



**ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL EVENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN
FOR JANUARY-APRIL 2007**

Bishkek, 2007

DOMESTIC POLITICS

1. Main political events*:

Date	Event
January 2007	Dismissal of Prime Minister Feliks Kulov and the formation of a new Cabinet.
February 2007	Feliks Kulov founds United Front "For a Decent Future for Kyrgyzstan", making early presidential elections and constitutional reform its aim.
21 February 2007	President Kurmanbek Bakiev states that Kyrgyzstan will not join the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative.
March 2007	Beginning of the split within the "For Reforms!" movement and withdrawal of a group of opposition politicians, who found the "For United Kyrgyzstan" movement.
March – end of April	Beginning of the process of a dialogue between the President and the moderate opposition; launching of the process to change the "December" Constitution.
End of March – end of April	Appointment of the Cabinet headed by Almaz Atambaev.
March – April	Beginning of the process of restructuring Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) along party lines. Creation of Ata-Meken party faction, followed by Ata-Jurt and Ak-Shumkar party factions. Merger of the Ata-Meken and Ak-Shumkar party factions into a united opposition group in parliament.
9 – 19 April 2007	Demonstrations in the regions and a rally in Bishkek organized by the United Front "For a Decent Future for Kyrgyzstan" and part of the "For Reforms!" movement.
19 April 2007	Dispersal of the United Front "For a Decent Future for Kyrgyzstan" and "For Reforms!" movement rally.
April 2007	Events related to barring Bermet Akaeva from running in special elections.

* This quarterly report includes the events of April 2007 in light of important political processes that took place in March-April 2007.

2. Main trends within this period

The main events this year are a natural continuation of the processes, which took place in November-December 2006 - a reaction to the rollback in December when a new Constitution increasing presidential powers was adopted.

The situation was further exacerbated when Felix Kulov was twice rejected by parliament twice as Prime Minister and dismissed.

Kulov's United Front "For a Decent Future for Kyrgyzstan" attempted to organize a transfer of power by putting pressure on President Bakiev and forcing him to hold early presidential elections.

Creation of the United Front "For Decent Future of Kyrgyzstan" restructured the political space. The "For Reforms!" movement, which was created earlier and organized all of the rallies last year, virtually split up. A group of politicians quit the "For Reforms!" movement because they were unwilling to support Feliks Kulov. They were opposed to his views on forcing Bakiev to resign before his term expires as well as his methods for achieving his goals. This group led by Almaz Atambaev, Azimbek Beknazarov, Roza Otunbaeva and Edil Baisalov set up a new movement called "For United Kyrgyzstan!"

There was no unity on various issues among politicians who joined the United Front, and many of them were not willing to see Felix Kulov as head of the coalition government in the transfer of power. And they also did not approve of Kulov's radical methods and the opposition camp was split into several parts from the very beginning.

The new Cabinet which replaced Kulov's Cabinet was completely controlled by Kurmanbek Bakiev since the key offices were filled by the President's allies: Prime Minister Azim Isabekov, Vice Prime Minister in charge of economic issues Daniyar Usenov, Head of the Cabinet Secretariat Tynychbek Tabaldiev and a number of other officials.

Creating such a Cabinet could have been considered one of the main events in the new year in following the trend of consolidating presidential power were it not for the fact that that Cabinet existed for little more than a month.

Azim Isabekov's Cabinet was sacrificed to the President's strategy of splitting the opposition camp when a number of opposition politicians were invited to join the new Cabinet. This happened after Kurmanbek Bakiev realized how dangerous a broad anti-presidential coalition could have been in uniting opposition politicians. The real threat of being deposed, not losing presidential powers, became the deciding

factor which forced Bakiev to start negotiating with the moderate opposition in mid-March after the United Front and "For Reforms!" movement had already set a date for the rallies.

The creation of the United Front led to the emergence of two trends in the development of the political situation. Both were geared towards putting pressure on the President by the threat of mass rallies. But part of the opposition thought it was necessary to have a corresponding negotiation process to press Bakiev into making possible concessions. The concessions they considered were changes to the Constitution, which would restore provisions in the November Constitution, forming a new Cabinet involving the opposition and transforming the National TV Corporation into a public network.

Another opposition faction refused to take part in negotiations with the President and insisted on advancing early presidential elections as its principle demand. According to the radical opposition's logic, the new President would make the rest of the changes.

Besides the shifts in Cabinet and the creation of new opposition movements, the issue of Kyrgyzstan's entry into the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC) also aggravated political tension in the country.

An unusually heated discussion, involving all political forces, unfolded around the HIPC question. Debates on the economic issue were largely political and centered on the question of whether the current authorities can development the country's sovereignty.

The issue of entering the HIPC Program became politically important because it exposed the country's identity problems and brought new social forces, which actively joined the political process, to light. Several public associations emerged and advanced political goals, including the formation of independent Kyrgyz politics and moving the country along its own path of development, strengthening sovereignty. Anti-American feeling also increased.

A broad political dialogue between the President and leaders of the moderate opposition, primarily Almaz Atambaev, became another important process - resulting in agreements to change the current Constitution and form a new Cabinet involving the opposition.

This was very important, since the lack of dialogue between the authorities and the opposition put the country in danger of new setbacks, which could turn confrontation between the authorities and opposition from rallies into a head-on clash.

The negotiations significantly influenced the alignment of political forces in Kyrgyzstan. Talks between a part of the opposition and the authorities became a key moment highlighting the split in the opposition in attitudes towards President Bakiev and the role of the president as the main political force.

If the opposition faction that flatly refused to negotiate with the President and demand his resignation had won, there would have been an objective rollback to a new wave of what was called "ketsinism". In this case the President (no matter who it is) would be seen as unacceptable in any situation and part of the electorate would not view his/her actions as political. Forming such an inflexible attitude towards the authorities in general and the President in particular is the direct danger of irreversible destructive processes in the political structure in Kyrgyzstan.

Proper communication between the authorities and opposition is new to Kyrgyzstan. It represents important mechanical components of consensual democracy, which is developing in the country.

In general the opposition rally is also a positive event because it demonstrated that there are ways to force the authorities to compromise and listen to those who disagree with them. Despite the fact that the rally did not enjoy broad support from the population, it reminded people as well as the President that the head of state's actions affect individual interests and should correspond to them.

At the same time it could be confidently stated that rallies do not advance political slogans as effectively as they used to and they do not enjoy serious public support. It is clear that it is not enough to stage rallies and the opposition has to offer the public its own program of actions and vision for the future, not just slogans. If March 2005 became a crisis of unipolar authority, which was not able to negotiate with and listen to important political actors, then April 2007 became a heavy blow to the opposition, which had no program.

The April 2007 rally demonstrated that inability to progress when political events are developing rapidly, and rejecting negotiations lead to political deadlock and the defeat of radicalism, illustrated by the way the opposition rally ended on April 19.

The defeat of the opposition led to attempts by the authorities to instigate persecution of the most radical members of the rally. Although there seemed to be no serious intention to instigate criminal proceedings against opposition figures when members of the United Front were detained and opposition offices were searched, nevertheless Kyrgyz politicians were aware that these actions threatened a return to political repressions. The unwarranted arrest

of the entire circulation of several opposition newspapers caused serious anxiety. A number of political parties made harsh statements, condemning the authorities' actions and nongovernmental human rights organizations have visibly livened up.

Barring the former President's daughter, Bermet Akaeva, from running in presidential by-elections showed that the authorities had toughened their stance against opponents. The same grounds (residence qualification) that Akaev used to prevent his opponents from contesting elections were used to cancel Bermet Akaeva's candidacy. Although their negative attitude towards Bermet Akaeva keeps opposition politicians from protesting against the authorities actions, it nevertheless illustrates the authorities' ability and readiness to employ any methods to eliminate their political opponents.

3. Forthcoming trends

The main trend for the immediate future is a change in the lay-out of the political arena where new political centers are being created.

Three such groups could be pointed out.

The first one is the politically transformed parliament where a new structure of influence formed by party factions is being created. This puts the issue of forming a new parliament from party lists in the near future on the agenda. The possible outcome of this process will be the self-dissolution of Parliament with subsequent parliamentary elections according to the new rules in fall 2007 or spring 2008.

The second group is a bloc of politicians in the executive, who are independent of the President. Their position and desire to change current cabinet relations with the President will intensify the President-Cabinet conflict. Given the steady persistence of Almaz Atambaev and his allies, some changes can be achieved, but Atambaev himself may fall prey to this confrontation as soon as fall 2007.

The third group is represented by political parties. The existing Asaba, Ata-Meken, Ar-Namys, Party of Labor and Unity, the recently founded Ak-Shumkar and new parties that will enter the political scene, will become one of the key centers of political action. It is them and not the pre-existing movements that will drive constitutional reform, Parliamentary elections and legal changes to fight corruption and create favorable conditions for rapid economic development.

Most likely it the President will try to suspend or delay constitutional reform as much as possible, gather supporters to gain a majority in the new parliament and prevent changes to the spheres of influence and the level of Cabinet control.

In this scenario, several outcomes are possible in the near future, depending on the consistency of those involved in the political process.

The first scenario: if the President's team don't take revenge and try to reclaim power over the Cabinet, continue talks with the opposition during which constitutional reform will be take place, at least partially weakening presidential powers and strengthening parliament, then conditions in the country will allow for the development of real development programs with the participation of many political and economic actors and the establishment of common political rules.

The development of this scenario could be held back by the ambitions of certain opposition politicians. Besides, the relatively harsh dispersal of the opposition rally given the support it received may lead to a situation where certain forces will try to consolidate their positions at the expense of political dialogue.

The second scenario: during the course of constitutional reform the President will try to keep most of his current powers, including the power to form the Cabinet. In this case it is quite possible that Almaz Atambaev will resign leaving no way out of a new round of political crises, which may again raise the issue of Bakiev's legitimacy as president.

This scenario is under the threat of a new round of confrontation between the opposition and the President.

The third scenario: The President will concede some of his powers, including the power to form the Cabinet. But at the same time he will take steps to strengthen his positions in the legislature. This means that by the end of the year there will be early parliamentary elections with party lists and the country will prepare for a new wave of party building.

This scenario could be jeopardized if MPs refuse to go for early parliamentary elections.

The second and third scenarios have similar outcomes as both will lead to new political confrontation by fall: the possible dissolution of parliament, parliamentary elections and Cabinet change.

4. Conclusion

Notwithstanding a number of positive changes in the country's political system, the dialogue between the authorities and opposition remains mostly interpersonal rather than inter-institutional, i.e. as usual it is the political figures who negotiate. State development is unlikely, if this continues but at the same time there is a high risk of renewed conflict.

Therefore political consistency in terms of a dialogue between the branches of government, the authorities and the opposition and the authorities and civil society, provides the main guarantee for development and stability. Without stability it is impossible to build an effective political system in Kyrgyzstan.

A coordinated plan, involving all main political forces, on how to achieve political stability should form the basis of such talks. The plan should be adopted as a result of continuing political negotiations in the near future.

The authorities have to renounce political persecution or even threatening it. Political amnesty for everyone who participated in political events over the past few years might be a possible step in this direction and the President could raise this issue so that Parliament can solve it.

At the same time it is important to explain to people the danger in actions like blocking highways, taking over government buildings and private property and taking officials hostage. Such actions threaten stability in the country and the problem should be fixed through laws which reinforce an individual or organization's responsibility for such actions.

FOREIGN POLICY

The internal political situation in the Kyrgyz Republic remained tense and turbulent in the first quarter of 2007. Felix Kulov's resignation from the prime ministerial post and the collapse of the tandem resulted in new political arrangement with confrontation between the authorities and the opposition. Two things took centre stage: The formation of two cabinets in a short period of time – under Azim Isabekov, then Almazbek Atambaev - and the preparations made by the authorities and the opposition ahead of the April rallies which demanded President Kurmanbek Bakiev's resignation and constitutional reforms.

The complete involvement of the authorities and the opposition in a mutual power struggle pushed the country's foreign policy into the background yet again and there was a "forced" silence on the issue.

But a number of events occurred during this period that have a significant impact on Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy. First of all, experts stressed the **refusal** of Isabekov's government **to participate in the HIPC programme**, an initiative supported by President Bakiev. All cabinet members except the Finance Minister Akylbek Japarov, voted against joining the HIPC programme. Prior to the cabinet vote, President Bakiev delivered speech to government and said that "by joining the programme we admit that we cannot solve our problems independently. We cannot let the world think that Kyrgyz are living at the expense of other countries and people."

The president's decision was largely politically motivated as a forced step in his fight against the opposition and a bid to reduce the bad feeling among the public. However, the decision also has the potential to go against Bakiev in servicing large external debt with a modest state budget and a complicated relationship with donors.

At the end of March 2007, a **session of foreign missions' leaders in the Kyrgyz Republic** was held in Bishkek. During the session, in which all of the country's high officials took part, Bakiev defined the priorities and goals of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy in the short and medium terms. The basic elements of Bakiev's speech were most likely taken from the ideas behind the as yet unpublished foreign policy, which was approved in April 2007.

The president defined following main points:

- The principle goal of the foreign policy is to further develop and strengthen relations with CIS countries, particularly Russia.

- The Key element in the foreign policy guidelines is to get complex policies with **Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan** underway.
- **Relations with China** in all spheres of cooperation should be developed on a pragmatic basis without an ideological focus. In economic relations, Kyrgyzstan should focus on the mining industry, the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railroad, completion of the Osh-Sarytash-Irkeshtam highway and the restoration and export of Kyrgyz electricity.
- **In relations with the USA** Kyrgyzstan should focus on smoothing bilateral trade and investment relations with political interaction on the principles of sovereign equality and mutual advantage.
- **Germany** remains a priority country in the European market, as a leading, active donor.

The next key event in the first quarter of 2007 was a number of significant personnel replacements in the foreign policy system. Former Foreign Affairs Minister Alikbek Jenshenkulov was replaced by Ednan Karabaev, who joined Isabekov's cabinet, and later Atambaev's.

For reference:

Karabaev Ednan Oskonovich

Graduated from the economics department at the Kyrgyz National University (1975). Member of the International Academy of Informatization.

1990-92 – head of the president's office, minister.

1992- State Secretary, parliament member.

1992-1994- Foreign Affairs Minister.

1994-2007- professor, head of the international relations department at the Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University.

From February 8- Foreign Affairs Minister.

No official reasons were given for Jekshenkulov's resignation and Karabaev's appointment as Foreign Affairs Minister. According to a number of experts, President Bakiev took the decision because there had been little activity or success in foreign affairs. Experts particularly pointed out the lack of progress in cooperation with Russia and worsening of relations with the USA in 2006. Many experts also see Karabaev's appointment as a bid to strengthen the pro Russian focus in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy.

In the first quarter the head of foreign policy in the president's administration was unexpectedly replaced. Islan Ryskulov took over from E. Ibraimov, a diplomat who had held the position since October 2005.

For reference:

Ryskulov Islan Abdybachaevich

In 1981 graduated from the Frunze Polytechnic Institute, specialty – technological engineering. Speaks Russian, English and German fluently.

2001-2003- Advisor to the Kyrgyz Embassy in Germany.

2003-2004- Advisor to the Foreign Affairs Minister.

2004- head of the Eastern countries department at the Foreign Affairs Ministry.

2004- 2006- Consular General of the Kyrgyz Republic to the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

From April 5, 2007- head of foreign policy in the president's administration.

Married, has three children.

Since the beginning of the year the head of the international cooperation department at the government office has also changed twice. Firstly, A. Kurumbaev was appointed instead of B. Junusov and one month later S. Isakov was made head of the department. Those replacements in the government office are most likely related to the change in prime ministers.

Experts previously noted that the main foreign affairs drive for Kyrgyzstan in 2007 should be: the country's chairmanship of the SCO and organizing the SCO Summit in Bishkek, and the need to steady Kyrgyz-USA relations. According to experts, despite Bishkek's efforts, no special progress was made in these areas in the first quarter of the year. Moreover, taking the continuing unstable public and political situation in Kyrgyzstan into account, the SCO countries were considering holding the SCO Summit in Russia or Uzbekistan instead. After the public and political situation in Kyrgyzstan "stabilized" in April, the chances that Bishkek will host the Summit has grown, however the issue will most likely remain open and the final decision is expected to be taken at the SCO Foreign Ministers session soon.