

CIVIL SOCIETY

**EVOLUTION
IN THE PARTY STRUCTURE
IN KYRGYZSTAN**

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The first constitution of the independent Kyrgyz Republic adopted in 1993 made political parties an important political institution. However, they have not yet developed into an efficient political instrument, into a “first fiddle” of sorts of the social and political processes, and have not yet claimed their potentially important role in the structures of power. So far, they remain outside the system and have not yet learned to properly perform their functions. While frequently leaving the constitutional and legal frameworks of their activity, they concede to traditional institutions (clans, tribalism, etc.), which unexpectedly revived as soon as the Communist Party’s monopoly in all political spheres was abolished and the republic became independent.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s the political situation was shaped by the fact that the Communist Party had fallen apart and left the way open for the opposition. The elections to the U.S.S.R. Supreme Soviet and to the Supreme Soviet of the Kirghiz Republic brought to the fore a group of democratically minded deputies. This ushered in an age of political democracy very much reminiscent of the situation in the Russian Empire after the 1905 revolution.

As before, the democratic forces proved weak, not only because former party and Soviet functionaries had captured the majority of the seats: the post-communist society had not yet been stratified into large social groups with shared social interests. The deputies expressed the more or less random instructions of their supporters living in certain territories. In other words, the new parties had practically no ties with the people; they were, rather, groups of like-minded people ranging from tens to hundreds of members. Finally, instead of cementing society and reaching a consensus about the reforms and the nature of the future social system, perestroika intensified the disagreements. Under these conditions political democracy is a purely formal procedure unable to rule. This has been amply demonstrated in all post-Soviet countries.

During the 70 years of Soviet power the few democratic traditions of pre-revolutionary Russia were destroyed; during perestroika populist meetings the democratic leaders used to reach power were the only form of people's political involvement. After the first election campaigns, in which the majority of Soviet citizens, including people in Kirghizia, demonstrated a lot of enthusiasm, society cooled down: none of the new leaders had any clear or well-substantiated programs. The democratic leaders, in turn, failed, or did not want, to establish feedback with their supporters. No wonder the democratic institutions developed into rivaling teams with ambitious leaders that soon fell into the old track of patronage, rivalry, diktat, and subservience.

Democracy was not an instrument, it was a ram used to destroy or disorganize the old power structures—no constructive steps followed. And what else was there to expect: the new people had neither administrative or management skills, nor responsibility. Their decisions were contradictory and incompetent and could not be carried out, while destructive trends gained momentum in the ideological vacuum and collapse of the old values.

It was in this context that new political parties and movements appeared in Kyrgyzstan.

Today, the republic is living through the first stage of party development—it is switching from the one-party to the multiparty system. Even though Kyrgyzstan has outstripped other post-Soviet countries with respect to the rate and scope of democratic reforms, it is trailing behind many of the CIS countries (with the exception of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, where there are practically no contemporary parties) in terms of party development.

Multiparty development in Kyrgyzstan is based on an alternative (informal) movement, which dates back to the late 1980s. It was at that time that several structures appeared, the most popular among them being the Demos political club at the *Komsomolets Kirghizii* newspaper, the Kirghiz branch of the Memorial Society (Memorial-Akykat), and the City Voters' Club, which soon became the center of attraction for democratically minded artistic intelligentsia. They were mainly discussion clubs that helped shape democratic mentality and formulate a system of democratic ideas and values. The first informal organizations never wanted to change the socialist social system; they formulated no political demands outside the C.P.S.U.'s political limits. Ashar, an informal society set up by young people who had come from the countryside to settle in the republic's capital (called Frunze at that time) and had no housing of their own, was another democratic structure that played an important role in political life. They organized the first ever civil disobedience campaign and forced the republican authorities to give them land for housing development.

In May 1990, amid the deepening economic and political crisis, the informal societies united into the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK), very much similar to the "popular fronts" mushrooming in other Soviet republics. The Democratic Movement was the first political organization to openly contest the ruling Communist Party. As the economic crisis in the republic deepened, the movement became even more radical than before, yet it never formulated an idea of the republic's independence. It was under its pressure that the dogmatic communist leadership headed by First Secretary of the C.C. Communist Party of Kirghizia A. Masaliev resigned to allow the democratic political forces under the republic's president Askar Akaev to come to power. In December 1990, however, the DMK started losing some of its members; one of them announced that it had been transformed into the Democratic Party Erkin Kyrgyzstan-Erk (Free Kyrgyzstan); and in October 1991, the Party of National Resurrection Asaba appeared (both structures were set up even before the C.P.S.U. was disbanded). Their slogans were basically anti-communist, very much in line with the prevalent national-patriotic sentiments.

Inevitably, the process was accompanied by internal struggle for leadership in the new parties. Late in 1992, for example, the Erk party split; its left wing later developed into the Ata-Meken Socialist Party. After the shock caused by the Soviet Union's disintegration, the old communist party reorganized itself into the Party of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan. In 1993, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan Party (DMKP), a party of the center, announced that it was the legal heir to the DMK. It was at approximately the same time that the Social-Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan was created. By 1995 the country had 12 registered political parties: the Republican People's Party set up in 1992, the Agrarian Party

(1993); the Party of Kyrgyzstan Unity—PKU (1994); the Democratic Party of Women (1994); the Agrarian-Labor Party (1994); and the Democratic Party of Unity of Kyrgyzstan, later transformed into the Political Party of the Afghan War Veterans and Participants in Other Local Conflicts. Before the first constitution, parties were set up according to the Soviet Law on Public Organizations adopted in the last years of perestroika.

In the fall of 1994, as the parliamentary elections scheduled for 1995 were drawing nearer, several political parties formed two election blocs: the Congress of Democratic Forces (Erk, the communists and six public associations) and For the Unity of Kyrgyzstan (PKU, the republicans and 12 public associations). This was the first attempt in the country's history at consolidating various political forces, yet the blocs failed to play a more or less important part in the 1995 elections. Political technologists in Kyrgyzstan and abroad agree that it was the majority election system that was responsible for this. At the same time, the parties and the processes of party development were too weak to be successful. For this reason, neither the parties, nor their representatives in the parliament could form party factions in the Zhogorku Kenesh (the parliament). It was too early to expect faction forming in the parliament.

At the second stage (1995-2000), there were 27 registered parties in the country; besides those enumerated above, there were the Party of People (Destitute), formed in 1995; the Manas El Party of Spiritual Resurrection (1995); the Party of Defenders of Interests of Industrial and Agrarian Workers and Poor Families (1996); the Party of the Working People (1997); the Party of Economic Resurrection of Kyrgyzstan (1998); the City Dwellers Party (1998); the My Country Party of Action (1998); the Party of Cooperators of the Kyrgyz Republic (1999); the Party of Popular Unity and Agreement (1999); the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (1999); the Adilet Republican Party (1999); the Ar-Namys Party of Dignity and Justice (1999); the Republican Party of Kyrgyzstan (1999); the Public Peasant (Farmer) Party (1999); the Kayran-El Party (1999). The year 1999 proved a year of party development, because the constitutional referendum of 1998 virtually introduced a majority-proportional system for forming the parliament. In May-June 1999, the republic acquired a new Election Code and the Law on Political Parties, which envisaged party life in greater detail. By the late 1990s, the country had all the laws on political parties it needed for further promoting the process of party development.

Today, there are 43 political parties in the republic; the number might have been even larger had not some of them merged, while others disbanded themselves. The number of parties, however, is no evidence of their quality. Many of the parties are still organizing themselves, while others are actually non-existent. Only three or four parties are functioning with any effect. At first glance, the range of parties covers the entire political spectrum: from rightist to leftist radicals. Regrettably, this did not make the party system clearer for many reasons. First, too many parties can be described in the language of political technologists as "marginal" or "relict" (such are the parties of the Afghan war veterans, women, old-age pensioners, the youth, etc.). Second, some of the parties have not yet drawn up relevant documents; they have no political programs, which makes it impossible to classify them according to their ideological or political preferences. Third, there are several anti-systemic parties, by which I mean parties that have nothing to do with the generally accepted political standards. For example, there are parties that, while calling themselves "rightist" or "liberal," use "leftist" or "radical" means and methods. Fourth, there is not much sense in identifying the local parties according to Western patterns: no matter what parties appeared in the republic they resembled the C.P.S.U. in their methods and means.

Still, ideologically the parties can be conventionally classified in the following way.

The left flank: the Communist Party with Prof. K. Ajibekova, former C.P.S.U. functionary, at the head; the Party of the Communists under A. Masaliev, in Soviet times leader of the Communist Party of Kirghizia, now deputy of the parliament; the Agrarian Party led by former C.P.S.U. functionary U. Sadykov; the Ata Meken Socialist Party headed by member of the parliament O. Tekebaev; and the Social-Democratic Party led by businessman A. Atambaev.

The center: the Alga, Kyrgyzstan Party (Forward, Kyrgyzstan) founded by B. Akaeva, daughter of President Akaev; the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan headed by businessman V. Chernomoretz,

deputy of the Bishkek City Council; the Economic Development Party under businessman V. Khon; the Adilet Republican Party headed by T. Kasymov, head of the presidential administration; and there are also marginal parties which describe themselves as centrist. There are a total of 30 parties in the center.

The right flank: the My Country Party of Action headed by Vice Premier D. Otorbaev; the Ar-Namys Party (Dignity) headed by F. Kulov, who used to be a vice president and who is now in prison; the Republican Party headed by journalist G. Tokombaev; the Party of Progress and Development led by former foreign minister M. Imanaliev, and the Voice of the People Party headed by banker B. Maripov.

The National-Patriotic Asaba Party headed by member of parliament A. Beknazarov does not belong to any of the above categories: it is working toward national resurrection of the Kyrgyz people.

The country has acquired a multiparty system which is politically too loose to successfully perform its functions. During the independence period, the country has already lived through several nationwide election campaigns: it elected a president in 1991, 1995, and 2000; a parliament in 1995 and 2000; local councils in 1995 and 2000; heads of local administrations (village heads and city mayors) in 2003; and held four national referendums (in 1995, 1996, 1998, and 2002). They demonstrated that the parties paid no attention to the local elections—no more than 2 or 3 parties bother at all to compete for local posts. The latest elections of the heads of local administrations in 2003 attracted only one party—the My Country Party of Action—which won 49 seats out of 460. The largest and the most influential among the parties, the Party of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan (an heir to the C.P.S.U.), has never bothered to compete for seats in the local structures. Obviously none of the political parties in the country, even the largest and most influential, have close contacts with the local self-administration system.

In 2000, only nine parties and two election blocs (out of a total of 25 registered parties) were allowed to compete for seats in the parliament with their party lists; others were kept out because of the disparity between their constituent documents and the election requirements and other violations of the legally established rules, or their organizational and financial inability to take part in the elections. Under the Election Code, the parties had 15 out of 60 (25 percent) seats in the Legislative Assembly of the Zhogorku Kenesh; this limited the number of parties able to squeeze into the parliament to five parties and one election bloc. The Party of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan won five seats; the pro-governmental bloc the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), four seats; the Democratic Party of Women, two seats; the Party of the Participants in the Military Events in Afghanistan, two; the Ata-Meken Socialist Party, one, and the My Country Party of Action, one seat.

Unfortunately, only two of the parties (the Party of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan and the Ata-Meken Socialist Party) managed to form parliamentary factions. On the whole, there were seven deputy groups in the Legislative Assembly, in which non-party deputies were also involved.

The leftist forces in the parliament are represented by the factions of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan (faction leader A. Masaliev) with six members; the Ata-Meken Socialist Party (faction leader O. Tekebaev) with two members; and the Kyrgyzstan Group headed by I. Isakov, who is the leader of the Novy Kyrgyzstan (New Kyrgyzstan) Party, with six members. The total number of deputies working in factions and groups is 14.

The rightist forces are represented in the parliament by the Right Coalition—On Ordo faction (faction leader Z. Kurmanov elected as member of the My Country Party of Action) with five deputies.

The center is represented by the following deputy groups: the Regions of Kyrgyzstan (leader Social-Democrat A. Zhaparov) with six members; For the People (leader M. Sultanov, a non-party deputy) with eight members, and Unity (headed by M. Kuchukov, a non-party deputy), 11 members. This makes 25 deputies in all.

Sixteen deputies preferred to remain so-called independent deputies.

It should be said that these groups are rather amorphous and fairly unstable; they are very much affected by the regional and clan factors. It is very important, however, that for the first time since the 1920s state power acquired politically recognizable outlines in the form of parliamentary factions and groups.

Many parties, while declaring their democratic principles, are merely hierarchical organizations in which decision-making belongs to the leader and where the leader is much more important than the political principles. This explains why such parties are inconsistent and inclined to random decisions and contradictory actions.

There is another fault: many of the parties are too small to create grass-root structures, to maintain contacts with the people, and to perform certain public functions. Such parties have no stable electorate or clear support; they try to attract people by criticizing power, which gives enough reason for criticism anyway.

As I have already pointed out, the majority of the parties are mono-national and are obviously of a limited, regional, nature. For this reason, people from the south join the parties headed by southern politicians; the same applies to the "northern" parties. The majority of the Russian-speakers prefer to remain outside the parties. To remedy the situation, the country should adopt laws, under which each of the parties should have its branches in at least 66 percent of the regions (five out of seven administrative units). On top of this, the minimum numerical strength of the regional branches (not less than 100 to 200 people) should be established. This will put an end to the regional nature of the parties. Since women are essentially not involved in party activities (they comprise half of the country's voters), it is necessary to legally register the share of women (not less than 30 percent) to be elected to representative and appointed to executive bodies.

The majority of the parties are poor to the extent that they cannot afford to pay for offices, publications, events, and paid functionaries. They have no contacts with the trade unions, probably because there are independent trade unions in the country, while those that are still functioning have become too close to the state.

Today, the party development process has slowed down; there is a new trend toward unification of the already registered parties (so far, the trend is limited to the centrist parties). This was an initiative from above, so only the pro-governmental parties are taking heed.

If these, and other, negative phenomena are removed, the country could switch to the second stage of party development: the party system should be structuralized, party democracy should be developed, while a three-party, and, possibly later, two-party system should be formed. So far, neither the authorities, nor the public have recognized how important a new party system is for democratic ideals and values to triumph. There is no clear idea about such a system, while the authorities and the public do not know what should be done in this respect.

After the fourth constitutional reform of 2002, the old party-free election system was restored. Elections became strictly personified, while the voters tend to support the well-known people rather than party programs. It is expected that all bureaucrats will be required to be non-party people again.

So far, all efforts to set up a system of party democracy have failed mainly because there is a general lack of understanding that these problems are extremely important for the future of democracy; because the authorities lack initiative; because regional political clans and the opposition interfere with positive development; because there are no traditions of party life; because the regional barons are holding tightly onto their power; and because national specifics are over-emphasized. Lack of political will and inadequate laws are the main obstacles.

It is interesting to discuss, in this connection, the traditions of national party development. The first parties appeared in Kyrgyzstan early in the 20th century, after they appeared in Russia. The process became even more active after the revolution of February 1917. The parties corresponded to the level of sociopolitical development of Kyrgyz society: there were few of them; their membership was small, while their organizational structures shaky. The Muslim parties headed by religious leaders enjoyed more respect than the others. They (Shuro-i-Islamiyya, Shuro-i-Ulema, Ittifak, and others) were working in the south where Islamic influence was much stronger. These parties described their aim as achieving Muslim unity and setting up a Muslim republic within democratic Russia. (Muslim, or Turkic identification was much closer to people's hearts than national identification.)

The Alash-Orda Party set up in 1905 by Kazakh and Kyrgyz intellectuals was the only secular party functioning in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and was a branch of the Constitutional-Democratic

Party of Russia. The union with the Russian liberals was not a success: in the nationalities question the Constitutional Democrats supported the Great Russian ideas while the Alash-Orda wanted wide national autonomy for the “Turkic people.” The party favored a democratic federative Russia with a parliament; it was highly respected by the national intelligentsia. On the whole, the Alash-Orda was a liberal party with certain specific ideas: they rejected private ownership of land and remained under the influence of the pan-Turkists, who wanted to unite all Turks into an autonomy within the Russian Federative Republic. Organizationally, the party took final shape after the February revolution of 1917; before 1918 it held three congresses. All the national parties of Turkestan hated czarism because of its obvious unwillingness to accept national equality and national development of the region’s autochthonous peoples.

There were branches of the socialist parties of Russia (the Mensheviks and, to a lesser extent, the Bolsheviks) that worked in the united social-democratic party organizations. The political and ideological opposition between them was less obvious than in central Russia; the Socialist-Revolutionaries set up their own party network—they preached peasant socialism. The influence of all of them on the popular masses was negligible.

The process of party development was cut short by the Bolshevik victory and the “red terror” launched after the attempt on Lenin’s life in 1918. Under the threat of repressions, some of the parties disbanded on their own free will, while others had to merge with the Bolsheviks. Many of those who disagreed with them either joined the opposition and the armed detachments of the basmachi or emigrated.

So far, there are no fundamental works in Kyrgyzstan dealing with the multiparty system, either because the documentary sources are inadequate, or because it is hard to read them (they used the Arabic script, which few academics today can read). Soviet historiography of the multiparty system and its history offers one of the two points of view. They were discussed in detail in two definitive collective works published in the 1970s: *Istoria Kirgizskoi S.S.R.* (History of the Kirghiz S.S.R.) and *Ocherki po istorii Kompartii Kirgizii* (Essays on the History of the Communist Party of Kirghizia). The former, a more primitive one, said that before the revolution there were no political parties in Central Asia; the latter recognized that there were several parties and described all non-Bolshevik parties as anti-Soviet. Soviet historiography never revealed the fact that the non-Bolshevik parties had hailed the October armed coup and resolved to cooperate with Soviet power. Their illusions were destroyed when the Kokand Autonomy set up by many multinational parties was crushed.

Only the Turkestan party of the Left Socialist-Revolutionaries was studied in any detail.¹ The first attempts at objectively analyzing the pre-revolutionary political parties in Kyrgyzstan were made when the republic acquired its independence.² The present day has not yet attracted any researchers. So far, individual articles, pamphlets and handbooks have appeared, the authors of which do their best to systematize the party development process.³

At the very beginning of perestroika, it was considered highly important to establish whether or not Central Asia had political parties before the revolution. The conservative communist leadership did a lot to distort the truth and prevent further democratic developments in the republic. First Secretary of the C.C. C.P.S.U. of Kirghizia A. Masaliev was fond of saying that the republic had no parties in the past and there was no need to set them up now. Democratic developments gave a clear answer to the question of whether the republic needed political parties or not.

The first political parties of Turkestan were far from ideal: they could rather be called circles or informal clubs (the same can be said of the parties of today) as far as their programs, organizational

¹ See: P.P. Nikishov, *Iz istorii krakha levykh eserov v Turkestane*, Kirgosizdat Publishers, Frunze, 1965.

² See: Z. Kurmanov, *Politicheskaia bor’ba v Kyrgyzstane: 20-e gody*, Ilim Publishers, Bishkek, 1997; Z. Kurmanov, E. Sadykov, *Abdykerim Sadykov. Lichnost i istoria*, Bishkek, 2002.

³ See: A. Akunov, E. Attokurov, “K pervym vyboram deputatov ZS ZhK KR po partiynym spiskam,” *Politika i obshchestvo* (Bishkek), No. 2, 2000, pp. 144-156; B. Malabaev, “Uchastie politicheskikh partiy v vyborakh deputatov Zhogorku Kenesha: problemy i perspektivy,” *Sbornik nauchnykh trudov iuridicheskogo fakul’teta KRSU*, KRSU Press, Bishkek, 2001, pp. 19-28; *Fraktsii i deputatskie grupy v parlamente Kyrgyzstana*, PROON Publishers, Bishkek, 2003; *Deputatskie ob’edineniia v Zhogorku Keneshe*, PROON Publishers, Bishkek, 2003.

structure, and methods were concerned. During the ten years of independence, our parties have not developed; they are still political clubs and circles with no clear division into activists and supporters, no clearly expressed political interests, no voters, no regional structures, and no programs. They do not run for parliament or local self-administrations. Their number is growing—their quality remains the same. The deputies that represent them in the parliament represent themselves rather than their political organizations. This explains why the authorities rejected proportional-majority representation in the Zhogorku Kenesh when carrying out the constitutional reform of 2002. According to Art 54 of the Constitution, political parties can nominate their representatives at parliamentary elections, which means that, according to the parliament's earlier decision registered in the election law, the party representatives and independent candidates compete on equal conditions. The majority system has been restored—this will preserve the current archaic political system dominated by regional groups and clans, rather than political parties. If the present election system survives no efficient deputy groups will be possible.

It seems that proportional representation was rejected for one more (never widely advertised) reason. The events of 2002 in Aksy, provoked by the failed attempt to arrest an opposition member of parliament and the subsequent shooting of his supporters at a rally, caused an acute political crisis in the country. The echo of these events was heard for about a year; even now, in 2004, it is hard to say whether the crisis has been left behind. It was not only conservative authorities that destabilized the situation by initiating the shooting—part of the blame should be placed on the political opposition, which organized numerous acts of civil disobedience. It was not easy to restore order, so it seems proportional representation was dropped because the people at the helm did not want to see the events repeated. Indeed, in a country where the standard of living remains low, the radical opposition has the best chance of winning a majority at the 2005 parliamentary elections. Proportional representation was abolished in the hope that the majority system and administrative instruments would create a more manageable parliament.

I cannot say that the leaders of the republic are unaware of the harm wrought by a situation in which political parties have no role to play, while the representative structures are managed by clans and regional groups. The majority system increases the chances of corrupt bureaucrats and members of criminal structures being elected to the parliament, which under the new constitution has acquired wider powers, right up to appointing cabinet members. Power says nothing about the need to leave the present paternalist-clan system of administration behind and move toward a democratic system, yet it is aware of this: it is promoting speedy decentralization of the administration, reform of the civil service and judicial system, introduction of so-called conscientious governance, etc.

The hopes that political parties will mature without state support proved futile; back in 2001 the government introduced certain amendments to the Law on Political Parties aimed at tightening up the requirements on them. So far, these efforts have been explained by the need to make the parties larger. Today, any organization with ten members can set up a political party; this does nothing but increase the number of parties without improving their quality. The government suggested that stricter rules be set up: parties should have no less than 500 members and regional organizations should be registered with the local judicial structures.

These amendments aroused a nationwide discussion; there were even harsher demands. It was suggested that parties should register their programs with the Ministry of Justice and take part in local elections. There are also plans to introduce rules designed to prevent the monopoly of one pro-governmental party and to diminish the chance of new marginal parties or parties oriented toward one leader appearing. There is a discussion about equal rights of the sexes in party development, about nominating more women candidates to the representative structures, and about registering parties with the Central Election Commission, rather than with the judicial structures. There is the opinion that the state should fund the parties represented in parliament.

The public is divided over these plans. Large parties (the Party of the Communists of Kyrgyzstan, the My Country Party of Action, and others) like the amendments because, they argue, the time has

come to acquire larger political organizations and start building a system of party democracy. The parties should leave the “period of political clubs” behind; they should move to the regions in order to find and mobilize supporters there. Abolishing the proportional system will create another problem: will it be possible to create a system of party democracy outside proportional representation in the elected bodies of power?

The radical opposition and dwarf parties disapprove of the amendments; they are convinced that they will squeeze them out of the republic’s political life. This fear is well-founded. It seems that it was precisely for this reason that the members of parliament, when discussing the draft Election Code, suggested that party nominees and independent candidates should be granted equal rights. This greatly damaged the party development process. What is more, independent candidates find themselves in a better position than the party nominees: they are not required to collect signatures in their support, nor are they asked to engage in public activities. They need merely write an application about their desire to run for a representative body and make a monetary deposit, its size being equal for party nominees and independent candidates.

It should be said that the authorities, fond of abusing administrative powers, and the opposition, which because of its numerous phobias often misses the forest for the trees, are equally responsible for the current situation. The public mistrusts power because it relies on its administrative influence and other illegal methods: even its sincere desire to improve the situation is seen as anti-democratic machinations, half-hearted efforts at best, and as the authorities’ disinclination to develop democracy. The opposition, for its part, is trying to perpetuate small parties and political circles under the pretext of real and potential persecution. This slows down the process of acquiring a clearer political structure and of social consolidation. Obviously, society will profit from the unification of political parties with shared ideologies and political ideals.

The country’s leaders are trying to set up a new strong party of power; today they pin their hopes on the Alga, Kyrgyzstan Party (set up according to the pattern of Berlusconi’s Forza Italia and Russia’s Edinaia Rossia with the help of the state, hand-picked people, and lavish funding). Helped by corresponding state structures, it has already carried out several large-scale sport events, humanitarian actions and shows; and it has set up regional and district offices and participated in local elections. Still, the expert community remains unimpressed: a process which reminds of what went on in Russia when Edinaia Rossia was set up may lead us back to the one-party system. Russia found the cost to be too high, yet the Kyrgyz leaders seem to be unaware of this.

The country’s leaders made an attempt to create a strong party of power back in 2000, but the result was disappointing. The bloc of pro-governmental parties, the Union of Democratic Forces, brought together four centrist and leftist-centrist parties. At the 2000 parliamentary elections, thanks to the administrative resource, they came second after the communists with four seats. Later the bloc members drifted apart and joined other deputy groups for regional and personal considerations. This, and the communist victory at the 2000 elections, created mistrust of proportional representation.

Early in 2004, over two-thirds of the members of both chambers asked the Constitutional Court to rule whether the amendment to the Constitution that increased the number of deputies from 75 to 105 (30 of them being elected by party lists) was made within the law. In May 2004, the Legislative Assembly introduced amendments into the Election Code, under which the councils of Bishkek and Osh, and the regional councils will be elected according to proportional representation. This still awaits approval by the Constitutional Court and the President.

Attention is still riveted to the party issue, even though the process abounds in problems and political details. The public wants to develop democracy; it wants to move away from the traditional paternalist-clan administrative system that has survived communist rule. The public and the authorities are becoming increasingly aware that no genuine democracy and no responsibility of power are possible without political parties. The country’s leaders have announced that the parties should work toward political stability. Life has shown, however, that the model of political party development the republic has opted for is not the best one.

Past experience shows that the ideal parties which functioned in the 1920s and are functioning today share certain common traits and have specific features of their own. First, today there are many more parties than in the 1920s, because there are more educated and politically aware people capable of leadership. Second, there is no division into activists and supporters in the traditional sense of the word. All party members are activists to the extent their organizational talents, intellectual powers, and political culture allow them. Third, a party works through communication and its response to events by carrying out actions and adopting political documents. Fourth, parties are still “clubs” and its varieties (political councils, councils, central committees, etc.). Fifth, power is the main goal, while criticism, rallies, meetings, picketing, hunger strikes, and other forms of protest are the main forms of struggle. At the same time, the majority of parties do not know how to organize this work and consolidate their forces in periods of stability. Sixth, very frequently the leader is more important than the collective. This fans conflicts inside parties; some of them split, others disappear; new parties are formed. Seventh, the parties of the 1990s are more politically diverse.

By way of a summary I can say the following.

1. The initial period of party development followed the pattern common to all other post-Soviet states (the first political parties grew out of informal public associations and movements; they were opposed to the C.P.S.U.; there were no relevant laws, etc.).
2. Parties developed further thanks to a better legal framework, which included direct (special) and indirect (electoral) legislation. These laws completely corresponded to the fundamental constitutional provisions related to political parties.
3. Further development of the multiparty system led to a system that has not yet become polarized and can therefore be described as a “non-systemic multiplicity of parties.”
4. Recently, it has become obvious that parties are integrating according to their ideologies and attitude to power.

After the political crisis in Aksy, the opposition announced that it was setting up two political organizations: a radical bloc, For Power of the People, and a more moderate one, the People’s Congress, which united several political parties and public movements of different ideological affiliations. Political scientists call such structures “unscrupulous” and describe their aim as “victory at all costs.” Such alliances are ruled by leaders, not political programs.

In the spring of 2004, in view of the upcoming parliamentary elections in 2005, a Citizens for Honest and Straightforward Elections was set up out of the members of the two blocs mentioned above. Even though its aims have not yet been announced and despite the fact that certain top bureaucrats joined it, the bloc continues what its predecessors started. These structures, and some of the political parties, try to coordinate their efforts to compensate for their organizational and financial weakness. In the West, large political parties act independently and form blocs after the elections; in Kyrgyzstan political parties prefer to pool forces for election campaigns.

The above testifies that so far the republic has not yet acquired a contemporary political or an efficient party system; to remedy the situation the state should actively promote the process by improving the laws and the election system, by creating equal conditions for all parties, and by extending adequate funding. A new law on political parties could improve the climate, help overcome the current problems of party development, bring order into the process, and create the best possible conditions for more efficient parties to appear; one of the aims is to restore proportional representation. Evolution of the parties left to themselves is fraught with unpredictable results, right up to curtailment of the democratic process and establishment of a harsh authoritarian regime.