

Democracy is a continuous process

Interview with Ambassador Sergey Kapinos, the Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, for the Noviye Litsa newspaper on 28 December 2015ⁱ

This outgoing year (2015) was politically quite eventful for Kyrgyzstan. There were ups, successes and difficulties. Our exclusive interview with Sergey Kapinos, the Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek focuses on the OSCE's view of the path our country followed this year.

- Sergey Petrovich, the OSCE has been operating within its mandate in Kyrgyzstan for 18 years. Do you think Kyrgyzstan has changed over the years and what is the role of the OSCE in these changes?

- It's hard to compare. I was not in Kyrgyzstan either in the Soviet times or in the initial period of its independence. Yet, I think the country has changed to a great extent. The country suffered two extremely difficult periods in its recent history - in 2005 and 2010. Positive changes in the last five years are evident. But there are problems that are rooted in the past, as well as those that emanate from the process of moving forward. There is no need to be afraid of the problems. They pose a danger when they are not addressed. Kyrgyzstan has chosen the right direction and progressively moves forward. The democratic path is difficult and thorny, but whoever goes through this, ensures long-term sustainable and steady development. There might be different views on the dynamics of the movement. External support, primarily from international organizations, may be very useful at this point. This fully applies to the OSCE which assists in the development and implementation of a number of major restructuring processes based on a universal concept of security in three dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. This concept allows the OSCE to address problems in a consistent manner.

- After each election, the people of Kyrgyzstan look forward to the OSCE observers' assessment, since this assessment is usually the most objective. This year I attended the presentation of OSCE observers' report and it seemed to me that it was the first time such an assessment was so complementary and positive. What are the pros and cons of the election that you would highlight?

- The assessment of elections is beyond the mandate of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek as determined by agreement between the Organization and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic. There is a specialized institution of OSCE – the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. Monitoring and assessment of elections are its prerogative. Its preliminary assessment was positive, reflecting the efforts of the Kyrgyz authorities to improve the electoral process based on democratic principles. In my opinion, the main achievement of the latest election was that the results were accepted by society, that there were no mass protests as in the past, and that the election was competitive. This is a credit to the country's leadership. As a side note, the OSCE Centre has provided significant support in the conduct of the election, working closely with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the International Foundation for Electoral Systems in Kyrgyzstan (IFES), the European Union (EU) and other organizations.

- The main problem of Kyrgyzstan's society remains corruption. What are the OSCE's recommendations in this respect?

- Corruption is in reverse to the efficiency of the public administration system. The more effective the system, the less room for corruption and vice versa. Therefore, the most effective means of combating this public scourge is the formation and development of an effective, well-controlled mechanism for public administration. Administrative and legal reforms are the key to this. First of all, we should talk about judicial reform. There are best practices in the world in successfully fighting corruption. These are the integrity and fairness of the laws; their strict compliance in conjunction with the inevitable enforcement of punishments for violations; an effective, accountable and transparent system of public administration with a clear division of powers and functions of state bodies; an efficient and fair judiciary; a competitive environment; a highly professional media; interaction with society, an active civil society and legal awareness among the population.

The OSCE has accumulated considerable experience in the fight against corruption - the OSCE Centre in Bishkek is assisting the Kyrgyz government in countering corruption. Therefore in the past years, the Centre has supported the work of the Defence Council's expert working group in analysing corruption schemes in state bodies. As a result, proposals have been developed and implemented to address these schemes in a number of ministries and agencies of the Kyrgyz Republic. We also supported the Ministry of Economy to develop a new Action Plan for state bodies to implement the State Strategy of Anti-Corruption Policy for 2015-2017. We serve as a "bridge" in Kyrgyzstan's joining the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the European Convention on the fight against corruption in order to facilitate the procedures for investigating, extraditing and returning the proceeds of crimes, which were illegally transferred abroad.

- Human rights are the cornerstone of any society. Do you think there are human rights violations in the country? Which aspect should our society pay special attention to?

This year, Kyrgyzstan was elected to the UN Human Rights Council. In my opinion, this is an important international recognition of the fact that the country has made significant improvements in the promotion of human rights. Nevertheless, much remains to be done. We must not forget that democracy is a continuous process. It has no upper limit. Even states that are considered to be mature democracies must move forward and are in constant development. I think it is necessary to bring judicial and legal reforms to a logical end, and further harmonize national legislation in the sphere of human rights with international law and international standards.

One of the priorities of the judicial and legal reform includes improving the efficiency of the prosecution agencies' work in their efforts to combat torture. In 2014, the Government of Kyrgyzstan approved the National Action Plan and created two inter-agency working groups on preventing torture and ill-treatment, which worked on making changes and amendments to the legislation. There is a need to continue these activities and we welcome the establishment of a special unit in the General Prosecutor's Office that supervises legality in pre-trial proceedings and the fight against torture.

Today, the National Centre for the Prevention of Torture and Ill-Treatment successfully operates with the support of the Centre. The result of our co-operation in this field was the reduction in the number of reported cases of torture and ill-treatment in places of detention in the police, army and prisons.

We welcome the adoption of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for 2015-2017 by the Government in order to further implement the National Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic on

achieving Gender Equality by 2020. The Centre also supports the Government's efforts in combating trafficking in human beings.

- The modern world has changed a lot and a new threat - terrorism - has come to the forefront. Is Kyrgyzstan ready to combat this challenge?

- The threat of international terrorism is unprecedented. At this stage of history it is one of the major challenges facing humanity. No country in the world can counter it alone. Special attention in countering terrorism should be paid to addressing the root causes of involvement in terrorism. They must be sought not only in the legal but also in the socio-economic, political and cultural fields. It is important to maintain a balance between security and respect for human rights. Their violation could lead to increased motivation for joining terrorist groups. Taking into account the growth of cross-border terrorism, achieving effective international co-operation is of particular importance. Therefore it is necessary to significantly step up efforts to combat this threat, given the regional dynamics associated with the terrorist threat - the proximity of Afghanistan, the so-called "Islamic state", and the emergence of various extremist groups in the country, among other things. These efforts should be focused primarily on identifying and eliminating the causes that push to senselessly cruel and inhuman actions. And this is a serious challenge. It cannot be addressed without large-scale effective international co-operation. In this context, the role of such organizations as the OSCE, UNODC, UNDP and others is of great importance. Also I would like to note that it would be naive to hope for success in the fight against terrorism and organized crime without a breakthrough in the fight against corruption.

The OSCE Centre supports Kyrgyzstan in building its capacity in counter-terrorism. Together with the General Staff of the State Border Service (SBS) of Kyrgyzstan and a special unit "Ilbirs", we organized a "Barrier 2015" command staff post tactical exercise for border services, police and emergency services of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, which was attended by representatives of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. In co-operation with the General Staff of the SBS, we also conducted a "Bogot-Barrier 2015" command staff post exercise designed to practice an inter-agency rapid response to possible terrorist attacks. The OSCE Centre conducted activities to improve the skills of journalists in covering the issues of terrorism aimed also at improving the information security of the society. In 2015, the OSCE Centre supported the transition to digital broadcasting, which is closely linked to strengthening the state's information security. In the coming year, our support will include organizing various training events and workshops to help enhance the capacity of Kyrgyzstan in prompt response to terrorist threats.

- What issues will be placed on the OSCE's increased focus in the next year?

- The range of issues that are now being addressed and will be addressed with our assistance is very broad. These are, first of all, the issues related to the reform and improvement of the activities of state agencies with a special focus on the judicial sector. We will also focus efforts on stepping up work in the economic and environmental areas, in particular the formation of a favorable investment climate and equitable resolution of problems related to the environment and the use of natural resources. The urgency of judicial reform is not only preserved but also raised among our priorities.

Now many ideas and suggestions are being discussed not only with the Ministry of Internal Affairs but also with other law enforcement agencies. Among the specific areas are strengthening the witness protection institution, which is one of the most important factors in the

fight against organized crime. The Centre will also assist Kyrgyzstan in strengthening the capacity to respond effectively to the impact of natural disasters. In this regard, we will expand our work with the Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Kyrgyz Republic.

I want to wish your team every success, and wish readers peace, stability, security, mutual understanding and happiness.

- Thank you so much!

ⁱ *This interview is a translation from the Russian-language version interview available [here](#). In case of any conflict or dispute in the translation, the Russian language version shall prevail.*