

POLITICAL SYSTEM OF KYRGYZSTAN: PREREQUISITES AND FACTORS OF TRANSFORMATION

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ABSTRACT

The author analyzes the stages, prerequisites, and factors relating to the political transformation in Kyrgyzstan. | If it succeeds, the Republic will be able to integrate into the worldwide globalization processes based on the values of democracy.

KEYWORDS: *Kyrgyzstan, political transformation, modernization, political system, political institutions, democracy, democratization processes, parliamentary system.*

Introduction

Democratization is the main development trend in the contemporary world. Despite its long history, democracy is not an ideal system of governance, yet it is the only alternative to a system that suppresses human rights and freedoms. The Soviet successor-states are working hard to arrive at a more adequate democratic order, this being an important part of their modernization efforts.

The democratic changes underway in the CIS countries have certain specific features determined by the post-totalitarian transit, which is much harder than the post-authoritarian transit and is being undertaken in less advantageous conditions.¹

The processes unfolding in the Soviet successor-states look very much like the so-called third wave of democratization that engulfed a large group of states and did much to shape their present political systems. The post-Soviet states have been changing under the strong impact of the following identical external factors: the Soviet Union's dissolution; the old Western democracies; and the world community's move toward globalization.²

In Kyrgyzstan, social modernization is going on along with its transition from totalitarianism to democracy, which means that the country needs political modernization as well.

In the absence of basic democratic principles, traditionalism, the political elites' authoritarian thinking, remnants of the Soviet period, social and economic crises, etc. are having a strong effect on political modernization in the Kyrgyz Republic as a spontaneous process developing from one revolution to another.

Prerequisites and Factors of Political Transformation

Political analysts in the West, Russia, and partly in the Kyrgyz Republic believe that the prerequisites, factors, and results of the political transformation in the contemporary world should be treated as an absolute analytical priority. In the mid-1980s, analysts or, rather, experts in transitology moved away, to some extent, from the classical tradition of studying the democratization processes. Since then, they have been concentrating not on the so-called structural (objective) social, economic, cultural, psychological, civilizational, religious, and other factors, but on the procedural (orientated at the actors) factor, that is, the strategy and tactics of political actors at the elite level in particular. This approach relies on the fact that "correct" (and to a significant extent corresponding to the theory of games) strategies and tactics (irrespective of the structural conditions and prerequisites) might create efficient democratic institutions and procedures in any sociocultural and historical context.³

Russian analysts are convinced that Kyrgyzstan's political system was changed under the pressure of predominantly procedural factors, that is, decisions of political actors and their actions. Unable or unwilling to seek and reach compromises to avoid violence, they feared an open political competition that might cost them power and property as its collateral. Hybrid regimes with vague prospects were a natural result of the above.⁴

We should, however, take into account the structural prerequisites and factors that affect the formation and development of democratic governance—this is justified by twenty-three years of Kyrgyzstan's sovereign development.

¹ See: M.S. Ashimbaev, *Politichesky transit: ot globalnogo k natsionalnomu izmereniiu*, Erlorda, Astana, 2002, p. 28.

² See: E.V. Pavlov, *Politicheskaya sistema perekhodnogo obshchestva v usloviakh globalizatsii: tsentralnoaziatskaya spetsifika*, Bishkek, 2008, p. 38.

³ See: A.Yu. Melvil, "Analiz rezhimnykh izmeneniy v sovremennom mire: novye demokratii i/ili novye avtokratii? (Kompleksnyy analiz globalnykh politiko-ekonomicheskikh protsessov)," 2010, available at [<http://www.hse.ru/org/projects/26406137>].

⁴ See: *Ibidem*.

Radical political and economic changes began as soon as the Soviet republic became an independent state. Its new leaders opted for liberal democracy, a choice largely determined by considerable financial aid from international structures and the developed countries of the West. Engaging in democratic reforms was the main condition for issuing soft loans and grants.

The course toward democratization was nothing more than a smokescreen behind which the truth of what was going on in the upper echelons of power was essentially undetectable. Society and the state found it hard to adjust to formal and malfunctioning institutions of democracy (elections, separation of powers, independent media, and civil society structures). The expert community identified the roots of the problem as follows: Western models were planted in the very specific soil of the country's historical, social, and cultural development.

Dr. Sally Cummings, who specializes in Central Asia and the Caucasus, says that the institution of political opposition in Kyrgyzstan (indispensable in a democratic state) is based on traditional tribal social structures and their perpetual confrontation, a result of the barely developed post-Soviet state institutions that had neither central power, nor any experience in independent functioning.⁵

The country found itself in an impasse—the democratic institutions were not functioning, while partial legalization of the traditional and obviously inefficient institutions (kurultais being one of them) contradicted the norms of liberal democracy.

This and the social and economic crisis caused turbulence in Kyrgyzstan's political life—in the two decades of its independent existence, the country has experienced two coups (in 2005 and 2010), interpreted as color revolutions.

Professor Nur Omarov has pointed out that authoritarian traditionalism can be described as the most striking feature of the Kyrgyz development model, in which certain elements of Western liberalism were used as constitutional frills. The post-Soviet ideological vacuum was gradually filled with the idea of traditionalism (previously existing at the level of popular sub-culture), a process driven by the policy of national resurrection, which relied on archaic forms of consciousness when building a modern system of government.⁶

As could be expected, this slowed down democratization, turned the process back to the authoritarian system predominant in Central Asia, and revived the old contradictions between the southern and northern elites.

First President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akaev later wrote that the country had opted for “a genuinely democratic version of development.” The people in power, however, could not decide whether the Turkish, Chinese, East European, Swedish, Swiss, or Japanese development model was best suited to Kyrgyzstan. The country finally arrived at the so-called “Kyrgyz road to democracy,” which, the former president said, “gathered the best elements of our national experience rooted in many centuries of our history and combined them with the latest Western experience that could be adjusted to our conditions.”⁷ Translated into common language, this meant that at that time, too, the people at the top doubted that this approach was wholly justified.

The political transformation in Kyrgyzstan relied on many social, economic, and cultural phenomena extracted from the country's past, the traditional principles of nomad and clan-tribal democracy in particular. Modernization of the social and political context was facilitated by the high level of education, science, and culture the republic inherited from its Soviet past.

⁵ See: H. Tatkalo, “Revoliutsii 2005 g. i 2010 g. v Kyrgyzstane: obshchee i osobennoe,” available at [<http://analiz.kg/analytics/43-revolyuczii-2005-g-i-2010-g-v-kyrgyzstane-obshhee-i-osobennoe>], 9 April, 2012.

⁶ See: N.M. Omarov, *Gosudarstva Tsentralnoy Azii v epokhu globalizatsii: poiki strategii razvitiia*, Bishkek, 2008, p. 68.

⁷ *Ibidem*.

There are certain cultural and historical factors responsible for the very specific forms and models of the democratic transit.

In his Ph.D. thesis, Asylbek Anarbekov described Kyrgyzstan as a symbiosis of traditionalism and political innovations unfolding in the country's political system.⁸

It is common knowledge that, despite the impacts of the czarist and Soviet regimes, the Kyrgyz remained devoted to the principles of traditional democracy to a much greater extent than their Central Asian neighbors. By the time Russia moved into Central Asia, the Kyrgyz nomads were living in a tribal patriarchal society on the brink of disintegration. The Kazaks, on the other hand, had already created a hierarchy of clans and tribes based on their numerical strength, territories, property, etc.

The patriarchal society was falling apart to create clan and tribal aristocracy, many of its members being wise, far-sighted, authoritative, and independent leaders who knew how to listen to the nobles, as well as to the ordinary members of the clans and tribes.

Ilyas Kurmanov writes about the "nomad democracy" among the Kyrgyz that survived until the early 19th century. The kurultais (*zhhyyyys*, popular assemblies) were the supreme bodies of power, so-called "military democracy," the last step toward class society and an early feudal state.⁹

Clan and tribal heads (elders and *biys*) were elected; at times of military threat, the Kyrgyz elected khans (military commanders). At that time, group interests predominated. The ideas of individual and individual interests were fairly vague, especially among the nomads; the same can be said about the ideas of freedom, political rights, and economic independence.

This explains the present specifics of democratic changes and development of the parliamentary system. The specific historical and cultural conditions of the Kyrgyz are responsible for the fairly fast, not to say stormy, development of democracy and civil society in the Kyrgyz Republic (with a seeming absence of basic conditions) compared with its neighbors. The country came to be known as an "island of democracy."¹⁰

Tribalism (privileges extended to individual clans or families), a typical feature of nomadic culture, can be described as one of the greatest obstacles on the road toward political transformations. Historians D. Dzhanushaliev and V. Ploskikh, who studied tribalism in depth, concluded that it has preserved the Kyrgyz's specific centuries-old culture and independence; they survived under Soviet power, which relied on bans and punishments as methods of state governance.

What is more, the deficit-affected Soviet economy taught the Kyrgyz to cherish informal ties; this largely affected their ideas about values, as well as their worldview and self-awareness as a nation.¹¹

In Kyrgyzstan, formal and informal political cultures live their parallel lives even though they clash from time to time; they constitute one of the greatest impediments on the road to political modernization. Every force determined to achieve national agreement should take this into account.

On the other hand, sociocultural factors keep members of social groups together; they are responsible for the predominant sociocultural principles of interaction and the mechanisms of social mobilization, responsible for the nature of political relations in the Kyrgyz Republic.

This is further confirmed by the studies carried out abroad. American analyst Kathleen Collins describes the political relations in Central Asian countries as "politics of clans," the corner-

⁸ See: A.B. Aharbekov, *Politicheskaia modernizatsia v Kyrgyzskoy Respublike (1991-2008 gg.)*, Ph.D. thesis, Moscow, 2010.

⁹ See: I. Kurmanov, *Zakonodatelnaiia vlast Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki v globaliziruiushchemsia mire*, Bishkek, 2012, p. 54.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ See: D. Dzhanushaliev, V. Ploskikh, "Tribalism and nation-Building in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3, 2000, pp. 118-119.

stone of political and economic power: “Clans are informal organizations based on kin and fictive kin ties.”¹² The author describes the informal pacts between clans as a source of stability of the state and regime. On the other hand, however, they largely slow down democratization and liberalization, Kyrgyzstan being one of the most graphic examples. She writes that the clans are political actors with “a profound impact on the nature of post-transitional regimes and the potential for regime durability,” as well as consolidation of authoritarianism. In the long-term perspective, this will negatively affect consolidation of authoritarian power and its stability.¹³

Scott Radnitz, an American political scientist, pointed to the strong impact the local communities and clan-tribal relations exert on domestic policy. He is convinced that clans have no great role to play in rallying the masses at the regional level of political activities and that the political process unfolding at the national level and supported by the popular masses is based on the solidarity of the local communities and the patron-client relations. The clan and tribal affiliation of local politicians can be viewed as one of the elements of the local political context.

Johan Engvall, who made “the anatomy” of Kyrgyzstan the subject of his study, has identified an interconnection between social and cultural values and weaker law and order and more obvious corruption in the republic.¹⁴ He pointed out that under the pressure of the social and cultural values that supported traditional clan, tribe and regional ties, the political elite preferred to keep away from the legal reforms and was doing next to nothing to uproot corruption.

Much of the above confirms, in particular, that sociocultural factors do affect political relations in the republic and the emerging political culture.

Kyrgyzstan is modernizing; it is moving away from a traditional to a modern society; it is trying to overcome paternalism and the factors that block the much needed transformations. The process is associated with the fact that Kyrgyzstan accepted democracy as one of the main forms of political self-organization of society. Disintegration of traditionalism forces people to defend their interests and give them a chance to use the advantages created by democratic freedoms. This, however, results in a contradictory combination of traditionalism and liberalism and, hence, tension and instability. Hence the country’s political and intellectual elite is reassessing traditional values and is formulating a new national agenda, which will give the nation a new development strategy. This can give rise to “endemic” variants of political consciousness and political organization that can hardly be explained within the Western democratic tradition.

Ilyas Kurmanov has written that traditionalism, under the pressure of democracy, is growing pragmatic and geared toward “here and now” situations; liberal ideas, on the other hand, being superimposed (or combined) with traditionalism lose much of their subtlety. The ideas about democracy are formal and archaic, which means that democratic values will not become behavioral patterns of the elite and ordinary people.¹⁵

The paternalism revived in kurultais, lustration, friend/foe, etc. causes repeated traditionalism of society, in which traditional norms and ideas find their way into new phenomena.

Political and economic transformation should become an organic process that spreads to the depths of society and adjusts traditional values to the realities of the day. Some of the traditional values will prove useful—collectivism, solidarity inside groups, and moral values lost in the West, which is hurriedly restoring them.

¹² K. Collins, “The Logic of Clan Politics: Evidence from Central Asian Trajectories,” *World Politics*, Issue 56, January 2004, p. 231.

¹³ See: *Ibid.*, p. 260.

¹⁴ See: J. Engvall, “Kyrgyzstan: Anatomy of a State”, *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 54, No. 4, July-August 2007, p. 41.

¹⁵ See: I. Kurmanov, *op. cit.*, p. 70.

Zakir Chotaev from Kyrgyzstan has identified several conditions conducive to the emergence and development of the modern political system, which would rely on the traditional cultural values of the Kyrgyz. He believes that clans, regional and tribal groups tied together by shared interests might be represented in the parliament and united into a coalition. After a while, under the pressure of the proportional voting system, which presupposes republic-wide representation, political forces from the entire country (united into parliamentary factions) might gradually develop into political parties.¹⁶

The political transformation of Kyrgyzstan should not be limited to “information technologies;” the process should rely on and preserve the best features of traditional society, which is being reformed. In this way the country, caught in a whirlpool of global and fierce rivalry of states, markets, and ideas, will be able to suppress the mounting confrontation, shape its own identity, and, in this way, survive as a country.

Stages of Political Transformation in the Kyrgyz Republic

To better understand the specifics of the political system of Kyrgyzstan we should look at the stages of its adjustment to post-Soviet reality.

The reforms triggered by perestroika of the mid-1980s created prerequisites for the destruction of the Soviet political system and transfer to democracy. This was when political and public organizations geared toward the republic’s national revival were set up as the first step toward a multi-party system, the main ones being the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, and the Ashar and Demos. Perestroika discredited many of the basic Soviet values and started a gradual shift toward liberal values, the ideas of constitutionalism, the market, and civil society.

On 24 October, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Kirghiz S.S.R. passed the Law on Instituting the Post of the President of the Kirghiz S.S.R. and on Amendments and Addenda to the Constitution of the Kirghiz S.S.R.

Stage One: A New Political System is Set Up (1991-1993)

On 27 October, 1990, the Supreme Soviet of the Kirghiz S.S.R. elected Askar Akaev president of the republic. On 12 October, 1991, he legitimized his position with 96% of votes cast for him at the first presidential election. The country set off on the road to democratic changes leading to a new political system.

In the West, political science distinguished two stages of the democratic transit:

- (1) setting up democratic institutions and consolidating “formal democracy;”
- (2) consolidating democracy at a higher level of democratic changes.¹⁷

¹⁶ See: Z.J. Chotaev, *Parlamentskaia forma pravleniia v Kyrgyzstane: problemy i perspektivy*, Bishkek, 2012, p. 124.

¹⁷ Quoted from: A.B. Elebaeva, *Politicheskaia transformatsia: opyt Kyrgyzstana v mirovom kontekste*, Bishkek, 2002, p. 77.

During the first stage of democratic changes in Kyrgyzstan (1991-1993), the country lived through constitutional reform and reorganization of the institutions of state governance and, in 1993, acquired a New Constitution, which changed the country's name from the Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the Kyrgyz Republic and created legal prerequisites for a democratic political regime.

The 1993 Constitution relied on the following principles:

- Separation of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial;
- Election of the president by popular vote;
- Differentiation between functions and authorities of state power and local self-governance.

The New Constitution, which spoke of “separation of state power into legislative, executive, and judicial branches, and their coordinated functioning and interaction” (Art 7.1), differed greatly from the Soviet constitutions.

The constitutions of most countries rely on this principle of separation of powers, which has historically justified itself.

Under the 1993 Constitution, the prime minister performed executive functions together with the president.

Under Art 46 “The President

- (a) appoints the Prime Minister and members of the Government in accordance with the procedure set forth in the Constitution;
- (b) accepts the resignation petitions of the Prime Minister, Government or its members;
- (c) decides on resignation of the Prime Minister or Government;
- (d) designates referendum on his own initiative;
- (f) dissolves the parliament on the results of the referendum.”

It should be said that the 1993 Constitution envisaged a checks-and-balances system in the structure of the bodies of state power. According to Avtandil Arabaev from Kyrgyzstan, this was the first step toward a fuller and more efficient separation of powers.¹⁸

At the same time, certain articles of the 1993 Constitution indicated that the form of governance in the republic differed from the semi-presidential (premier-presidential) form. Under Art 46, the president “on his own initiative or at the suggestion of the Prime Minister of the Kyrgyz Republic has a right to dismiss from the office a head of an administrative institution or other body of executive authority,” which contradicts one of the main criteria of the premier-presidential system, in which the Cabinet depends on the parliament.

Under the 1993 Constitution, the president “submits draft laws to the Jogorku Kenesh, signs and promulgates laws, returns laws with his objections to the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, and is entitled to suspend regulatory legal acts of the Government and other bodies of executive authority.” Under Art 47, “the President issues decrees and orders in accordance with and for the execution of the Constitution and laws. Decrees and orders of the President must be executed in the entire territory of the Kyrgyz Republic.”

The above suggests that the New Constitution created the prerequisites for a presidential republic in Kyrgyzstan; the country obviously had no conditions indispensable for a parliamentary republic.

At the same time, it created the legal conditions necessary for the relatively independent functioning of the legislative and executive branches of power and for a balance between them. In these conditions, the president could not rule the state single-handedly.

¹⁸ See: A.A. Arabaev, *Konstitutsionnoe razvitie Kyrgyzstana*, Bishkek, 1998, p. 61.

The expert community of Kyrgyzstan agrees that the 1993 Constitution combined features typical of very different models—a purely presidential republic and a premier-presidential (semi-presidential) republic.

The 1993 Constitution laid the legal foundation of a democratic political regime in Kyrgyzstan; the parliament had a great role to play in forming the structure of the government and identifying the major trends of domestic and foreign policies.¹⁹

To sum up: between 1991 and 1993 the country became independent and acquired a president and a new constitution; it set up institutions of civil society, developed democracy, dealt with the accumulated social and economic problems, and moved toward a predominantly market economy.

Stage Two: Transfer from the Semi-Presidential to the Presidential Form of Governance (1994-2005)

In 2004, it became clear that the president was gaining more power, while the parliament was losing some of its rights; in fact the president added a large part of the legislative powers to his own executive functions.

On 24 October, 1995, the country first elected the president on an alternative basis; President Akaev was reelected with 73% of the votes. The referendum of 10 February, 1996 made it possible to pass, on 17 February, 1996, the Law on Amendments and Addenda to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, which considerably widened the powers of the president and deprived the parliament of some of its prerogatives.

An analysis of the 1996 Constitution tells us that the country acquired the legal prerequisites for a presidential form of government; many authors spoke about an obvious trend toward an authoritarian regime sprinkled with democracy.²⁰

In this way, in 1995 and 1996, the country slid toward authoritarianism; the executive power branch dominated in the regime with weakly developed democratic institutions and civil society—a situation typical of formal, or limited, democracy. The amendments and addenda of 1996 reflected the new balance of political power; the president and his allies won the power struggle. The amended Constitution registered the smaller role of the parliament and the fact that new structures gravitated toward the power center, that is, the president. Despite the loudly proclaimed course toward “political modernization,” authoritarian trends were on the rise, while the president was strengthening his position. In short, the country was drifting from a premier-presidential toward a presidential republic.

By the early 2000s, it had become clear that the Akaev regime was in crisis. The Aksy events in March 2002 had made it even more obvious and contributed to the regime change that took place later, on 24 March, 2005. There were other reasons as well. On 27 February, 2005, Akaev ran for

¹⁹ See: A.B. Elebaeva, op. cit., p. 77; A.B. Anarbekov, op. cit.

²⁰ See: *Politicheskaia transformatsiia: opyt Kyrgyzstana v mirovom kontekste*, Textbook, ed. by A.B. Elebaeva, Bishkek, 2002, p. 77.

and was elected to his third (unconstitutional) term, while the parliamentary elections that followed on 13 March, 2005 abounded in gross violations of democratic principles.

Stage Three: A Super-Presidential Form of Governance Takes Shape (2005-2010)

The events of 24 March, 2005 ushered in a new stage described as revival of the democratic changes suspended in the late 1990s. For several subjective and objective reasons, however, these intentions were pushed aside to give way to rapidly unfolding authoritarian traditionalism.

Very much like Akaev, the new president, Kurmanbek Bakiev, became a hostage of the traditionalist system, which determined the way he thought and acted. For obvious reasons, this bred serious doubts about the possibility of the country's successful modernization expected to create an open society and national economy that would be more competitive in the globalized world.

The new people in power preferred to move away from the course toward political democratization—they moved, instead, toward authoritarian and corrupt “family-clan” system of governance.

On 12 February, 2009, President Bakiev submitted to the parliament a Draft Law on Amendments to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic,²¹ which further strengthened presidential power. On 23 July, 2009, at the pre-term presidential election, he was re-elected president with 76.43% of the votes.²²

This ushered in reform of the institution of presidency. Very soon it became a center of authoritarian power that crushed the system of state governance. A Secretariat of the President of the KR and the Central Agency of the KR for Development, Investments and Innovations appeared headed by President Bakiev's son Maxim. His economic activities were one of the factors that stirred up protests across the country.

The president instituted new coordinating and consultative structures—the Presidential Consultative Council and the Development Council²³—and new posts: State Advisor to the President of the KR for Defense, Security and Law and Order, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of the KR, etc. This reduced the parliament, government, judicial structures and political and civil organizations to formal additions to the institution of presidency.

The ill-advised economic policy cost the republic part of its industrial potential. In 2010, trade and services created over 40% of the country's GDP, agriculture accounted for 30%, while industrial production for a meager 15%; over half of the republic's population lived below the poverty line.²⁴

People were disappointed in the democratic changes and dissatisfied: in April 2010, the country lived through another revolution that removed Bakiev from power.

²¹ Nearly a year later, the public could familiarize itself with the report submitted by the State Commission on the April 2010 events (see: [http://www.vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=4422&Itemid=83]).

²² See: “TsIK Kyrgyzstana ob'iaвила o pobede Bakieva na prezidentskikh vyborakh,” available at [<http://rus.newsru.ua/world/27jul2009/bakiew.html>].

²³ See: *Speech of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic Kurmanbek Bakiev at the Republican Conference on the Reforms of State Governance*, 20 October, 2009, available at [<http://www.msn.kg/showwin.php?type=newsportal&id=29783>].

²⁴ CIS Interstate Statistical Committee, available at [<http://www.cisstat.com>].

Throughout the twenty-odd years of its sovereignty, Kyrgyzstan survived two revolutions (on 24 March, 2005 and 7 April, 2010).

Stage Four: The Parliamentary-Presidential System of Governance is Taking Shape

At the referendum on 27 June, 2010, the country adopted Constitutional amendments that limited the power of the president and widened the rights of the democratically elected parliament. People supported the changes suggested by the republic's Interim Government: according to official data 90% of those who came to the polls voted for a parliamentary republic.²⁵ Kyrgyzstan, the first among the Central Asian countries, created an important political prerequisite of a transfer to a parliamentary republic.

It should be said that this choice was prompted not only by the unhappy experience of the presidential-parliamentary form of government of Akaev and Bakiev, but also by the country's history, its sociocultural, political, and economic experience. Indeed, the country lacked the traditions of national statehood; its bureaucracy proved inefficient, while the principles of popular democracy firm and tenacious. The present political relations in Kyrgyzstan are strongly affected by the high level of cohesion inside social groups, the principles of cooperation and interaction inside them, and the mechanisms of social mobilization.

The parliamentary form of governance looked very attractive because power was transferred peacefully, albeit through harsh competition among groups and parties. Moreover, this form of governance guaranteed openness when it came to sorting things out at the top level, permitted the people in power to appeal to society, ensured fair and just decisions, and protected the people against abuse of power at the very top.

The process has been far from easy in a region where neighbors prefer a political system focused on the president.

We should bear in mind that Kyrgyzstan's closest neighbors are large countries with rigidly centralized regimes in which legitimacy is sanctioned rather than elected. There is a fairly widespread opinion that the mentality and political culture of the Central Asian states are paternalistic; they view the government as sacred and the leader as a prophet or a messiah.

The Parliamentary Form of Governance: Positive and Negative Sides

Today in Kyrgyzstan and outside it, people cannot agree on the efficiency and prospects of the parliamentary system. This is true of the new political elite brought to power by the April events of 2010. Some influential political leaders, A. Beknazarov, I. Isakov, and others, objected to the

²⁵ See: Decision of the Central Commission for Elections and Referendums of the Kyrgyz Republics on the Results of the Referendum (National Voting) of the Kyrgyz Republic, 27 June, 2010, available at [<http://www.shailoo.gov.kg/index.php?module=content&page>].

parliamentary system and went as far as saying that it might degenerate into a parliamentary dictatorship.

Some of the deputies of the Zhogorku Kenesh (parliament), likewise, were very skeptical about the efficiency of this form of government. Deputy Dastan Bekeshov, for example, said that there was a parliament, but not parliamentary governance in Kyrgyzstan. Some of the critics tended to associate the negative assessments of what certain deputies or groups of deputies were doing with the function of the parliament as an institution.

This means that the Kyrgyz Republic might follow the road of authoritarian trends or a road leading to a strong and stable democratic power. There is a paradox—transfer to the parliamentary form of government inevitably strengthens authoritarian trends. Dastan Bekeshov believes that the present parliamentary-presidential system will move toward a presidential form of government.

The leaders of some of the CIS countries were quite open and categorical when talking about the parliamentary system as ill-suited to Kyrgyzstan and predicted a catastrophe.

Western political elites and members of international organizations such as the U.N., OSCE, and others think differently. On the whole, the world community hailed a parliamentary republic in Kyrgyzstan as a democratic beacon indispensable for political modernization.

Public opinion inside the republic is divided. Ivan Kamenko, a public security expert at the Public Fund Egalité, for example, predicts that the parliamentary system will shrink for the following reasons: “In the current political, economic, public, and social situation, Kyrgyzstan cannot afford parliamentarism: it has not yet acquired social, economic and financial groups and groups of influence which would develop into parties designed to represent the interest of social groups at the top, legislative level. We have not yet reached the point at which we would be able to live with parliamentarism; this is amply confirmed by the practice of parliamentarism.”²⁶

It remains to be seen what will come out of this experiment, very unusual for Central Asia. The first four years of parliamentarism in Kyrgyzstan have created certain positive and negative results.

The positive results are:

- A higher level of openness and transparency of decision-making and involvement of political parties (through their parliamentary factions) in shaping the executive and judicial powers and in running the state as a whole. The parliamentary form of government allows members of civil society to be involved in parliamentary discussions of draft laws and steps planned by the state, which makes the procedure more open and transparent, arrive at coordinated decisions and more democratic processes, and prevent deep crises and misunderstandings;
- Wider involvement of varied forces in the process of governance has invigorated political relations within the parliament in the form of much closer cooperation between the government and opposition forces in the parliament and a lower level of political confrontation in the streets and, hence, more stability;
- Liberalization of the media, which have become more independent, and development of political pluralism. This is confirmed by the studies carried out by Zakir Chotaev,²⁷ commentaries supplied by deputies of the parliament,²⁸ and the results of regular public opinion

²⁶ “Experts about the PParliament and Parliamentarism in Kyrgyzstan,” Institute of Public Policies, available at [<http://ipp.kg/ru/news/2156/>].

²⁷ See: Conclusions rest on the author’s interviews with members of the parliamentary factions in the Zhogorku Kenesh, December 2011.

²⁸ See: “Kyrgyzstan has Improved its Position in the Freedom of Press Rating,” 24.kg Information Agency, 12 February, 2013, available at [<http://www.24kg.org/community/147767-kyrgyzstan-uluchshil-pozicii-v-rejtinge-svobody.html>], 25 April, 2013.

polls conducted by the International Republican Institute among 1,500 respondents. The majority was very open when answering the following question: Are people in Kyrgyzstan afraid to speak openly about their political views? In May 2011, their share was 52%, in February 2012, 69%, and in February 2013, 57%.²⁹

— Conditions conducive to the appearance of political parties in the true sense of the word.

The negative results are:

- Absence of mechanisms for calling deputies to account. The government can be called to account by hook or by crook; it can be disbanded by a vote of no confidence, while the parliament, which has no clearly delineated duties and responsibilities and which is constantly criticized by the expert community and the people, remains indifferent;
- The ruined structure of governance was replaced with new types of relations and led to collisions of all sorts and imbalances; the ruined standards of the separation of powers mixed two different principles that sometimes disagree with the Constitutional laws;
- The greater role of the parliament and its stricter control over the government are not always straightforward; a mixed form of government means that the power of the parliament is not absolute. Today, the prime minister and the president are gaining more power, while the system is not ready to accept this in the absence of guarantees against absolute personal power;
- The lower role of institutional factors: not infrequently everything depends on one person;
- The low level of political culture among the parliamentary elite and at the grass-roots level. The republic's political elite is not quite ready for the parliamentary form of government; its undeveloped political culture is shaped by relations inside the factions and among the political parties still dominated by traditional ties rather than belonging to political parties and party ideology. So far, political forces find it hard to achieve a consensus and live up to their promises.

We can hardly say that parliamentarism is the best form of state governance for Kyrgyzstan, but we can say that the presidential-parliamentary republic is best suited to local conditions.

Conclusion

The democratic transit in Kyrgyzstan proved harder than expected. In the twenty-odd years of its independence, the republic has changed its Constitution nine times: it has changed its form of governance four times, disbanded its parliament three times, banished its presidents twice, and lived through two regime changes—in 2005 and 2010.

The twenty-three-year long experience of independence and the post-April 2010 period in particular suggest that the country has been given one more and maybe its last chance to build a democratic state. Today, democratization is closely connected with the realization of the semi-parliamentary form of government which, to a certain extent, prevents monopolization of power by one person or one institution of power.

²⁹ See: "National Public Opinion Poll in Kyrgyzstan," February 2013, International Republican Institute (IRI) with USAID support, available at [<http://www.iri.org/countries-and-programs/kyrgyz-republic/kyrgyz-republic>].

It is too early to tell whether the country is ready to transfer to a democratic form of government, but its future as a stable and independent state and an equal member of international politics fully depends on political modernization.

To survive, the Kyrgyz Republic must build a state based on the fundamental principles of democracy with a competent bureaucratic apparatus geared toward predictable and efficient policy carried out in the interests of all.

If it succeeds, Kyrgyzstan will be able to realize its main strategic priority: integration into the worldwide globalization processes based on the values of democracy and rationality.
