubtful if Akayev would be coura-

geous enough to make the same decision and openly contradict Karimov.”

Meanwhile, Bakiyev dismissed Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov on September 19. The surprising news came shortly after Aidar Akayev, son of former president Askar Akayev, was stripped of his seat in parliament by a parliamentary vote. Besides closely dealing with the Andijan refugees this summer, Beknazarov had chaired a special committee investigating Aidar’s case. “I had two goals – abolish Akayev’s regime and fight corruption. The regime fell, but the battle against corruption I lost,” he commented.<sup>17</sup> Beknazarov said he would now join the opposition.

Following the 60th session of the UN General Assembly, Acting Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva noted that almost all of the delegations had acknowledged Kyrgyzstan’s efforts to abide by international laws in solving the Andijan refugee crisis. Ties with Europe are improving. “At the meeting with European Commissioner for Foreign Affairs Benita Ferrero-Waldner we discussed issues of bilateral cooperation, gas supply and provision of heating this year,” she reported.<sup>18</sup>

There are three Kyrgyz citizens among the 15 individuals arrested following the Andijan uprising. Their trial begins on September 20 in Tashkent. Tolekan Ismailova, leader of the Kyrgyz human rights NGO Civil Society against Corruption, has condemned the detention of the Kyrgyz citizens. Along with other activists, Ismailova has also reported increased activity by the Uzbek Special Services in southern Kyrgyzstan. She believes the Kyrgyz government should prevent Uzbek personnel from operating on its territory.<sup>19</sup>

Hundreds of Uzbek refugees who fled during the Andijan massacre still reside throughout southern Kyrgyzstan. Many refused to officially register at the refugee camps in Jalalabad. Most of these refugees live with their relatives without legal registration by Kyrgyz immigration officials. They try to remain inconspicuous, because the Uzbek government is persecuting family members of the 439 refugees deported in late July to Romania.<sup>20</sup> The Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs is investigating the issue of illegal immigrants and plans to confer some type of legal status. But local residents are generally negative towards the Uzbek citizens in their cities, describing them as religious extremists.

The Kyrgyz newspaper *Obshchestvenny reiting* has questioned Kyrgyzstan’s ability to accommodate more Uzbek refugees from future crises.<sup>21</sup> The newspaper comments that Kyrgyzstan is doomed to be a victim of Tashkent’s inhumane politics towards its own citizens. “The Andijan crisis brought us a murky perspective – the [Uzbek] central government’s showdown with religious groups will turn into Kyrgyzstan’s refugee headache,” noted one recent editorial, adding that, “The international community will not be able to endlessly accommodate Uzbeks around the world.”

## ERKINBAYEV'S ASSASSINATION PROVOKES CONTROVERSY IN KYRGYZSTAN

✂ September 27, 2005 ✂

On September 21, Bayaman Erkinbayev, a member of the Kyrgyz parliament with alleged ties to criminal groups, was shot dead in central Bishkek, the Kyrgyz capital. His murder is the third political assassination in Kyrgyzstan since the March 24 Tulip Revolution. The National Security Service has not released any official statement regarding the possible perpetrators or what interests might have triggered the contract murder.

The first of the three assassinations occurred on April 10, when an unknown gunman shot Usen Kudaibergenov, a close ally of Prime Minister Felix Kulov, dead in his house. On July 10, pro-Akayev parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev was gunned down in broad daylight in Bishkek. Since the ouster of former president Askar Akayev, Erkinbayev survived two previous assassination attempts with only slight injuries.

Better known by his first name, Bayaman earned a reputation as a criminal who was able to avoid prosecution by winning election to parliament in 1995, 2000 and 2005. Analysts explain Erkinbayev's broad local support by his efforts to improve living standards in the poverty-stricken region of southern Kyrgyzstan. Erkinbayev was among the wealthiest individuals in southern Kyrgyzstan. He owned a hotel in Osh and shared control of a key regional market in the town of Karasuu. After Akayev's ouster, Bayaman initially declared that he would run for the presidency. He withdrew his candidacy shortly after Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Kulov formed a political union.

While the government has not issued official explanations for the three contract murders, some Bishkek residents are inclined to believe that Erkinbayev was killed due to illegal business deals. Although no direct evidence exists, many locals suggest that the motives for Erkinbayev's assassination arise from criminal groups competing for control of lucrative drug-trafficking routes in southern Kyrgyzstan.

It remains unclear whether there is a direct connection between Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov's unexpected dismissal on September 19 and Erkinbayev's assassination. President Bakiyev claimed that he fired Beknazarov for his disappointing investigation into an armed showdown between criminal organizations over the Karasuu market earlier this month. In return, Beknazarov declared that the government is concealing the real reasons behind the conflict.<sup>22</sup> Beknazarov believes that the state's attempt to re-privatize the Karasuu market was a veiled attempt to strip Erkinbayev of his property.

Bakiyev's popularity has plummeted in the wake of Beknazarov's dismissal and Erkinbayev's assassination. Presidential approval rates reached their lowest point on September 24, when thousands of protesters took to the streets in Jalalabad to demand Bakiyev's resignation.

Beknazarov also had political problems during the Akayev regime. The former president sent him to prison on corruption charges in March 2002, but local analysts

believe he was sidelined for speaking out against a border treaty that would cede territory to China. Beknazarov's imprisonment prompted the country's first popular protest, in Aksy region, on March 17, 2002. Six people died at Aksy due to the law-enforcement agencies' unprofessional approach in dealing with civilian demonstrations. After being fired by Bakiyev, Beknazarov declared that he would join the opposition.

President Bakiyev's growing unpopularity is also dragging down Prime Minister Kulov. Parliamentary disputes over cabinet appointments suggest that Kulov's plan to promote his own candidates to balance pro-presidential figures has failed. Kulov's political weakness also casts doubt on whether he is able to act independently. As one 33-year old Bishkek resident explained, "Kulov is doing nothing. Imagine, he sat in prison for five years, and all of a sudden he is put to rule the country. Of course he will be weak. Currently, Bakiyev's cadres in the government significantly outnumber Kulov's appointees." Southerners are now everywhere, throughout public institutions, and I find myself unable to communicate with them, to find a common language," complained a 22-year old student at the Kyrgyz-Slavic University.

Frustration about Erkinbayev's death is increasing among the Kyrgyz public. As a local journalist noted, "Nobody can definitely say why, how and who's next." At an emergency session of parliament, a number of lawmakers expressed concerns about their safety, blaming the prime minister and the president for poor coordination among law-enforcement agencies. One anxious parliamentarian, Omurbek Babanov, claimed that he is next on the hit list because he owns businesses and has the courage to speak against the government.<sup>23</sup> The parliament voted to carry out its own investigation of Erkinbayev's murder.

Amid the controversies and ambiguities about Erkinbayev's death, local media found themselves engaged in a press war. One day after Erkinbayev's murder, the popular internet-based Kyrgyz news agencies *Akipress* and *Gazeta.kg* disseminated a letter allegedly written by Erkinbayev about his premonition of his approaching death. In the note Erkinbayev assails the current government with allegations of corruption, while mentioning that only Akayev "was genuinely a strategist, genuinely the son of his land!"<sup>24</sup> Most local experts agree that the letter is a fraud instigated by pro-Akayev forces. Other contentious media reports include Erkinbayev's possible cooperation with Akayev and his daughter Bermet Akayeva. But no mass media outlet dared to name specific reasons for Erkinbayev's assassination or parties involved in the crime.

A private entrepreneur from Bishkek summed up the popular mood, saying, "During the Akayev era it was all corrupted, but predictable. The hierarchy of bribery was stable, everyone knew who takes what amount of money at what time. Today it is unclear who stands behind decisions at the Customs [Agency], who raises and collects the fees." Obviously, said the entrepreneur, medium-sized entrepreneurs now believe they contribute to the state budget in other, more direct, methods. Still, many doubt that such profitable areas as administration of import/export duties will remain uncontrolled for a long time.

**KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT REJECTS FEMALE CABINET NOMINEES, INCLUDING OTUNBAYEVA**✂ **October 4, 2005** ✂

On September 30, the Kyrgyz parliament finalized appointments for all 16 cabinet ministers and key members of the new government. The selection process took two rounds because six of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's candidates were initially rejected.

Roza Otunbayeva, a major force behind the March 24 Tulip Revolution, was one of the rejected candidates. The parliament's rebuff of Otunbayeva was an enormous disappointment, broadly interpreted as pay-back for her attempts to dismiss the parliamentary body after the revolution.

Otunbayeva took her defeat stoically, calling it logical and predictable. "I was dead in the existing scheme of power. Alga [party members] won, avenging the [Akayev] Family for [my] trampling the values of Akayevshchina," she observed, "I was stuck in the throat of some [individuals] who came to the high levels [of the government and parliament] to solve personal problems."<sup>25</sup>

Along with former Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov, whom Bakiyev unexpectedly dismissed last month, Otunbayeva will become the current government's strongest critic. "I will join the thousands of ordinary people who participated in the March events across the republic, who did not ask for government positions afterwards, and who today are sick at heart for the well-being of the country. We will highlight the key points of the national March 24 Revolution, we will fight to clean up politics," Otunbayeva told *Akipress*.<sup>26</sup>

Parliament also rejected two other female candidates, Alevtina Pronenko and Toktokan Boronbayeva, for minister of labor and social security and minister of culture, respectively. With these three women ejected from the cabinet, only one female remains in the parliament and executive branch: Aigul Ryskulova, chair of the State Commission on Migration and Employment.

The Coalition for Civil Society and Democracy denounced the parliament's rejection of the three women as gender discrimination. According to the NGO's public statement, the parliamentarians rejection of Otunbayeva and Pronenko is a challenge to the development of democracy in Kyrgyzstan. The NGO's statement asks: "Doesn't yesterday's voting confirm that some deputies... are professionally useless, capricious, and revengeful – they are not able to think on a state level, placing personal dudgeon in the forefront, [they] do not calculate the reaction of public opinion and the international community."<sup>27</sup>

Bakiyev's nominees for the second round of cabinet appointments are not well known to the wider public. Parliamentarian Marat Sutalinov dismissed them as "such amoebas." Another parliamentarian, Iskhak Masaliyev, says that the president's cadres lack experience in politics and have little to present for their political programs. "For three days the candidates walked around parliamentarians' offices

like poor relations. Everyone came, introduced themselves and promised to be an obedient minister. This was the way they campaigned for themselves,” he said.<sup>28</sup>

Along with other politicians, Sotalinov believes that Bakiyev’s choices are inconsistent and demonstrate no clear strategy. The political situation is chaotic, he said. “It is not clear where everyone is moving, gathering: today with him, tomorrow with someone else, someone is offended – he comes here, somebody – there. There is no normal system in the country,” he argues.<sup>29</sup> His counterpart, Kabai Karabekov, thinks that the entire procedure of nominating ministerial candidates was corrupt and followed the old scheme set by ousted president Askar Akayev.

The parliament was also criticized for curtailing reform-oriented candidates. According to local observers, most of the nominees who received parliamentary approval in the first round worked in the old government and joined the opposition in the last days of the Akayev regime.<sup>30</sup>

Bakiyev affirmed a strict attitude towards the new ministers. “If anyone is caught in corruption, I won’t pity anyone, I will take appropriate decisions right away,” he said. Meanwhile, Daniyar Karimov, a political analyst from *Vecherny Bishkek* and a strong adversary of the Tulip Revolution, argues that “there is not a single state structure left in Kyrgyzstan that wouldn’t raise doubts about own legitimacy”.<sup>31</sup>

The recent assassination of Bayaman Erkinbayev, a prominent member of parliament, feeds the current anxiety about the criminal groups controlling important government decisions. The National Security Service still has not issued any official statements about the possible perpetrators. At the same time, politicians such as Deputy Prime Minister Adakhan Modumarov and Prime Minister Felix Kulov repeatedly insist that criminality in the country is steadily rising in the aftermath of the revolution.

The past week did see at least one positive development. Adil Toigonbayev, Akayev’s son-in-law, no longer unofficially controls the *Vecherny Bishkek* newspaper. Toigonbayev had seized the newspaper while it was among the top-rated media outlets in Kyrgyzstan. On September 30, the newspaper’s entire staff openly rioted against the usurper. As of October 3, the newspaper no longer presents rigidly pro-Akayev positions. Akayev still has influence over the *KOORT TV* channel, however, which he uses to influence domestic politics.

**KYRGYZ, UZBEK LEADERS CHOOSE COLD PEACE OVER OPEN CONFRONTATION**✧ **October 11, 2005** ✧

On October 6 Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Uzbek President Islam Karimov held a bilateral meeting to discuss future cooperation. The meeting took place during Central Asian Cooperation Organization summit in St. Petersburg. This was the first face-to-face meeting between the two presidents following several months of open confrontation regarding the status of some 500 refugees who escaped from Uzbekistan, to Kyrgyzstan during the Andijan riots in May. But the Kyrgyz-Uzbek dialogue turned out to be a symbolic event that alleviated few of the accumulated tensions between the two parties. Although the leaders discussed border and economic issues, more pressing problems—regulation of gas and water supplies and earlier Uzbek accusations that Kyrgyz leadership allowed terrorist organizations to operate from its territory—were left untouched. The leaders discussed issues of disputed borders and economic partnership as outlined in the countries' 1996 agreement "On Eternal Friendship."

Once again, the agreement "On Eternal Friendship" proved too ambiguous to be useful in resolving concrete inter-state disputes. The agreement does not provide practical details on the rights and duties of the participating parties. Offering only symbolic recognition of each other's national sovereignty and the desired peaceful coexistence, it is open to *ad hoc* interpretations of its scope and force in emergency situations.

Regarding the legal status of the Andijan refugees, the Uzbek side believes the agreement obligates Kyrgyzstan to work through official channels in Tashkent rather than with third countries or international organizations. When the Kyrgyz mass media and civil society organizations encouraged the government to abide by basic human rights regulations, Uzbekistan demanded the refugees' repatriation. With the "Eternal Friendship" strained to the limit, it was no longer clear what actions could be taken within the agreement's framework.

Kyrgyz analysts have varying interpretations about the meaning of the St. Petersburg meeting. Some are optimistic that Karimov is trying to reestablish friendly relations with Kyrgyzstan, noting Tashkent's growing international isolation.<sup>32</sup> According to this view, engagement is Karimov's natural reaction to the U.S. withdrawal from its military base in Karshi-Khanabad and the EU's imposition of severe economic sanctions. After vacating Uzbekistan, it is now clear that U.S. and NATO troops will expand their presence in Kyrgyzstan.

Other observers believe that Karimov is pursuing hidden goals by trying to reactivate his country's partnership with Kyrgyzstan. Chief among them is holding Kyrgyzstan accountable for hosting alleged terrorists. According to Uzbek officials, there are still terrorist training camps located in southern Kyrgyzstan that threaten regional security. Nonetheless, both Prime

Minister Felix Kulov and the Kyrgyz National Security Service have persistently argued that there is no evidence of insurgent activity in Kyrgyzstan.

Moreover, the Kyrgyz president emphasized that his government is equally concerned with the spread of Islamic radical movements in the region and therefore actively participates in multilateral security alliances such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Bishkek expressed hope that the Uzbek-Kyrgyz partnership would be based on mutual understanding and trust.

Meanwhile, three Kyrgyz citizens detained by the Uzbek police for organizing riots in Andijan have pleaded guilty. Djohanghir Burkhanov and Valijon Ergashev testified that they underwent subversive training at a military outpost near the southern Kyrgyz village of Teeke and at a school in Osh city. However, according to *Vecherny Bishkek's* special investigation, neither the outpost personnel nor school representatives had known of or seen the convicts.<sup>33</sup> The newspaper concluded that the Kyrgyz citizens had either “bluffed” at the trial or were forced to give false evidence.

In the coming months the U.S. government will likely help resolve the energy crisis in Kyrgyzstan, which has worsened since the Kyrgyz-Uzbek disagreement over the Andijan refugees. In recent years the Kyrgyz energy sector has accumulated external and internal debts due to poor management and devastating corruption. According to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried, Washington will help the Kyrgyz government to develop a rational energy policy that will ameliorate the current crisis through October 2006 and minimize unwanted external pressures. That support has political as well as economic value.

Many Kyrgyz analysts have welcomed the news that U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice will travel to Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan October 10-13, but not Uzbekistan. They are also encouraged by the prospect of Karimov facing an international trial initiated by the U.S. government. They see such steps as necessary and long awaited.<sup>34</sup> This approval for U.S. plans to pressure Karimov arises from the fact that many doubt that Uzbekistan will ever become a good and trustful partner as long as the current political regime continues to rule.

Apparently the two Central Asian leaders have decided to embrace the old Russian proverb, “Better a bad peace than a good quarrel.”

## WILL RE-PRIVATIZATION OF KYRGYZ MEDIA QUIET OPPOSITION VOICES?

✂ October 18, 2005 ✂

On October 15, *KOORT* (Kyrgyz public radio and television) was re-privatized as a result of a legal investigation of the previous management on corruption charges. This news came shortly after the highly popular newspaper, *Vecherny Bishkek*, was returned to its previous owner, Alexander Kim, under the purview of the new government's anti-corruption policy. The re-privatization of mass media raises the question of whether the media is becoming more independent or is it being placed under state control. While *KOORT* employees called the administrative changes a "civilized looting" and claimed that re-privatization was illegal, *KOORT*'s new directors say it was never an independent media outlet, but was created as a government organization in the first place.<sup>35</sup>

*KOORT* remained one of the few media outlets that regularly criticized President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's government and this year's Tulip Revolution. But some of *KOORT*'s critical views towards the political changes in the country verged on a smear campaign against the new government. Such one-sided reporting raised questions about whether its activities were still directed by members of the previous political regime, particularly Adil Toigonbayev, former president Askar Akayev's son-in-law. By comparison, *Vecherny Bishkek* and *Pyramida TV* also stayed in the opposition during the first months after the March 24 revolution. State-controlled *KTR* (Kyrgyz Television and Radio) and *Kabar News Agency* backed the Bakiyev government within hours of Akayev's removal on March 24.

While the government insists its decision is legitimate, *KOORT* employees have rejected the new management team. In a statement released on October 17, the employees explained that they are worried that the new administration will persecute them for political reasons. They also insist that members of the new management regime lack the appropriate experience to head *KOORT*. In particular, they are unhappy with the company's new general director, Azima Abdimaminova, who was an active participant in the mass riots against Akayev and organized a youth group, Kel-Kel. The employees are threatening to quit if the previous general director, Omurbek Satayev, is not reappointed. At the same time, supporters of *KOORT*'s new management say the company's journalists are still influenced by Akayev.

Before the presidential election in July, then-acting President Bakiyev had promised that all mass media would be privatized and released from state control. This declaration found wide support, especially after Akayev's suppression of independent reporting during the parliamentary elections in February-March 2005. It was quite evident that the few newspapers that remained unenthusiastic about the March events still had ties with members of the previous government. Therefore, following the March Revolution any mass media taking a stance against Bakiyev's government was inevitably portrayed as pro-Akayev. With

*KOORT* and *Vecherny Bishkek* re-privatized, the overwhelming majority of the Kyrgyz popular mass media became pro-governmental. Only the newspapers *Litsa*, *Obshchestvenny Reiting* and *Pyramida TV* allow some criticism of the president.

*Gazeta.kg*, a popular Internet newsletter that actively propagated anti-Akayev and, later, anti-Bakiyev views, was sold to a new owner last week. The website is well known among Kyrgyz youth living in Kyrgyzstan and abroad for its liberal political views. It is not clear whether *Gazeta* will continue to monitor the government.

The biggest disappointment with the post-revolutionary mass media was that the main newspapers opposing Akayev's regime, *Moya stolitsa novosti* and *Res publica*, now back the new government. The chief journalists from both newspapers, Zamira Sydykova and Irina Prozhivoit, are currently serving as ambassadors to the United States and the OSCE in Vienna, respectively. Sydykova explains the altered positions of her newspaper by the fact that it is more important to support than to criticize in the early stages of government formation.

Yet some Kyrgyz say that these two prominent journalists who once withstood numerous attacks by Akayev's government are now effectively immune from unwanted criticism in the press. For this reason, many Kyrgyz doubt the credibility of former opposition newspapers because of their sudden switch to pro-governmental positions.

Kyrgyz journalists are concerned about the re-privatization of *KOORT*. Some complain that it is time for them to finally unite in a bloc to secure freedom of speech. "When previously *Res publica* and *Vecherny Bishkek* were in the government's pocket, no one from the journalism community showed solidarity. Now we see that anyone can be influenced by politics," commented one freelance correspondent from Bishkek.

In effect, the policy shifts that accompanied *KOORT*'s re-privatization reflect a general dispute between a more optimistic segment of the public that hopes that the Tulip Revolution will bring positive changes and skeptics who doubt that the new government is capable of conducting clean, transparent politics. The optimists believe that *KOORT* has finally been released from pro-Akayev control. The pessimists despise the fact that a majority of the well-known and influential journalists who previously challenged the Akayev regime are currently on Bakiyev's side.

Public reaction to the shifting mass media perspectives in Kyrgyzstan is becoming an important barometer of public trust in the government.

**THE STATE-CRIME NEXUS**  
**❧ NOVEMBER 2005 ❧**





**ASSASSINATION OF KYRGYZ LAWMAKER REVEALS LINKS BETWEEN POLITICS AND CRIME**✂ **October 25, 2005** ✂

On October 20, Kyrgyz parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev died following a prison riot in the 31st penal colony located 20 kilometers from Bishkek. He is the third lawmaker to be assassinated since the March 24 Tulip Revolution. Like the other two victims, Bayaman Erkinbayev and Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev, Akmatbayev was a businessman known to have a criminal background. Despite denials from Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Prime Minister Felix Kulov, the death of a parliamentarian has once again revealed direct links between the criminal and political worlds in Kyrgyzstan.

Akmatbayev headed a parliamentary committee on security, rule of law and information policy. He and two assistants were shot dead during their visit to the prison to calm riots that had erupted among inmates. Following the murders, Akmatbayev's older brother, Rysbek, allegedly the most influential mafia boss in the Issyk-Kul oblast, declared a *jihad* against Prime Minister Kulov. According to Rysbek, Kulov was pressing his brother to vacate the parliamentary committee's chairmanship so he could install his own candidate.

Rysbek is convinced that Tynychbek died at the hands of his long-time foe, Aziz Batukayev, a mafia boss influential in the criminal circles in Chui Oblast, which includes Bishkek. A few days earlier Kulov visited the prison and allegedly spoke with Batukayev. According to other sources, however, Akmatbayev came to the prison to discuss personal issues with Batukayev. Akmatbayev's bodyguards and Batukayev were armed and their conversation soon deteriorated into a gunfight. Akmatbayev reportedly fired the first shot.

Rysbek was exiled for murder and illegal business during the reign of former president Askar Akayev. He was legally released under the anti-corruption policies of the new government that toppled Akayev in March. Rysbek's release suggests that he has strong ties with some members of the new government.

Guided by the belief that Kulov has ties with Batukayev and that the assassination was planned in advance, Rysbek actively recruited the crowds that have gathered in central Bishkek to protest against the prime minister since October 21. He was seen walking among the 500 rioters, supplying them with food, water and shelter in front of the parliament building. A few relatives and friends of Surabaldiev and Erkinbayev have also joined the crowds. In an October 22 interview with *Akipress* Rysbek said that he is determined to fight as long as it takes to secure Kulov's dismissal.

In response, Kulov's Ar-Namys party organized a "peace demonstration" on October 25. According to the party's official statement, the action in support of Kulov is ongoing. As many as 10,000 more people may join it from different regions in the country. With this latest development, there currently are two simultaneous demonstrations held in Bishkek; one for and one against Kulov.

The Kyrgyz parliament convened an extraordinary session to discuss the possibility of dismissing the prime minister. Several lawmakers have openly affirmed Kulov's involvement in Akmatbayev's death. Kyrgyz experts suggest that parliament's apparent intention to sack the prime minister is setting the stage for Bakiyev to remove Kulov with parliament's blessing. However, in an emergency meeting between the president, the prosecutor-general and the Security Service, Bakiyev made no statements against Kulov.

Kulov himself has said that he would resign if the president and parliament find sufficient evidence of his alleged misconduct. He also mentioned that Bakiyev had told him to "continue to peacefully work in the government." Both Bakiyev and Kulov strongly deny the allegations of political motives behind Akmatbayev's assassination. The October 25 parliamentary session is to be broadcast live to the central square in Bishkek so that the demonstrators can follow the discussion of the issues around Akmatbayev's assassination. The turmoil around Akmatbayev's case has clearly strained the political bonds between Bakiyev and Kulov.

Three dead politicians in only five months presents a deeply disturbing trend for Kyrgyzstan. Many observers have rushed to blame the new government for weakness against criminals and for its inability to resist the influence of the mafia chiefs. But many analysts forget that the current parliament was formed by fraudulent means during Akayev's leadership. There are a number of other lawmakers who fit the profile of successful businessmen with criminal overtones.

Meanwhile, corruption charges against Akayev have become an international issue. In the United States the FBI has initiated an investigation of the Akayev family's secret bank accounts, financial assets, real estate holdings and investments. According to Edward Lieberman, an attorney helping the Kyrgyz government probe Akayev's graft. The investigation is examining the money trail involving nearly \$40 million taken from Manas airport to the New York-based Citibank.

Following the March 24 Revolution, a balance between various criminal groups was apparently disturbed. The deaths of three parliamentarians point at the fact that organized crime, which has been growing for many years, has now fused with the political sphere. It is becoming increasingly problematic to come up with an unambiguous interpretation of the recent political developments in Kyrgyzstan. Various criminal groups seem to support different political factions to protect their own interests. The next step could be civil unrest as influential criminals further press the parliament and government for favors.

**BAKIYEV-KULOV POLITICAL UNION ENDANGERED BY CRIMINALS**

✂ November 1, 2005 ✂

October's showdowns between various political forces in Kyrgyzstan's government and parliament, as well as between criminals and businessmen, have challenged the credibility of the political union between President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Prime Minister Felix Kulov. Rysbek Akmatbayev, the older brother of assassinated parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev and a known mafia boss, recently assembled about 1,000 people to protest against Kulov in the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. This provoked a wave of demonstrations across the country calling for support for the prime minister and condemning the president for failure to act. Parallel mass gatherings against the prime minister and the president interrupted the normal functioning of the government and the parliament for several days.

Rysbek's demonstrations ended after his allies met with the president on October 27. In response to Rysbek's demands, Bakiyev agreed to personally supervise the investigation into Akmatbayev's death. Bakiyev's agreement to meet with Rysbek's representatives was widely criticized by Kyrgyz experts. According to some opposition newspapers, these meetings revealed the president's true nature as a politician deeply influenced by criminal circles.<sup>1</sup>

Bakiyev's lack of concrete actions to stop the protests against Kulov for almost a week after Akmatbayev's assassination mobilized civic organizations to denounce the president's inactivity and his failure to defend his union with the prime minister. On October 28 Edil Baisalov, leader of the NGO coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society," declared that the president's stability is crucially dependent on the prime minister's position. Baisalov reminded Bakiyev that he was elected president largely due to his political alliance with Kulov.

Topchubek Turgunaliyev, Kyrgyzstan's most famous "prisoner of conscience," and former president Askar Akayev's strongest opponent, was the highest profile figure to insist that Bakiyev meet with Rysbek. He was later severely criticized by his colleagues from the NGO sector for supporting criminals. Critics claimed that since Tynychbek Akmatbayev was Turgunaliyev's son-in-law and Rysbek is his close relative, the human rights activist faced a choice between defending his family or defending the rule of law.

Turgunaliyev's former supporters say that his opposition party, "Erkin Kyrgyzstan," was financed by criminal elements. "We will write a letter to the UN to recall his award, because the name of a human rights activist cannot be associated with murders," Baisalov said, referring to Turgunaliyev's numerous awards by Amnesty International and the United Nations.<sup>2</sup> *Vecherny Bishkek* defined Turgunaliyev's connection with Rysbek as a newly emerged political tandem to challenge the existing Bakiyev-Kulov one.<sup>3</sup>

Currently, Rysbek is under several indictments, including murder. Kyrgyz ex-

perts interpret the postponement of Rysbek's trial, scheduled to begin on October 28, as being to the government's advantage. Many do not exclude the possibility that he will be acquitted of the charge. "If Rysbek is freed, he will run in the Cholpon-Ata district to succeed his younger brother in the parliament. Due to his virtually unlimited authority in the criminal world, economic wealth and connections in the government, there is little doubt that Rysbek will win in the run for the parliamentary seat," noted a representative from the Kyrgyz NGO sector. According to *Delo nomer*, during the days of riots against Kulov, there was a sharp decline in crime in Bishkek.<sup>4</sup> The city was quiet and safe, Interior Minister Marat Sutalinov told parliament.

The end of protests against Kulov brought apparent relief to a rapidly growing political crisis in Kyrgyzstan. However, it is highly doubtful that criminal elements will stop intervening in political affairs. Rysbek, with his early declarations that he is determined to fight until Kulov is dismissed, will likely continue his struggle against the prime minister. As one Kyrgyz government representative observed, "Criminal forces will now lead a less overt confrontation with undesired political figures, it will be a partisan war through informal channels."

Meanwhile, Roza Otunbayeva and Azimbek Beknazarov, two leaders of the Tulip Revolution who were refused positions in the new government, will run for parliament seats in Aksy and Tunduk electoral districts, respectively. Beknazarov has a strong chance of winning in the first round, as he is the only candidate registered at his district. Otunbayeva might face stronger challenges, as there are several other candidates contending for the Aksy seat.

Since the parliamentary elections earlier this year, the central square in Bishkek has become a central scene for political skirmishes. Some decisions in the government and parliament after the March 24 Tulip Revolution were dictated by crowds mobilized by various figures, political factions and civil society organizations. But along with positive changes, the constant demonstrations in the Kyrgyz capital have created a sense of instability and visibly undermined the work of the government, leading to its weakened capability and diminished popularity.

## AS BAKIYEV LOOSES SUPPORT, KULOV GAINS POPULARITY

✂ November 10, 2005 ✂

A series of contradictory statements about international politics, delayed responses to domestic crises and awkward jokes about his own political views have visibly harmed Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's political image. Despite growing disappointment with Bakiyev, Prime Minister Felix Kulov is not rushing to challenge the president's policies. Part of the reason why Kulov stays mute about the president is the fact that he still has not gained sufficient support in the government and parliament to act autonomously. Among the mostly pro-presidential team, only Almazbek Atambayev, minister of industry, trade, and tourism, and Turusbek Koenaliyev, chief of the prime minister's office, can be considered Kulov allies.

Despite Kulov's tenuous position in the government, his public support is substantially stronger than Bakiyev's. The majority of the population trusts Kulov for his reputation as a strong leader with a clean background. An Internet survey on Kulov's personal website (Kulov.kg) shows that 64 percent of respondents believe that the prime minister is constrained in his actions because of the president's low support.

In contrast, Bakiyev is confronted with criticism for being an unprofessional politician suspected of having connections with the criminal world. As interim president this summer, Bakiyev made several incongruous statements concerning the U.S. military presence in Kyrgyzstan. At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana he promised to limit U.S. military influence, explaining that the regional security situation no longer required foreign assistance. Yet while meeting with U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld in late July, he assured the U.S. representative that his government is ready to support humanitarian missions in Afghanistan. So far Kulov has refrained from criticizing the president for his anti-American stance or unbalanced foreign policies, even though he previously condemned former President Askar Akayev for similar views.

Since Bakiyev is in charge of the security forces, he is blamed for the slow government response to emergency situations. In particular, the president was barraged with criticism for not taking urgent actions when a known mafia boss, Rysbek Akmatbayev, rallied several hundred people to demand Kulov's dismissal. The president also received disapproving comments from Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir for using armed law-enforcement agents to suppress simultaneous riots in seven different prisons after the assassination of parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev. According to various reports, between two and 20 inmates were killed as a result of those operations.<sup>5</sup> At the same, journalists praised Kulov for managing to stop the riots temporarily.

Bakiyev has also been inconsistent with cadre politics. Yet despite criticism from civil society organizations and local mass media, Kulov did not oppose the president's decision to dismiss Prosecutor-General Azimbek

Beknazarov. The prime minister also made little effort to encourage parliament to support Roza Otunbayeva's nomination as minister of foreign affairs. Left without official government jobs, Beknazarov and Otunbayeva declared that they would continue to fight for the principles of the Tulip Revolution, which, according to them, are being neglected by the new government.

Beknazarov's allies have called upon Bakiyev to resign from the presidency. On November 6, some 2,000 supporters gathered in Aksy region to protest Bakiyev's presidency. But as Edil Baisalov, leader of the NGO coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society," observed, Bakiyev was elected through free and fair elections, a fact that rioting mobs cannot change.

The only time Kulov has publicly opposed the president was on the issue of incorporating electoral regulations on party lists in the new constitution. "I never objected to the president, but on this matter I have another opinion," he said.<sup>6</sup>

When questioned about the stability of his political union with Kulov, the president recently joked: "If we are not kissing each other in public, this does not mean that our relations have worsened. In the end, we are of a traditional orientation – we don't need to kiss, otherwise one will think that we are gay."<sup>7</sup> Some Kyrgyz experts believe that since Kulov is rapidly gaining popularity, Bakiyev will be the first to break the political union between them. However, should Bakiyev sack Kulov, he would only create another prominent opposition figure to challenge his regime. At the same time, it is also evident that Kulov, although supported by the masses, still lacks reliable allies within the government.

Former president Askar Akayev's prime ministers were rather submissive and loyal figures who usually posed no direct challenge to the president's authority. Bakiyev, however, is surrounded by politicians who were either active participants in the movement against Akayev, or are representatives of the previous regime who rapidly changed political positions after the Tulip Revolution in order to join the new government. Kulov is indeed one of the strongest political figures, capable of overshadowing the president. As Baisalov noted in a November 7 speech at Virginia's George Mason University, "Bakiyev is not yet established in the people's minds as a representative of a presidential institution... he is surrounded in the government by people who expect him to act similar to Akayev, to use autocratic means."

## NGOS WANT KYRGYZ TO BE THE SOLE STATE LANGUAGE OF KYRGYZSTAN

✂ November 15, 2005 ✂

Several days before Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev presented the draft law “On the Introduction of Changes and Additions to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic,” a number of nationalist movements raised the question of elevating the status of the Kyrgyz language vis-à-vis Russian, which is currently the country’s second official language. Several political figures and non-governmental organizations are in favor of stripping the Russian language of its official standing and converting all state documentation into Kyrgyz starting from 2006.

Russia’s recent agreement to introduce dual citizenship with Kyrgyzstan represents one of the major achievements of the new Kyrgyz government. It is aimed at facilitating the movement of Kyrgyz labor migrants in Russia and expanding Russian businesses in Kyrgyzstan. But the issue of dual citizenship and the status of the Russian language face challenges from the recent surge of local nationalist movements. Several NGOs formed a bloc to promote the Kyrgyz language as the sole official language in Kyrgyzstan. They also oppose the dual citizenship regime with Russia, fearing an exodus of ethnic Kyrgyz.

Kyrgyz language failed to become the dominant language in the country after former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev granted the Russian language the status of a second state language in 2000. An overwhelming majority of state institutions and mass media continued to communicate in Russian. Akayev said his decision was an attempt to prevent an out-migration of ethnic Russians. Yet the law was arguably aimed more at efforts to secure good relations with the Russian government than to placate the local Russian minority, which had experienced little discrimination for not knowing the Kyrgyz language.

Members of Kyrgyz nationalist movements point to the fact that the education system is heavily influenced by the Russian language and that the most prestigious schools and universities offer training only in Russian. On November 10, advocates of the Kyrgyz language assembled at the national “House of Friendship” and declared that the Russian language’s official status hinders the development of the Kyrgyz language.<sup>8</sup> The Kyrgyz example is often contrasted with neighboring Kazakhstan. Although the Russian minority there is larger, the share of Kazakh-language schools is 50 percent, significantly higher than in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>9</sup>

The enduring popularity of the Russian language in Kyrgyzstan can be explained by economics. Russian schools are becoming more prestigious in rural areas because Russia is the most common destination for Kyrgyz seasonal migrants. According to various estimates, there are 500,000-800,000 Kyrgyz citizens currently working abroad. The majority of these migrants are located in Russia, with Kazakhstan a distant second. The Kyrgyz Institute of Economics and Politics recently estimated that the average annual remittance of migrants totals about

\$1,400 per household. In total, labor migrants send home \$520 million, a figure that is 27 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GNP and 158 percent of the state budget.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to the diminishing popularity of the Kyrgyz language, the number of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan seems to have declined in recent years as well. According to reports from the U.S. Department of State, the percentage of Muslims in Kyrgyzstan in 2001 was 84 percent. By 2004 the number fell to 79.3 percent.<sup>11</sup> This trend is observed despite the out-migration of the Slavic population and likely relates to Bishkek's liberal policy regarding religious pluralism. There are more than 2,000 religious organizations registered in the country. After Muslims, Christian Orthodox organizations comprise the second largest religious group. There are also Jewish, Roman Catholic and Buddhist communities. Thousands of ethnic Kyrgyz have converted to Christianity.

Some Kyrgyz experts believe that Bakiyev's government will inevitably broaden the use of the Kyrgyz language over Russian in state affairs due to its numerous members from southern Kyrgyzstan. The population in southern regions of the country is ethnically homogeneous. The Russian language is not as popular there as Kyrgyz or Uzbek.

According to *Radio Azattyk*, the Uighur ethnic community also supports the idea of upgrading the status of the Kyrgyz language.<sup>12</sup> As one Kyrgyz expert from the non-governmental sector argues, strong nationalist feelings have always existed among some social groups and political factions, but they did not receive the level of public attention that they do now.

As Kyrgyzstan begins the process of constitutional reform, the Kyrgyz language debate promises to be a central issue.

**CLANS, CRIME AND POWER IN KYRGYZSTAN**

✂ November 23, 2005 ✂

Despite their assassinations in recent months, Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev, Bayaman Erkinbayev, and Tynychbek Akmatbayev remain influential in Kyrgyz politics. Now the slain parliamentarians' closest family members are struggling for power.

Surabaldiyev's nephew, Erkinbayev's widow and Akmatbayev's brother are going to compete for their loved ones' now-vacant parliamentary seats on November 27. None are known for significant politician achievements or specialize in any particular field that would make them competent to serve in the parliament. Yet all of them have strong local power bases because they control major economic sectors in their constituencies. The blood ties between the slain parliamentarians and those seeking to replace them may ensure unbroken political power in Kyrgyzstan.

Surabaldiyev owned several large businesses and had a criminal reputation in his electoral district. Zhanysh Kudaibergenov, Surabaldiyev's close relative, will compete with Roza Otunbayeva in the Tunduk electoral district. Otunbayeva was one of the leaders of the Tulip Revolution. Once the acting foreign minister, she was denied a ministry nomination by parliament. Surabaldiyev's daughter, Elvira Surabaldiyeva, participated in the demonstrations against Prime Minister Felix Kulov organized by Rysbek Akmatbayev, brother of Tynychbek Akmatbayev. Elvira maintains that members of Bakiyev's government shot her father. Former Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev, who was ousted along with president Askar Akayev in March, will also compete for a parliamentary seat in Tunduk district.

Erkinbayev's widow, Cholponai Chotonova, owns the economically and politically important Khalmion market in Batken oblast. Erkinbayev's family is among the richest and most influential in southern Kyrgyzstan. According to *Kabar*, the local population viewed a series of charity events during Ramadan as the beginning of Chotonova's electoral campaign.<sup>13</sup>

Rysbek Akmatbayev evidently has ties in the government and is able to shield himself from legal prosecution for multiple alleged crimes, including murder. His trial has been suspended. Many Kyrgyz observers are convinced that Rysbek will be acquitted of the charges and be able to win a parliamentary seat from Balykchy district due to his substantial local authority. As an MP, he would become immune from any prior legal charges.

Criminal elements continue to exert strong pressure on the work of the government, revealing internal splits among various political forces. The Prosecutor-General is unable to effectively limit organized crime sprees or to put key mafia chiefs behind bars. At the same time, competing criminal groups support specific politicians and public institutions while trying to disrupt the work of law-enforcement agencies. Although the work of the Kyrgyz police and the National Security Service is generally efficient against small criminal groups, their performance is lacking on a

larger scale, particularly when economic interests are combined with family relations.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan experienced additional political assassinations in the past week. On November 18, Esenbek Dzeencheriyev, an ally of the assassinated Kyrgyz actor Usen Kudaibergenov, was killed. Two men accompanying Dzeencheriyev were also injured. According to several Kyrgyz experts, it is likely that Rysbek, who is convinced that Kulov is responsible for in the death of his brother, is involved in the murders of Kudaibergenov and Dzeencheriyev.

Besides blood connections on a local level, organized crime in Kyrgyzstan also has a transnational dimension. A number of local criminal groups are linked either by ethnic or religious ties with similar elements in Russia and neighboring Central Asian states. Religious radical movements muster regional networks to fuel illegal activities locally. Chechen, Uighur, Kazakh and a number of other ethnic-based networks have gained a foothold in various parts of Kyrgyzstan, infiltrating local legal and illegal businesses, including drug trafficking.

The rapid criminalization of Kyrgyzstan stems from current government's inability—or lack of desire—to impose informal control over the country's major economic sectors. Unlike the Akayev era, when a small group within the government regulated the bulk of financial resources, several groups are now competing for economic dominance in the country. Such groups were suffocated under Akayev, but not completely eliminated. Comparatively speaking, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's government is fragile and vulnerable to the influence of organized crime. "The criminal world did not participate in the March 24 events, but apparently had made the most out of the lack of the rule of law and order," observed Edil Baisalov, leader of NGO coalition "For Democracy and Civil Society".<sup>14</sup>

Against this backdrop, the Kyrgyz mass media and elements of civil society are working to report the showdowns between criminals and the government. These efforts deserve particular appreciation. There is a cluster of newspapers and NGOs in Kyrgyzstan that are genuinely free from any influence by local legal or illegal political forces. A class of quaqsi-criminal businessmen provoking domestic chaos cannot affect the freedom of speech among independent Kyrgyz observers, analysts and activists. There are no clans within Kyrgyzstan's progressive civil society.

**GROWING DISSATISFACTION**  
**❧ DECEMBER 2006 – FEBRUARY 2006 ❧**





## OTUNBAYEVA LOSES LAST CHANCE TO REMAIN IN KYRGYZ POLITICS

✂ November 30, 2005 ✂

On November 27, two key leaders of Kyrgyzstan's Tulip Revolution, Azimbek Beknazarov and Roza Otunbayeva, stood for election for the parliamentary seats from the Aksy and Tunduk districts. Although both had been driving forces behind the political change of March 24 this year, parliament later expelled them from government. Beknazarov was able to win a parliamentary seat and thus recover his role on the political scene. Otunbayeva, however, lost to a young, unknown businessman named Zhanysh Kudaibergenov.

Otunbayeva, along with Bakiyev, Beknazarov and a number of other well-known opponents of former president Askar Akayev's regime, was able to mobilize thousands of protesters against rigged parliamentary elections in February and March 2005. When dissatisfaction with Akayev's maneuvering began to escalate across the country, Otunbayeva encouraged the crowds, arguing that changing the political elite in Kyrgyzstan was not only possible but also inevitable. She openly challenged Bermet Akayeva, daughter of Askar Akayev, by trying to register at the University electoral district where Bermet was actively promoting her candidacy for the parliament. When the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) refused to register Otunbayeva, controversy erupted that the pre-election process favored pro-Akayev candidates.

Following the March 24 Tulip Revolution, Otunbayeva's popular approval rating was higher than Bakiyev's. As Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs, Otunbayeva effectively handled the crisis with the Uzbek refugees who had fled to southern Kyrgyzstan following the violent suppression of demonstrations in Andijan on May 13-14. She also spoke out about the energy crisis Kyrgyzstan faced in early autumn as a result of Tashkent's unilateral cancellation of an agreement on gas supplies.

Earlier this month unknown hooligans aggressively attacked Otunbayeva's team. Prior to the elections, Otunbayeva had expressed her concerns that Kudaibergenov's team had resorted to illegal means, including smear campaigns against other candidates. Otunbayeva faced severe criticism in the mass media outlets that are still allegedly affiliated with Akayev and his son-in-law Adil Toigonbayev.<sup>1</sup>

A number of voters from the Tunduk electoral district expressed their distrust of the elections' outcome. Otunbayeva's supporters claimed that there were numerous violations on election day, such as bribery and the transportation of voters. However, according to the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, the local election watchdog, the November 27 elections went off without major violations of the Election Code.<sup>2</sup>

Kudaibergenov, a 31 year-old businessman, is a close relative of assassinated parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev. He gained 52 percent of the vote, against 28 percent for Otunbayeva. As far as the Bakiyev government was concerned, Kudaibergenov was a more appealing candidate who, com-

pared to Otunbayeva, who has a solid background in international diplomacy.

It seems that Otunbayeva has lost her last chance to be actively involved in Kyrgyz government. A number of Kyrgyz parliamentarians, including Melis Eshimkanov and Kubatbek Baibolov, expressed their regret that Otunbayeva was unsuccessful. "That Roza Otunbayeva did not gain a sufficient amount of votes shows the real state of the society. As always everything is being sold and bought. The presidential administration supported a young businessman, whom it can control. Roza Otunbayeva would dominate with her independence, intellect. But she did not have the money," Eshimkanov told *Kabar* news.<sup>3</sup> However, the current parliament also voted against Otunbayeva's nomination as minister of foreign affairs in September, thus excluding her from the government. Otunbayeva's loss marked the complete closure of the Kyrgyz parliament to female candidates.

Beknazarov had no difficulty in winning an absolute majority of the votes in his district in Aksy region. After Bakiyev demoted him from prosecutor-general, his supporters in Aksy staged several demonstrations against the president. Beknazarov has moved into the opposition to Bakiyev government, although both politicians previously worked together to topple Akayev's regime.

Human rights activist Topchubek Turgunaliyev has collected the 300,000 signatures necessary to initiate a referendum to dissolve the current parliament. The CEC is now examining the validity of the signatures. The final decision on whether the referendum should be held will be announced by December 5. The prospect of dissolving the parliament is opposed not only by parliamentarians, but also by members of the government and some leaders of the March 24 Revolution. Since the parliament is comprised mostly of influential businessmen, the cancellation could lead to instability and new riots against the government. Turgunaliyev himself is convinced that the referendum will take place next spring.<sup>4</sup>

Several leaders of the Tulip Revolution have distanced themselves from Bakiyev's regime in recent months. Most of them are now pursuing an independent political line that often comes into conflict with the government and may challenge its stability. There is still a strong contingent of pro-Akayev political figures, mostly in the parliament, who can still obstruct Otunbayeva and Beknazarov's efforts to return to government.

**FEARING COLOR REVOLUTIONS ARE CONTAGIOUS, KAZAKHSTAN SHUTS BORDER WITH KYRGYZSTAN**✂ **December 1, 2005** ✂

On November 29 Kazakhstan imposed new restrictions along the state border with Kyrgyzstan “to prevent possible penetration into Kazakhstan of unwanted elements” ahead of presidential elections on December 4.<sup>5</sup> Some 230 Kyrgyz citizens were arrested in Almaty and deported. According to Kubanychbek Isabekov, head of the Kyrgyz parliamentary committee on labor migration, dozens of Kyrgyz traders were unable to cross the busy Qordai customs point.<sup>6</sup> Besides the economic implications of tightened control on the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border, the move also carries strong symbolic undertones.

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev had persistently declared that a democratic “color revolution” is not possible in Kazakhstan, hinting that the March 24, 2005, Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan brought instability and chaos to that country. The Kazakh media have focused solely on negative events such as looting in Bishkek, the numerous demonstrations and political assassinations in the wake of the new political regime in Kyrgyzstan.

The closure of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border and deportation of migrants had no advance warning. The first explanation was the alleged involvement of Kyrgyz citizens in setting fires at four large bazaars in Almaty last week. The fires caused an estimated loss of \$5,000-\$400,000 in damage per stall and overall losses ran into millions of dollars. Umurzak Uzbekov, the Kazakh Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, rejected this version of events, saying that different security reasons prompted the border shutdown. Uzbekov noted that Uzbek and Tajik migrants were deported as well.<sup>7</sup> However, it was clear that Kyrgyz citizens were the main targets.

The forceful mass deportation of Kyrgyz migrants demonstrated that Nazarbayev is ready to take harsh measures against potentially disturbing “third forces” that might trigger instability following the elections. Instead of focusing on the legal opposition groups and their ability to challenge the validity of election results, the government chose to scapegoat migrant workers in advance of any potentially destabilizing activities. The Kazakh online magazine *Ekspress-K* labeled the Kyrgyz migrants “revolutionary hucksters” who are attempting to “export revolution to neighboring Kazakhstan.”<sup>8</sup> The Kazakh mass media took special pains to warn of possible looting in Almaty, drawing a parallel with the chaos in Bishkek immediately following the March 24 regime change.

Such active propaganda against labor migrants by the Kazakh mass media, in combination with the devastating fires at the Almaty bazaars, has found a wide audience among the local population. “We will not allow a second Paris in Almaty!” declared one 26-year old Kazakh student, referring to recent riots in the suburbs of the French capital. But according to Anara Tabyshalieva, a senior researcher at the Kyrgyz Institute for Regional Studies, “the Kazakh government’s [decision to] ac-

cuse migrants was a strategic move to divert the attention of the local public from internal problems and unite it around a common enemy before the elections.”

Aziza Abdirasulova, head of a Kyrgyz NGO “Kylym Shamy,” claims that, prior to deportation the Kyrgyz migrants were asked to pay 10,000 tenge (\$75) in bribes to the Kazakh police.<sup>9</sup> Most of deported workers had legal residency permits, but had to leave their families and merchandise behind in Kazakhstan. About 15 of the Kyrgyz citizens had their passports marked with a deportation stamp, which restricts entrance to Kazakhstan for 3 to 5 years.

Some 50 deportees gathered at a central square in Bishkek demanding the Kyrgyz government to take actions and enable them to return to Kazakhstan to secure their families and businesses. “We, businessmen and shuttle traders, are the most peaceful people. We don’t participate in pickets and demonstrations; we are not involved in politics. Regional stability and good payment are important for us... Neither Kazakhstan nor Kyrgyzstan is harmed by us, on the contrary, we benefit Kazakhstan through [paying] taxes and Kyrgyzstan by remittances,” one of the deportees insisted.<sup>10</sup>

The Kazakh border will remain closed to Kyrgyz citizens until the 8<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> of December. The International Organization for Migration is providing the deported migrants, who come from different parts of Kyrgyzstan, with shelter in northern Kyrgyz cities and small sums of money.<sup>11</sup>

According to Kyrgyz government estimates, about 150,000 Kyrgyz citizens currently live and work in Kazakhstan. Half of them are engaged in trade at Kazakh markets. Unofficial data estimate that up to 500,000 Kyrgyz citizens are occupied in small and medium businesses in Kazakhstan. The number of Uzbek and Tajik labor migrants in Kazakhstan is significantly higher, however.

Along with increased media censorship and the suspicious death of opposition activist Zamanbek Nurkadilov on November 12, the incident with the Kyrgyz migrants and the unilateral shutdown of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border will play a negative role in Kazakhstan’s drive to chair the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 2009.

Kazakhstan is not the only Central Asian country to openly critique the March 24 political changes in Kyrgyzstan. Like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan also sealed its borders with Kyrgyzstan for several days immediately after former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev’s ouster.

The forceful deportation of Kyrgyz migrants could cause the Kyrgyz government to object to Kazakhstan’s membership in the World Trade Organization, which is set to begin in 2006. But the Kazakh and Uzbek sides undeniably possess immense leverage over domestic economic and political developments in Kyrgyzstan. As the Kyrgyz migrants were humiliated and blamed, Kyrgyz civic groups reacted to the crisis faster than the government. So far, there have been no official statements from the Kyrgyz Presidential Administration on Astana’s latest move.

**HIGH-RANKING KYRGYZ OFFICIAL PROPOSES NEW NATIONAL IDEOLOGY**

✂ **December 6, 2005** ✂

Following the removal of Kyrgyzstan's long-time President Askar Akayev on March 24, 2005, the new government led by Kurmanbek Bakiyev terminated some of Akayev's efforts to build an official state ideology. Yet apart from anti-corruption slogans aimed at remnants of Akayev's regime, the Bakiyev government has not generated any new political concepts. A number of Kyrgyz politicians are actively pushing Tengrism, an ancient Turkic religion dating to the fourth century BC, to fill the ideological void. Dastan Sarygulov, currently secretary of state and formerly chair of the Kyrgyz state gold mining company, has established "Tengir Ordo," a civic group that seeks to promote the values and traditions of the Tengrian period in modern Kyrgyzstan.

Independent Kyrgyzstan has not been able to promulgate a state ideology, although the Akayev regime made many failed attempts. Beginning in 1991 Akayev had to confront the twin pressures of growing Kyrgyz nationalism and increasing nervousness among the ethnic Russian population about their status in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. The former president tried a variety of national projects ranging from the ethnic-centered "Manas-1000" in the mid-1990s, to more civic-based ideas such as "Kyrgyzstan is Our Home" in the late 1990s. In 2003 Akayev's government celebrated the 2,200-year history of the Kyrgyz nation.

In the mid-1990s the Manas ideology, based on the world's longest epic narrative, was placed at the center of efforts to advance a national consciousness. Seven maxims mentioned in the epic and modified by a government committee on cultural and educational affairs were included into the official state ideology. A competing ideology, the civic-oriented "Kyrgyzstan is Our Home" campaign, was primarily directed at the Russian-speaking and ethnic Uzbek minorities. While the civic formula gained popularity, attempts to incorporate all ethnic groups into a common idea about the Kyrgyz state inevitably exacerbated neo-nationalist political movements in the country.

Given his high position in the government, and his credentials as a member of the economic elite in Kyrgyzstan, Sarygulov may have sufficient resources to propagate his views. Tengrism, according to Sarygulov, is the genuine religion of the Kyrgyz and helped the people to survive throughout the centuries. In his interpretation, Tengrism promotes an anti-capitalist lifestyle and is a natural response to the problems caused by globalization. "The time has come to get rid of external influences—to lift barriers, the inferiority complex and centuries of humiliation," he said.<sup>12</sup>

Kyrgyzstan's communists have embraced Sarygulov's ideas. Anarbek Usupbayev, secretary of the Kyrgyz Communist Party, sees resilient similarities between values of Tengrism and communism, such as social justice and equality.<sup>13</sup> Usupbayev also tried to draw parallels between Tengrism and the Manas epic, which he refers to as the "Kyrgyz Bible." Supporters of Tengrism do not deny that as a

national doctrine, it will represent primarily pan-Turkic and even pan-Kyrgyz views.

Some Kyrgyz experts see Tengrism as an idea developed to resist Islamic feelings among the Kyrgyz public.<sup>14</sup> Anara Abdynasyrova, a philosophy scholar, argues that Tengrism is unable to coexist peacefully with Islam, the dominant religion in Kyrgyzstan. Other scholars warn that a clash between Sarygulov's doctrine and Islamic clergy in Kyrgyzstan is inevitable if Tengrism is further popularized. "Today there are many different 'prophets' who invent new religions. For instance, Tengrism. Yes, it is interesting, but this is history and has nothing in common with modern life," commented Kyrgyz Prime Minister Felix Kulov.<sup>15</sup>

Since Islam in Kyrgyzstan is generally moderate and the percentage of Muslims is low compared with neighboring Central Asian states, some observers believe that the principles of Tengrism might gain some popularity. In the recent years the term has gradually entered everyday use. It is discussed in the mass media and on Internet forums. However, given the number of failed attempts at formulating a state ideology, the Kyrgyz public tends to be skeptical of any new ideology project.

Similar efforts to revive Tengrism ideals are evident in Kazakhstan and some parts of Russia. In February 2005 the French Institute for Central Asian Studies sponsored a regional colloquium in Almaty on the topic, "Tengrism as a New Factor in the Construction of Identity".<sup>16</sup>

Sarygulov has few supporters of his national doctrine proposal and is the only self-declared ideologist in Kyrgyzstan. Akayev tended to maneuver between various projects on Kyrgyz state ideology, but most of his initiatives were short-lived. The lessons learned from Akayev's search for a unifying state ideology suggest that large Russian and Uzbek minorities living on the territory of Kyrgyzstan and hundreds of thousands of Kyrgyz labor migrants residing in Russia and Kazakhstan, make pursuing any policy that discriminates against ethnic minorities risky for the Kyrgyz government.

**KYRGYZ JOURNALISTS CLAIM GOVERNMENT SUPPRESSES FREE SPEECH**

✂ December 13, 2005 ✂

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has announced that his government would restructure control over a number of state-controlled media outlets to encourage greater public participation. However, due to previous unsuccessful attempts to reprivatize a number of popular mass media sources, the president's latest initiative raises doubts about whether the restructuring would lead to the promised liberalization of the media or result in stronger government control. Along with Bakiyev's announcement, the nation-wide radio and television company *Piramida* has been experiencing difficulties in renewing its license for the year 2006. According to *Piramida*'s employees, several entrepreneurs allied with the government pushed the company to change its profile from "information" to "entertainment."

Kyrgyz parliamentarian and renown journalist Kabai Karabekov claims that Bakiyev's family is involved in the disputes around *Piramida*, hinting at an authoritarian method of taking control over media holding.<sup>17</sup> In response to the public accusations, the president's office denied any connections between Bakiyev and *Piramida*: "The President of the Kyrgyz Republic has neither direct nor indirect links to the situation around *Piramida*," declared Bakiyev's press secretary, Nadyr Momunov.<sup>18</sup>

Together with Karabekov, some 20 *Piramida* employees staged a public protest in front of the parliament building on December 12. They sealed their mouths with white tape to symbolize suppression of the freedom of speech. *Piramida*, like other media outlets re-privatized after the Tulip Revolution such as *KOORT* and *Vecherny Bishkek*, represents one of the most popular and trusted sources of information in Kyrgyzstan.

Bakiyev's latest maneuverings with the media can be interpreted as attempts to secure his next presidential term. Likewise, the president's announced plans to postpone constitutional reform until 2009 due to the current economic hardship in the country came as a surprise to members of parliament, as the reform was already scheduled already for spring 2006. By postponing the reform by four years, it will fall in the last year of Bakiyev's presidency. Although the president agreed to grant the parliament more power, postponing constitutional reform undermines the democratic values propagated by the March 24 Tulip Revolution.

Another instance of Bakiyev's betrayal of the principles of the Tulip Revolution is his harsh reaction to the statement made by the Kyrgyz Ambassador to the United States and Canada, Zamira Sydykova, in the *New York Times*.<sup>19</sup> In her interview, Sydykova claimed that the U.S. government underpaid the rent for its military base in Kyrgyzstan and ignored the corruption within former president Askar Akayev's regime. In the following weeks Sydykova received a public rebuke from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the president's administration. Sydykova's commentary lacked diplomatic acumen. Although she acted more as a journal-

ist rather than an official representative, her statements nevertheless resembled the opinion voiced by Bakiyev before the Tulip Revolution. Along with a number of other leaders of the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev had repeatedly alleged that Akayev's family was using the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan for money laundering. But on December 9 Bakiyev cryptically said that, in the future, Kyrgyzstan "would be able to receive an amount a hundred times higher than now" from the U.S. base.<sup>20</sup>

With the rise of criminality in Kyrgyzstan in recent months, Kyrgyz journalists also must confront the ethical issues connected with reporting criminal activities. At a meeting on December 9, leading Kyrgyz journalists debated creating a special code of ethics to use when reporting crisis situations, such as the Bishkek rallies organized by Rysbek Akmatbayev following the assassination of his older brother, the well-known parliamentarian, Tynychbek Akmatbayev. Both brothers were known as local mafia chiefs. The journalists argued that criminals gain a wider audience through mass media coverage and that reporters should agree on ways to inform the public without abetting illegal operations.<sup>21</sup>

Nine months after the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev is distancing himself more and more from the objectives set by his government. By striving to take firmer control over the mass media through indirect means, the government is failing to fulfill the promises made in the spring. The crisis around control over the mass media in Kyrgyzstan also demonstrates that despite the increasing suppression of the freedom of speech, there are nevertheless professional journalists willing to address issues such as the lack of transparency and corruption in state structures.

The Kyrgyz government is not able to muzzle all unwanted reporters or media outlets. To the contrary, the government's attempts to suppress independent voices of popular media damage its image and lowers public trust.

**KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT UNABLE TO REGULATE CROSSINGS ALONG BORDER WITH UZBEKISTAN**

✂ January 3, 2005 ✂

In the course of one week this December several violent incidents took place between Kyrgyz and Uzbek civilians and border guards, as well as between Kyrgyz border guards and police in the Fergana Valley region. While the Kyrgyz government has not made any public statement about the incidents, they are indicative of Bishkek's weakening control over law-enforcement agencies, as well as the protracted economic crisis in southern Kyrgyzstan.

On December 17, a group of eight policemen clashed with border guards in Kadamzhai district. The Kyrgyz police claim that they were conducting an anti-corruption raid at the border post and that the border troops responded by resorting to arms. But the border guards accuse the police of attempting to illegally seize their weapons.<sup>22</sup>

On December 13, an Uzbek citizen struck a Kyrgyz border guard after he was denied entry to Kyrgyzstan. On December 11, an Uzbek border guard shot a Kyrgyz citizen. The Kyrgyz border guard and the Kyrgyz civilian were both hospitalized. These incidents were connected with illegal border crossings and smuggling undeclared merchandise. The Uzbek citizen allegedly tried to cross the border without documents. Similarly, the Kyrgyz citizen was transporting goods imported from China valued at 30,000 soms (\$726) and refused to show his papers.<sup>23</sup>

On December 12, 20 Uzbek citizens threw stones at Kyrgyz border guards at the Palman checkpoint, claiming that the territory around the post must belong to Uzbekistan and that entrance should be permitted without passports.<sup>24</sup> The Kyrgyz border guards responded with their weapons.

Kyrgyz and Uzbek press reported incidents at border areas with different emphasis, with each side accusing the other of violating customs rules by border guards and citizens.<sup>25</sup> It is now nearly routine for such incidents to occur along the border with Uzbekistan on a monthly and even weekly basis.

In response to the December 11 incident, the Uzbek media reported that the Kyrgyz citizen had refused to show his documents and threatened the border guards. The media suggested that his refusal justified the actions of senior border officers who first fired warning shots in the air and subsequently shot the trespasser. But according to the Kyrgyz press, the Uzbek border guards are usually more aggressive than Kyrgyz guards regardless of whether the migrants in question are legal or illegal.

The Kyrgyz-Uzbek border has been the scene of violence since the collapse of the Soviet regime. Since 1991, the behavior of Uzbek border guards has only become more aggressive. The most common incidents along the Uzbek border include intrusions by the border guards against civilians and casualties from landmines. In recent years the Uzbek border troops killed dozens of Uzbek, Kyrgyz and Tajik citizens who tried to cross the border illegally. There have also been numerous reports of violent treatment of women and children.

Violent clashes between civilians and border guards along the densely populated areas in the Ferghana Valley foment disputes over Uzbekistan's Shakhimardan province, which is surrounded by Kyrgyz territory. Still, such incidents rarely trigger official responses from the Kyrgyz or Uzbek Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the Ministry of Interior.

Since Kyrgyzstan has moderate customs regulations, most goods imported from China are resold by shuttle traders to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Spontaneous markets for clothes, foods and home appliances appear along the border areas with prices greatly varying from state to state.

Kyrgyzstan's protracted passport reform has complicated life for the population living in border areas. An 18-month shortage of blank Kyrgyz passports left tens of thousands of labor migrants and people living in border areas without legal papers. Residents in border areas are able to cross the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border without visas, but it remains difficult to change citizenship in cases of marriages.

The regulations established at the state level in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan appear to differ from the rules observed by the border guards and local residents. The states presume rigorous control over flows of people through visa regimes and quotas on imports and exports. However, this does not prevent the impoverished population from crossing borders and trading goods. As a result, violence between civilians and border guards occurs on an almost daily basis.

**WITH CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM STALLED, BAKIYEV OPTS FOR REFERENDUM**

✂ January 10, 2006 ✂

On January 5, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev signed the decree "On Arrangements to Prepare a National Referendum in the Kyrgyz Republic," calling for a referendum on constitutional reform at the end of 2006. Although Bakiyev seeks to postpone constitutional reform for as long as possible, he must eventually revise the existing division of powers between the government and the parliament to forestall future political crises. After a constitutional committee comprised of representatives from government, parliament and civil society institutions reached a stalemate, the idea of a national referendum was chosen as the best way to end the current political uncertainty.

The newly formed National Coalition of Democratic Forces of Kyrgyzstan (NCFP) openly criticized the existing presidential-parliamentary government structure and described it as "a system where neither president nor parliament are held responsible for their own politics; but the government is a common scapegoat deprived of rights."<sup>26</sup> The NCFP includes a wide range of political parties, including Prime Minister Felix Kulov's Ar-Namys, the well-known parties Kairan El, Ata-Jurt, Moya Strana and the communist party as well as NGOs such as the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, Interbilim and Kelkel.

A different perspective comes from Kyrgyz legal specialist Murat Ukushev, who claims that the current constitution is unjustly blamed for all political crises. He maintains that harsh criticism of the current constitution is destructive for the democratization process, because it creates a negative image of the existing legal order. The current government should not seek the "revolutionary expediency" of the March 2005 Tulip Revolution by denying the constitution, Ukushev argues, but must follow the established rule of law. Ukushev also holds that the constitution provides the president with a broad range of powers and strips the parliament of its basic rights.<sup>27</sup>

The Kyrgyz public regards referendums skeptically. The previous president, Askar Akayev, held out two referendums that only increased his presidential powers and received negative reviews from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. Generally speaking, Akayev's referendums in 2003 and 1996 served the interests of the central authorities and not the public will. The current constitution was fundamentally altered in the February 2003 referendum. Ironically, the change from bicameral to unicameral parliament was officially enacted in April 2005, shortly after the Tulip Revolution.

Bakiyev's recent decree seeks to prepare the Kyrgyz public for the referendum by explaining to the population the differences among various government systems. Within a period of nine months the decree intends to educate the public about the importance of constitutional reform. It calls upon parliamentarians, representatives of the judicial branch and national mass media to take an

active role in the initiative. According to the decree, these activities should prepare the public to “consciously consider the assessment and selection” of the most appropriate state structure. Bakiyev’s decision to prolong the moratorium on the death penalty might potentially also be included in the new constitution.<sup>28</sup>

Independent of the president’s decree, Kyrgyz media has been actively discussing positive and negative aspects of parliamentary, presidential and mixed systems. Still, most Kyrgyz analysts agree that neither government officials nor the general public possess a clear idea about the differences among various state configurations.

A national committee on ideology will soon be established, drawing members of the government, parliament and civil society. To date, State Secretary Dastan Sarygulov has been the most vocal ideologist in Kyrgyzstan. The entire process of constructing a national ideology appears transparent and liberal. Yet it is doubtful that the committee, comprised of people with various educational backgrounds, political affiliations and economic wealth, will craft a viable national concept. Edil Baisalov, leader of NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society and a member of the committee, comments that it is more important to develop a national idea that would bridge the north-south divide in Kyrgyzstan, rather than propagate “hollow incitements” such as the seven maxims from the Kyrgyz epic narrative *Manas*.<sup>29</sup>

Such a mass-education project on political issues is unprecedented for post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Relying on popular opinion to select the state configuration after attempts by specialists had failed is a rather radical measure for changing the country’s constitutional order. Bakiyev’s decree represents a bizarre blend of the Soviet mentality to educate the public and an attempt to bring in democratic changes by involving a broad spectrum of political actors. Unclear in what the referendum will produce, the government seems to be seeking constitutional changes for the sake of sustaining its revolutionary image.

**IS BAKIYEV LOSING LEGITIMACY?**

✂ January 17, 2006 ✂

Almost ten months after the March 24 Tulip Revolution, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev is losing public support due to continuing political assassinations, open challenges to the government by criminal figures, as well as poor political and economic performance of the state. Together, these trends make the situation in Kyrgyzstan less predictable and more dangerous.

The January 9 assassination of sportsman Raatbek Sanatbayev continued the long chain of contract murders that began during the spring of 2005. Sanatbayev was allegedly attempting to run for the chairmanship of the National Olympic Committee (NOC), a position coveted by several other known sports and business leaders. Rumors across Bishkek suggest that Rysbek Akmatbayev, a well-known “thief-in-law,” might be involved in this killing, as he is also interested in heading the NOC. Known by his first name, Rysbek was previously accused of organizing assassinations of a number of political and sports figures.

In his recent address to the legislature, parliament speaker Omurbek Tekebayev declared that, “it is in our [parliament’s] capacity to prevent criminal structures from heading the NOC.”<sup>30</sup> Despite persistent rumors and indirect official statements by the Kyrgyz lawmakers about the involvement of specific criminal elements in political assassinations, the Kyrgyz Minister of Interior Muratbek Sutalinov declared that it will be “quite difficult to solve the case.”<sup>31</sup> The minister made similarly vague comments on other political assassinations. The previous chair of the NOC, Bayaman Erkinbayev, was also killed in September last year. Before the March 24 Revolution, the NOC was headed by Aidar Akayev, the son of the former president Askar Akayev.

Efforts to reform Kyrgyzstan’s constitution have stalled, with the special Constitutional Committee failing to reach a consensus. Bakiyev’s decision to conduct a referendum to decide which state system—presidential or parliamentary—would best suit the country is likely to further undermine his approval rating. The results of the referendum are difficult to predict because of the general inability of the Kyrgyz public to accurately distinguish the differing types of government structures. The newly formed National Coalition of Democratic Forces of Kyrgyzstan, a political bloc comprised of 18 political organizations, notes that constitutional reform is designed to “form a new regional clan system based on old scheme,” hinting at Bakiyev’s wish to establish a presidential system.

The government has also failed to introduce any visible economic reforms to remedy the economic difficulties that worsened after the ouster of former president Askar Akayev. According to the Minister of Finance Akylbek Japarov, the current tax system was developed during the last two years and still stirs strong debate among business elites.<sup>32</sup> At a recent meeting with Prime Minister Felix Kulov, local businessmen criticized high tax rates, arguing that a lack of flexibility inspires a shadow economy.<sup>33</sup>

Bakiyev's fight against corruption has failed to a large extent. Compared with the anti-corruption campaign in Georgia after the November 2003 Rose Revolution, in which state income was significantly increased due to confiscation of illegally appropriated capital, anti-corruption efforts in Kyrgyzstan are undermined by Bakiyev's weakness in confronting criminal networks.

Nurlan Motuyev, director general of the "Ak-Ulak" coal mine in Naryn oblast, organized a series of meetings of between 350 and 6,000 people to restrain law enforcement agencies from conducting an investigation of his business. Motuyev threatened to incite armed civilian uprising against the government if the state fails to pay subsidies to his coal deposits. Earlier this month, Motuyev threatened to set fire to a local police precinct after the government sent a special investigation group to the mine.<sup>34</sup> For months the local law enforcement agencies have been unable to cope with Motuyev's behavior against the government. Nevertheless, against the backdrop of Motuyev's aggression, the General Prosecutor Kambaraly Kongantiyev publicly warned Kyrgyz media to refrain from criticizing the president and government.

A government that is unable to prevent political assassinations, persecute criminal leaders, and carry out reforms is rapidly losing its public approval. Many Kyrgyz suggest that Akayev is losing legitimacy in a manner similar to Bakiyev, albeit over a longer period of time.

**BAKIYEV WINS BATTLE AGAINST PARLIAMENT LEADER, BUT LOSES PUBLIC SUPPORT IN THE PROCESS**

✂ February 14, 2006 ✂

Kyrgyz Parliamentary Speaker Omurbek Tekebayev confirmed his decision to resign on February 13, following a shocking clash with Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev.

In his address to the legislature on February 3, Bakiyev criticized the parliamentarians for intrigues, laziness, and corruption. The president called parliamentarians “puppets and puppeteers,” hinting that a small group is able to manipulate the entire legislature. Bakiyev bullied Tekebayev in particular, indirectly accusing him of attempts to seize state power. “It is frightening to think what would happen if the country changes into a parliamentary system,” Bakiyev speculated. Many parliamentarians found the president’s criticism unfair and inappropriate.

Tekebayev responded by harshly criticizing Bakiyev for repeating mistakes made by the previous president, Askar Akayev. He accused him of widespread embezzlement, corrupt privatization and slow progress adopting bills prepared by the parliament. Tekebayev stressed that by voluntarily leaving the post of parliamentary speaker after the president’s provocation, he wants to forestall a further escalation of political tensions. Deputy speakers Bolot Sherniyazov and Erkin Alymbekov also resigned.

The conflict between the president and the parliamentary speaker affected the Security Council session on February 9. Bakiyev refused to attend the session if Tekebayev was present. The speaker ignored the president’s ultimatum, but was aggressively confronted by the head of the president’s administration, Usen Sydykov, who claimed that Tekebayev had “no moral right to participate in the session after the recent incident.” According to former prosecutor-general Azimbek Beknazarov, Bakiyev’s attempt to prevent the speaker from attending the Security Council meeting lacked legal legitimacy. Meanwhile, members of Tekebayev’s Ata-Meken political party organized several dozens of protesters in the city of Bazarkorgoon (Jalalabad oblast) to support their leader.

Tekebayev has served in parliament since 1991. He ran for the presidency in 1995 in an electoral bloc with current Prime Minister Felix Kulov. He served as a deputy speaker in the 2000-2005 parliament. Tekebayev was one of the major participants of the movement against former Kyrgyz president Akayev in spring 2005. He later became increasingly critical of Bakiyev’s policies.

The reaction of the Kyrgyz parliamentarians to Tekebayev’s resignation was diverse. Most agreed that a peaceful resolution of the conflict between the president and speaker is necessary to preserve political stability. Parliamentarian Sultan Urmanayev pleaded with Bakiyev and Tekebayev to set aside their personal differences and find a compromise. Bakiyev was condemned for his reluctance to participate in dialogues with the parliament and for under-appreciating the role of the parliamentary speaker.

With Bakiyev losing yet another comrade from the March 24 Tulip Revolution, the scandal with Tekebayev added to Kyrgyzstan's ongoing political crisis. It remains unclear who will be able to gain the speaker's chair after Tekebayev's resignation. There are a number of prospective candidates, but none has enough support to win a majority of the parliament's vote. "It will be better if the parliament dissolves, because it was susceptible to the president's provocations. We could not defend the parliament speaker... We turned out to be cowards," said parliamentarian Melis Eshimkanov.

Bakiyev's attack on Tekebayev widened the gap between the president and parliament. It decreased chances for collaboration and prompted several parliamentarians to take a stronger position against the president. Bakiyev showed that he is not willing to grant the parliament more rights and will try to increase his own authority. The power struggle between the president and the government will likely intensify as the national referendum approaches in the next few months.

Bakiyev's offensive against Tekebayev also harmed his public approval rating, with the public condemning the president and showing stronger support for the parliament. A significant increase in public support for the parliament might result in the Kyrgyz public choosing a parliamentary and not presidential state structure at the national referendum. As Tekebayev declared in his February 13 address to his parliament, "We worked in the most difficult moral conditions, when our colleagues were killed, when we were threatened, when signatures for our resignation were being collected throughout the country. We did not fight with anyone, but we have won."

**BAKIYEV FACES STRONG, MATURING OPPOSITION IN KYRGYZSTAN**

✂ **March 14, 2006** ✂

One year after Kyrgyzstan's March 24 Tulip Revolution Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev faces outspoken criticism of his regime from both governmental and non-governmental sources. Although the current political situation in Kyrgyzstan largely resembles the final years of former President Askar Akayev's regime, when the general public was dissatisfied with widespread corruption and ineffective economic policies, most political actors now strive to avoid another revolution.

The majority of Bakiyev's opponents are his former political allies who helped him oust Akayev's regime. Corrupt regime politics are driving more and more prominent political figures into the opposition camp. Roza Otunbayeva, Azimbek Beknazarov and Omurbek Tekebayev are now Bakiyev's most active challengers. All three leaders were also strong opponents of former President Akayev. For several years they acted separately by leading their own political factions, but in late 2004 they united into one block.

The new political opposition claims that Bakiyev is repeating the mistakes made by Akayev. Specifically, the president is becoming increasingly authoritarian in his appointment of government members and curbing free speech. To avoid further deterioration of political transparency in Kyrgyzstan, the new opposition is acting more thoughtfully than their counterparts did during the Akayev era. In particular, former Foreign Minister and Akayev critic Otunbayeva is drawing attention to the success of political party building in Kyrgyzstan. According to her, the current opposition values social cohesion and seeks to involve large numbers of people rather than clustering around a few charismatic individuals.<sup>35</sup>

The new political opposition has also revealed some previously unknown details about the March 24 revolution. According to Otunbayeva, Bakiyev was pushed forward by political figures from southern parts of the country shortly before the parliamentary elections in February-March 2005. She claims that three years ago, Absamat Masaliyev, an "elder statesman" of Kyrgyz politics and a parliamentarian from the south, informally anointed Bakiyev to become the next presidential candidate. Political figures such as Usen Sydykov pledged to follow Masaliyev's orders after his death and supported Bakiyev as the Tulip Revolution unfolded.<sup>36</sup>

Otunbayeva has been criticized for not revealing the nuances of the current political regime while she was still part of the post-March 24 government.<sup>37</sup> However, she claims that she was not able to remain in the government because she constantly confronted the president's cadre politics and opposed the many manifestations of nepotism. She was offered various positions in the Foreign Service before parliament rejected her nomination to become foreign minister.

Otunbayeva and Beknazarov have asked Bakiyev to make a report on March 24 about the progress made by the new government since

last year. Both opposition leaders are pessimistic about changes brought by the revolution, yet neither denies the fact that the revolution was necessary.

Meanwhile, the president announced that March 24 would be a public holiday, with nation-wide celebrations organized by the government. Top government officials—Bakiyev, Prime Minister Felix Kulov, Head of Presidential Administration Usen Sydykov, State Secretary Dastan Sarygulov and Vice Prime Minister Adakhan Modumarov—are all actively promoting the day's symbolic significance. Celebrations will be held in all of Kyrgyzstan's largest cities and a special monument commemorating the Tulip Revolution will be erected in Jalalabad, Bakiyev's birthplace.

Bakiyev's efforts to celebrate the March 24 anniversary show the president's detachment from society's prevailing mood. Behind the spectacle of the upcoming events, there is deep disappointment with the regime among both the urban and rural populations. For many Bishkek residents the events of March 24, 2005, are still closely associated with the looting and banditry that followed the takeover of the government headquarters and the demoralization of law-enforcement agencies. Businessmen who suffered from arson and theft have still not received monetary compensation for their losses. "March 24 should be called the day of triumph for looters and hooligans," one student from Bishkek commented bitterly.

Speculation is circulating in Bishkek that another mass uprising against the Bakiyev government might take place on March 24 this year. However, members of the new opposition have confirmed that they are determined to exclusively build constructive relations with the government until the next presidential and parliamentary elections are held in 2010.

## KYRGYZSTAN MARKS FIRST ANNIVERSARY OF TULIP REVOLUTION

✻ March 24, 2006 ✻

A year has passed since the March 24, 2005 Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, when crowds seized the main government building in Bishkek and President Askar Akayev fled the country. The popular euphoria about the demise of the corrupt regime quickly changed to anxiety as tensions rose in the country. Virtually every week has been marked with showdowns between state officials, civil unrest and political assassinations. The new government, led by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Prime Minister Felix Kulov, has been criticized for its chaotic cadre reshuffles and its inability to curb corruption or generate economic development.

The events of March 24, 2005 have multiple interpretations. They can be considered a victory for democracy, a mere rotation of political elites, a mass riot, or even a coup d'état. The final judgment depends on the answers to four questions.

**✻ WHAT HAS CHANGED?** Today, southern elites occupy key positions in the government, breaking the northern hold on power established during the Soviet era. This long northern dominance was the main source of regional tensions. Popular unrest was triggered by the defeat of Bakiyev and Adakhan Modumarov, two famous political leaders from the south, in the parliamentary runoff on March 13, 2005. Together with former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva, the opposition leaders began to organize demonstrations in southern cities, producing the deepest political crisis that Akayev has faced during his presidency.

The revolution shifted the balance between state and non-state actors and uncovered the tremendous power of the criminal world in Kyrgyzstan. Some two dozen organized-crime groups are currently active throughout Kyrgyzstan. While the state was able to exercise strong control over various criminal elements during the Akayev regime, since the revolution the underground world has formed a parallel authority structure. Criminal groups and mafia chiefs have openly challenged the government and often escaped persecution.

The revolution also confirmed that deep inter-ethnic cleavages still persist in Kyrgyz society. Much of the Russian population fled after the revolution, indicating minority groups' feelings of insecurity. The new government has paid little attention to the importance of civic rights in Kyrgyzstan, and violent conflicts erupted between Kyrgyz, Dungans and Uzbeks.

Finally, in the wake of March 24 Kyrgyz civil society has developed into a significant political force that the government is no longer able to ignore, let alone curb. NGOs now regularly voice concerns about episodes in the criminal world. The NGOs also played a key role in resolving the Uzbek refugee crisis following the violent protests in Andijan, Uzbekistan, on March 13-14. They called on the Kyrgyz government to comply with UN standards and deport 439 Uzbek refugees to third-party countries.

 **WHAT DID NOT CHANGE?** Corruption still plagues all state structures. Bakiyev quickly gained public support by promising to eradicate corruption in the government. But the president and his team clearly failed to meet the people's expectations. By sacking Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov, an active participant in the Tulip Revolution and the person responsible for investigating corruption by Akayev, the president showed how personality conflicts can affect the government's performance.

Bakiyev's government has yet to introduce more efficient economic programs. To date, the government has not taken action to decrease unemployment or prevent the out-migration of the working-age population.

While almost 90 percent of population voted for Bakiyev in the July 2005 presidential election, today his popularity has dramatically fallen. Many overestimated Bakiyev's ability to become a visionary leader who would solve pressing problems left by the previous regime. At the same time, Prime Minister Felix Kulov turned out to be overrated as a potential counterweight to Bakiyev.

The new government could have done more to encourage an independent mass media. The Kyrgyz Ambassador to the United States, former journalist Zamira Sydykova, suggests that the government should lower taxes for mass media outlets and paper imports. Encouraging small and medium businesses would also generate advertising and thus help the media to gain economic independence.

 **WHAT WILL CHANGE?** By firing his former allies, Bakiyev is producing strong opposition leaders. Beknazarov and Otunbayeva are determined to create stronger political parties to act as a counterweight the current government. Sydykova predicts, "Those who had ambitions to win the presidency in 2005 will likely compete in presidential and parliamentary elections in 2010 and represent a powerful force against Bakiyev."

Popular dissatisfaction with the government is likely to increase in the coming years. Bakiyev's response will be pivotal. Akayev showed that when the government's public approval rating drops, the president may turn to authoritarian means in order to remain in power. Akayev, like other Central Asian presidents, used national referendums to amend the constitution to extend his political power.

The Tulip Revolution changed the rules of politics in Kyrgyzstan. There is a new commitment for future Kyrgyz presidents to confine themselves to two five-year terms. And although today the Kyrgyz public regards any possibility of future revolutions with great anxiety, mass mobilization is now a potential tool to protest against undemocratic government.

 **WHAT MUST CHANGE?** Bakiyev and his government must stop replicating Akayev's mistakes. They must tackle poverty through viable economic policies. Kyrgyz experts believe that decreasing the poverty level would curtail the activities of organized criminal groups, strengthen civil society, and alleviate inter-ethnic tensions in the long run.

On the international front, Bakiyev should continue to maintain a careful balance of cooperative relations with the United States, Russia and China. In summer 2005 the new government made several undiplomatic statements regarding the

U.S. military base in Bishkek to serve the interests of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where Russia and China are members. At the same time, Kyrgyzstan cannot allow relations with Russia to deteriorate because some 500,000 labor migrants are currently working in Russian cities. China is an important trade partner.

 **MIXED OPINIONS** March 24 is now a national holiday in Kyrgyzstan. A military parade is scheduled in Bishkek and concerts are planned in all of Kyrgyzstan's major cities. But as NGO activist Edil Baisalov asked, "What's the need for the military? Why engage in saber rattling? Who is being threatened by missiles? The people who won?"<sup>38</sup>

Some see the celebrations as the last vestige of the looting that engulfed Bishkek in the days immediately following the revolution. "This is the day of lost hopes," one student from Bishkek complained. Similarly, a shuttle trader from Issyk Kul oblast noted, "It is a holiday for the president, not for the people."

The events on March 24, 2005, constituted a revolution for Kyrgyzstan, a country where democratic traditions are only beginning to take shape. The political changes were abrupt, yet inevitable in the long run. Bishkek's Central Asian neighbors are carefully watching as the Tulip Revolution unfolds, because Kyrgyzstan's past year could well be their future.



**THE TULIP REVOLUTION: A CHRONOLOGY**  
**✿ JANUARY 2005 – MARCH 2006 ✿**





**The Tulip Revolution: A Chronology**

⌘ **JANUARY 2005 – MARCH 2006** ⌘

**January 6, 2005**

⌘ Former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbayeva, declares her intention to run in the parliamentary elections along with Bermet Akayeva, daughter of President Askar Akayev. Otunbayeva officially registers at the University district in Bishkek. A few hours later, the Central Election Committee (CEC) cancels her candidacy due to a residence qualification law.

**January 7, 2005**

⌘ A group of 200 protesters organized in front of the Kyrgyz Parliament to show support for Otunbayeva and express disagreement with the residence qualification law. Several parliamentarians were present, including Adakhan Modumarov, Bolot Sherniyazov, and Omurbek Tekebayev. The CEC continues to bar Otunbayeva's registration.

**February 27, 2005**

⌘ Kyrgyzstan holds the first round of parliamentary elections. The opposition loses to pro-presidential candidates in most voting districts. Protests begin in remote areas shortly after the results were announced. The number of protesters ranges from a few dozen to as many as 2,000 in Naryn and the densely populated southern cities of Jalalabad, Osh, and Uzgen. The protesters' demands include canceling the results of the allegedly fraudulent elections and Akayev's early resignation.

**March 3, 2005**

⌘ A bomb detonates in the Bishkek apartment of opposition leader Roza Otunbayeva; no one is injured or killed.

**March 10, 2005**

⌘ 23 opposition parliamentarians gathered in Bishkek to issue a symbolic vote of no confidence in the president and CEC.

**March 11, 2005**

⌘ The Paris Club of creditors agrees to write off \$555 million in Kyrgyzstan's external debt.

**March 13, 2005**

⌘ Kyrgyz voters return to the polls for parliamentary runoff elections. Among the more notable candidates is Bermet Akayeva, informal leader of the pro-governmental Alga Kyrgyzstan party, as well as Adakham Madumarov and Omurbek

Tekebayev, who are well-known representatives from the opposition. The government simultaneously suppresses several Kyrgyz newspapers. State-financed mass media dominates election coverage.

✎ The NGO coalition For Democracy and Civil Society reports violations in various voting precincts. Turnout was reported at 51 percent, lower than in the first round. The People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan (PMK) coordinates protests. PMK leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev demands early presidential elections and an extension of the current parliament's mandate.

✎ Kyrgyzstan is divided into a politically active "south" and passive north. Protesters occupy seven regional administrations in the southern cities of Jalalabad, Uzgen, Osh, Kochkor, and the northern city Talas. Protesters from Naryn begin to march toward Bishkek until police detain their leader, Tursunbai Akun.

### **March 19, 2005**

✎ Three-thousand protesters gather outside the capital, Bishkek. A record 50,000 gather in Jalalabad. Several news agencies publish a phony report from the U.S. Embassy containing defamatory statements about the political situation in Kyrgyzstan and the activity of leading Kyrgyz politicians. The U.S. Embassy officially denies the report.

### **March 20, 2005**

✎ The Kyrgyz government deploys interior ministry troops to suppress civilian protesters in Jalalabad and Osh. Protesters re-group and deploy 1,700 men on horseback in Jalalabad's suburbs.

### **March 21, 2005**

✎ The government loses administrative control over all large cities in the southern Kyrgyzstan. Reports of arson, beatings, mass arrests and deaths prompt the Kyrgyz diaspora to join anti-Akayev protests on March 21 in front of Kyrgyz embassies and consulates in Washington, DC, Chicago, New York, Brussels, London, and Moscow.

### **March 22, 2005**

✎ Speaking before the new parliament, President Akayev declares the government is unwilling to launch any talks with the opposition. Ten of the 71 deputies refuse to appear in parliament as a demonstration of solidarity with the protesters.

✎ As tensions mount in Bishkek, Russian deputy speaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy proposes deploying peacekeeping troops to Kyrgyzstan in order to prevent the escalation of violence in its southern cities. Kazakhstan, Japan, Russia, and the United States call for a peaceful resolution of the crisis and urge against resorting to military force. Uzbekistan tightens control at the Kyrgyz border.

### **March 23, 2005**

✂ The Kyrgyz opposition claims control of two-thirds of the country's territory and one-third of its population, excluding the densely populated Bishkek and Issyk-Kul regions.

✂ Two youth organizations, Kel-Kel and Birge, organize a protest of 1,000 people in the center of Bishkek. A subsequent clash with hired provocateurs brings immediate intervention from interior ministry forces, which selectively beat the protesters. More than 20 students and journalists were hospitalized and 200 people were arrested in Bishkek.

### **March 24, 2005**

✂ Between 15,000 and 20,000 people gather in Bishkek's central square demanding President Askar Akayev's resignation. State Secretary Osmonkun Ibraimov resigns his position citing disagreement with Akayev's politics. Opposition leader Felix Kulov is freed from jail.

✂ As crowds capture the main government building, state-controlled mass media joins the protesters and broadcast anti-Akayev views. Looting and arson are widespread, with many protestors suspecting counter-revolutionary provocations by Akayev loyalists. President Akayev and his family flee to Moscow, where the Kremlin offers political asylum.

### **March 25, 2005**

✂ Opposition leaders form interim government and appoint Bakiyev as Acting Prime Minister. The interim government declares that its leaders would accept the legitimacy of the new parliament and set presidential elections within a three-month period.

### **March 29, 2005**

✂ Former President Askar Akayev appears publicly in a radio interview with *Ekho Moskvyy*.

### **April 3, 2005**

✂ Akayev formally resigns as president after negotiations with a special parliamentary commission at the Kyrgyz Embassy in Moscow. Akayev and Bermet Akayeva give several interviews to foreign media claiming they had been violently forced out of the country as a result of a coup d'état, not a people's revolution.

### **April 7, 2005**

✂ Zamira Sydykova, editor-in chief of the *Res publica* newspaper and prospective Kyrgyz Ambassador in Washington, DC, testifies before the U.S. Helsinki Commission. U.S. Department of State deputy spokesman Adam Ereli confirms that Washington will continue to provide assistance, with \$31 million earmarked for

Kyrgyzstan under the Freedom Support Act.

**April 8, 2005**

✂ Parliament strips Akayev of his historical status as the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan. The parliament also deprives him of the right to a personal security guard (provided by the state) within the territory of Kyrgyzstan and the right to take part in the political life of the country. They also terminate diplomatic immunity privileges for his family members, paving the way for corruption investigations.

**April 10, 2005**

✂ Usen Kudaibergenov, a close ally of former political prisoner Felix Kulov, is killed amid continuing political unrest. His shooting marks the first political assassination after the Tulip Revolution. Critics accuse Bakiyev's government of a lack of transparency in appointing new cabinet members, inability to restore order in the capital following the political upheaval and discrimination against the ethnic Russian minority.

**April 14, 2005**

✂ U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld arrives in Kyrgyzstan for talks with the new government. Discussion addresses the status of the U.S. military base in Kyrgyzstan.

**April 21, 2005**

✂ The Kyrgyz news agency *Akipress* publishes an updated list of 42 enterprises controlled by Aidar Akayev and Adil Toigonbayev, the former president's son and son-in-law. The list includes some of Kyrgyzstan's most profitable businesses. Estimates suggest that the Akayev family illegally pocketed hundreds of millions of dollars every year.

**April 25, 2005**

✂ Kulov announces that he will enter the presidential race. His popularity rating reaches 50 percent, according to Internet polls. Poll results for Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev polls suggest support around 20 percent. Southern residents, including the Uzbek population in Osh Oblast, express great hope for Bakiyev, while Kulov is backed by northern residents.

**April 26, 2005**

✂ Press investigations uncover additional businesses controlled by members of Akayev's family. Reports also trace payments made by parliamentary candidates, state employees, and diplomats in exchange for government positions. Fees range from \$30,000 to \$200,000, depending on the desired position. Foremost on the "shame list" is the head of the National Bank, Ulan Sarbanov, who is suspected of

illegally transferring \$480 million to President Akayev's account in 1999.

### **May 9, 2005**

✂ On the even of celebrations marking the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conclusion of World War II, Kurmanbek Bakiyev joins other CIS leaders for an informal meeting in Moscow. Bakiyev raises a series of bilateral issues with Russia, including dual citizenship and Kyrgyzstan's external debt to Russia.

### **May 13, 2005**

✂ Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Felix Kulov agree to form a political alliance for Kyrgyzstan's July 10 presidential elections. Kulov agrees to withdraw his candidacy in exchange for an appointment as prime minister should Acting President Bakiyev win the elections. The move resolves growing public anxiety regarding a possible Bakiyev-Kulov rivalry.

### **May 14, 2005**

✂ Refugees flood the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border as a result of the Uzbek government's suppression of civilian riots in Andijan and Pakhtaabad. Uzbek citizens are placed in special refugee camps in the Jalalabad oblast. Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir Uulu warns that Kyrgyzstan might sink under increased flows of the Uzbek immigrants, noting that the actual number of refugees is much higher than reported.

### **May 17, 2005**

✂ Speaking at a press conference Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov claims that many insurgents slipped into Kyrgyzstan along with civilian refugees. Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev makes a statement supporting Karimov, saying that bloody events were organized by terrorists. However, Kyrgyz human rights activists appeal to the government to allow the Uzbek refugees to remain inside Kyrgyzstan for the duration of the tensions in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyz officials delegate responsibility for the refugees to international organizations such as the Red Cross, UN and OSCE.

### **May 19, 2005**

✂ A Russian delegation led by Andrei Kokoshin, chairman of the State Duma Committee on the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), meets with Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Bishkek. Russian news agencies report that they discussed many bilateral issues, including introducing dual citizenship and the stationing a new Russian military base in Osh under the auspices of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Modesta Kolerov, head of the Russian President's Department of Interregional and Cultural Relations, notes that the new Russian military base would house up to 1,000 personnel.

### **May 27, 2005**

✂ In his interview to *Akipress*, Akayev's lawyer, Maxim Maximovich, claims that many of the corruption charges against the former president are flawed. He speculates that the lawsuit might bring in a new editor-in-chief at the newspaper.

### **June 9, 2005**

✂ Kyrgyz security services deport four Uzbek citizens at the request of President Islam Karimov's government, provoking harsh condemnation from UN officials in Bishkek.

### **June 10, 2005**

✂ Parliamentarian Jyrgalbek Surabaldiyev is shot and killed in central Bishkek. Surabaldiyev, a former sportsman and a successful businessman allied with Akayev, helped organize the provocateurs deployed against anti-Akayev protesters in Bishkek in March 2005.

### **June 13, 2005**

✂ Between 350 and 400 men armed with bludgeons gather in front of Erkinbayev's Osh office demanding that the lawmaker gives up his parliamentary seat and return illegally owned property to the state. Another group of 100-150 men, dressed in white shirts emblazoned with Erkinbayev's likeness, attack the demonstrators with Molotov cocktails and gunfire, injuring three. Erkinbayev claims that Usen Sydykov, head of the presidential administration, organized the riots against him.

### **June 17, 2005**

✂ A crowd of approximately 5,000 gather in central Bishkek to support Urmat Baryktabasov, who had been refused official registration for the July 10 presidential election. The government uses armed force to break up the crowds, with police detaining 216 people. Detainees later report that they received between 300 and 1,000 soms (\$6-20) to organize the protest.

### **June 30, 2005**

✂ In an interview with the Associated Press, former president Akayev accuses the United States of financing the Kyrgyz opposition and contributing to his ouster. He argues that Washington was unhappy with his friendly politics towards Russia, and blames international organizations, including Freedom House, for bringing democratic changes to the Central Asian country without considering local traditions.

### **July 5, 2005**

✂ At the Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit in Astana, Kyrgyzstan joins other member states in requesting a deadline for ending the U.S. military pres-

ence in Central Asia. The government's sudden demand for the United States to set a deadline sparks a mixed reaction among Kyrgyz experts.

### **July 10, 2005**

✎ Kyrgyzstan holds presidential elections. Bakiyev wins nearly 90 percent of the vote in the first round. About 340 international observers from 45 countries participated in the elections nationwide. The Chair of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Kimmo Kiljunen, calls the elections a “step forward,” but acknowledges that the abnormally high turnout—between 75 and 90 percent in each precinct—appears dubious and would require additional investigations.

### **July 18, 2005**

✎ President Bakiyev demotes Bishkek police chief Omurbek Suvanaliyev for failing to prevent the riots on June 17, sparking debate over the government's cadre politics ahead of the presidential inauguration.

### **July 25-26, 2005**

✎ U.S. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld visits to Bishkek for the second time since the March 24 Revolution to discuss security cooperation with Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Defense Minister Ismail Isakov. Kyrgyz officials withdraw their request for a deadline for the U.S. presence, agreeing the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan is needed to fight terrorism and to enhance bilateral relations.

### **July 27, 2005**

✎ More than 300 refugees from the May riots in Andijan are transported from Jalalabad oblast to Bishkek Manas International Airport and then sent on to a third-party country. The Kyrgyz government is still under pressure from the international community not to relinquish 29 convicts that are currently held at the Osh jail. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice informs the Kyrgyz government that it should not send back any more refugees.

### **August 14, 2005**

✎ Bakiyev is inaugurated amidst growing criticism over the cost of the ceremony. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev is one of the few official guests present at the event.

### **September 5, 2005**

✎ The Uzbek Prosecutor-General accuses the Kyrgyz government of allowing up to 70 religious extremists to train on its southern territories ahead of the Andijan riots. He claims that 60 professional gunmen participating in the riots were Kyrgyz citizens. The Kyrgyz newspaper *Obshchestvennyy reiting* questions Kyrgyzstan's ability

to accommodate more Uzbek refugees from future crises.

### **September 19, 2005**

✂ Bakiyev sacks his former political ally, prosecutor-general Azimbek Beknazarov. Thousands of Beknazarov's supporters take to the streets in Jalalabad to demand Bakiyev's resignation.

### **September 21, 2005**

✂ Bayaman Erkinbayev, a member of the Kyrgyz Parliament with alleged ties to criminal groups, is killed in central Bishkek. His murder is the third political assassination in Kyrgyzstan since the March 24 Tulip Revolution.

### **September 30, 2005**

✂ The Kyrgyz Parliament approves 16 new cabinet ministers and key members of the new government. Six of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's candidates are rejected in the first round, including Roza Otunbayeva, a major force behind the March 24 Tulip Revolution. Parliament also rejects two other female candidates, Alevtina Pronenko and Toktokan Boronbayeva.

### **October 6, 2005**

✂ Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Uzbek President Islam Karimov hold a bilateral meeting during the Central Asian Cooperation Organization summit in St. Petersburg. Although the leaders discuss border and economic issues, more pressing problems such as regulating gas and water supplies and Uzbekistan's allegations of Kyrgyz assistance to terrorist organizations are left unaddressed.

### **October 15, 2005**

✂ The Kyrgyz government re-privatizes *KOORT* (Kyrgyz public radio and television) following corruption investigations.

### **October 20, 2005**

✂ Parliamentarian Tynychbek Akmatbayev is killed during a prison riot in the 31<sup>st</sup> penal colony located 20 kilometers outside Bishkek. Akmatbayev's older brother, Rysbek, who is allegedly the most influential mafia boss in the Issyk-Kul oblast, declares a jihad against Prime Minister Kulov.

### **October 21, 2005**

✂ Rysbek Akmatbayev actively organizes protests against Prime Minister Kulov in central Bishkek.

### **October 25, 2005**

✂ Kulov's Ar-Namys party organizes a "peace demonstration" in support of

the prime minister.

**October 27, 2007**

✂ Rysbek Akmatbayev ends his anti-Kulov demonstrations after his allies meet with President Bakiyev. Critics charge the president with failing to stop protests against Kulov.

**November 6, 2005**

✂ Some 2,000 people gather in Aksy region to protest against Bakiyev's presidency.

**November 10, 2005**

✂ Kyrgyz language advocates assemble at the national "House of Friendship" and declare that the Russian language's official status hinders the development of the Kyrgyz language.

**November 18, 2005**

✂ Esenbek Dzeencheriyev, an ally of the murdered actor Usen Kudaibergenov, is found dead. Political analysts suggest that Dzeencheriyev and Kudaibergenov were assassinated for supporting Prime Minister Kulov.

**November 27, 2005**

✂ Two key leaders of Kyrgyzstan's revolution, Azimbek Beknazarov and Roza Otunbayeva, stand for parliamentary seats in Aksy and Tunduk districts. Beknazarov wins, recovering his role in the political scene. Otunbayeva loses to a previously unknown businessman, Zhanysh Kudaibergenov.

**November 29, 2005**

✂ Kazakhstan imposes new restrictions along the state border with Kyrgyzstan "to prevent possible penetration into Kazakhstan of unwanted elements" ahead of the December 4 Kazakh presidential elections. Some 230 Kyrgyz citizens are arrested and deported from Almaty.

**December 12, 2005**

✂ Some 20 *Piramida* employees stage a public protest in front of the Kyrgyz Parliament, sealing their mouths with white tape to symbolize suppression of the freedom of speech. Like *KOORT* and *Vecherny Bishkek*, *Piramida* was one of several media outlets re-privatized after the Tulip Revolution.

**January 5, 2006**

✂ Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev signs a decree calling for a referendum on constitutional reform by the end of 2006.

### **January 9, 2006**

✂ Famous sportsman Raatbek Sanatbayev is assassinated. Sanatbayev was allegedly attempting to run for the chairmanship of the National Olympic Committee, the position coveted by several other known sports- and business-people.

### **February 3, 2006**

✂ In an address to parliament, Bakiyev harshly criticizes parliamentarians for intrigues, laziness and corruption. The president bullies Parliamentary Speaker Omurbek Tekebayev in particular, indirectly accusing him of attempts to seize state power.

### **February 13, 2006**

✂ Kyrgyz Parliamentary Speaker Omurbek Tekebayev resigns following a clash with Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Deputy speakers Bolot Sherniyazov and Erkin Alymbekov also resign.

### **March 2, 2006**

✂ After several unsuccessful attempts to elect a new speaker, parliament approves Marat Sultanov for the position. Sultanov wins with 45 out of 59 votes.

### **March 10, 2006**

✂ Murat Jumagulov, a former member of Criminal Research Service, is killed in the outskirts of Bishkek. Jumagulov was believed to be cooperating with Rysbek Akmatbayev, a known mafia boss.

### **March 24, 2006**

✂ A year after the Tulip Revolution, Bakiyev declares March 24 a day of national celebration. The celebration sparks widespread debate and public discontentment with the government and the president.

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### The Revolution

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- <sup>18</sup> *Vecherny Bishkek*, May 1, 2005.

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- <sup>14</sup> *Obshchestvenny reiting*, November 24, 2005.
- <sup>15</sup> *Megapolis.kg*, December 5, 2005.
- <sup>16</sup> *Centrasia.ru*, February 26, 2005.
- <sup>17</sup> *Akipress*, December 10, 2005.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>19</sup> *The New York Times*, November 15, 2005.
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- <sup>24</sup> *Fergana.ru*, December 14, 2005.
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- <sup>28</sup> *Vecherny Bishkek*, January 9, 2006.
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- <sup>30</sup> *Kabar*, January 16, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Delo Nomer*, January 11, 2006.

<sup>33</sup> *Akipress*, January 16, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> *Akipress*, January 11, 2006.

<sup>35</sup> *Delo nomer*, March 1, 2006.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Analitik.kg*, March 12, 2006.

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