

Kyrgyzstan in transition

OSCE displays swift and decisive action



Osh, 19 March: A man on horseback was among thousands of southern residents who took part in protest actions against the results of Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary election.

Photo: Muhtar Irisov/OSCE

Why should the OSCE participating States care about the events that took place in Kyrgyzstan in March, and why should they spare no effort to assist the country at this critical juncture in its democratic development? The answers are obvious. In our globalized world, geographic distances no longer matter as much as they used to. The “local” suddenly finds itself on the global stage. Today, the impact of political and economic security in the countries of Central Asia extends far beyond their national borders.

BY ALOJZ PETERLE

In Kyrgyzstan, the long-simmering frustrations and grievances of the population reached the boiling point after the parliamentary elections in February and March 2005.

Following a series of scattered post-election protests in the southern region, which were initiated by candidates who were accusing the authorities of unfair electoral practices, the OSCE lost no time in trying to help contain the crisis.

As the gatherings attracted larger crowds and showed no signs of letting up, the most urgent task was to ensure that any attempt by authorities to control them would not entail the use of arms. A repeat of the fatal shootings at the mass rallies in the southern district of Aksy in 2002 was to be avoided at any cost. At the same time, the OSCE channelled its efforts into encouraging a political dialogue between President Askar Akaev and his opponents.

As soon as Government and opposition leaders had agreed to the OSCE's assuming the role of mediator, I flew to Bishkek on 24 March in my capacity as Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to help ease the country's political tensions. It was to be the first of many visits in the following weeks.

I was in the middle of a meeting with then Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov when we were suddenly interrupted by news that Bishkek's “White House” — the seat of government — had been stormed by demonstrators. Later, we learned that the President had left the country.



GERHARD SCHAUMBERGER

Bishkek, 24 March: A peaceful demonstration unexpectedly led to a storming of Kyrgyzstan's government headquarters.

This unexpected turn of events changed the course of my mission profoundly, since one of the negotiating parties had disappeared. Furthermore, the security situation had spun out of control. With police and security forces backing off, public order broke down and widespread looting of business establishments in the capital took place unhampered during the night of 24 March and most of the next day.

It was an unusual situation, to say the least: At that moment, the country had de facto two presidents, two parliaments and diverse groups of demonstrators.

NEUTRAL PLATFORM

In the next few days, security in Bishkek improved visibly as a result of the re-establishment of new security forces under the co-ordination of former senior official Felix Kulov, who had been released from four years' imprisonment under the fallen government. At that point, the OSCE welcomed these moves towards stability.

After the country's one-day political and security vacuum, the OSCE quickly initiated a working relationship with the interim government, serving at the same time as a neutral platform for dialogue with the new leadership. With the OSCE providing a focal point for co-ordinated action, regular meetings were set into motion between the representatives of embassies, international organizations and NGOs.

As a matter of urgency, the OSCE appealed for law and order to be immediately restored. In all my discussions, politicians and private citizens alike said that the OSCE's police assistance programme, including the community policing component, was needed more than ever and that it was an opportune time to strengthen the capability and professionalism of the police service, especially in the South.

The Acting President, Kurmanbek Bakiev, and I agreed on the need for a joint Kyrgyz-

OSCE work plan aimed at bringing about stability and security in the country. Urgent as well as long-term tasks would be drawn up, with corresponding requirements for funding and personnel. This was done in cooperation with the European Union and the United Nations, and with bilateral embassies in Bishkek, which recognized the OSCE's leading role in this process.

Chairman-in-Office Dimitrij Rupel and the Permanent Council in Vienna provided me and the OSCE Centre in Bishkek with political advice. The Secretariat's professional support throughout the crisis will continue to be indispensable. The visits of the Chairman-in-Office and Secretary General Ján Kubiš to Kyrgyzstan gave further impetus to our efforts at the highest levels and drew wide media coverage, which is vital to securing broad support for our goals.

What is next for Kyrgyzstan?

With the presidential election of 10 July fast approaching, the eyes of the world will be on this important Central Asian republic as it goes through its first significant democratic test after the March upheaval and a period of fragile stability. Will it prove that it is ready to be part of the democratic family of nations by conducting a fair and transparent election, free of violence and intimidation?

CODE OF CONDUCT

In addition to the election assistance activities under the aegis of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), I believe that there is scope for the OSCE to play a productive role in facilitating dialogue among the presidential candidates, thus helping them to steer clear of polarizing the electorate during the voting season and beyond.

On a visit to Bishkek in early June, I called on Kyrgyzstan's presidential candidates to agree on a politically binding code of conduct — a "Charter of Accord" — on fairness in campaigning. Though not legally binding, the code would appeal to the sense of moral responsibility of the country's future leaders and would go a long way towards restoring public confidence in the political process. Regrettably, this goal was only partially reached as a few of the candidates refused to sign the Accord.

People's expectations are high. While many acknowledge that the campaign season is not the ideal time for their politicians to launch badly needed reforms, they are obviously keen to see an improvement in their lives once credibly-elected officials are in place.

It is likely, however, that Kyrgyzstan's transition phase will prove to be another trying time for the whole country. Large parts of the population have already faced up to the fact that replacing the former regime, granting the media greater freedom of expression, and making room for a more vibrant civil society will not necessarily rid the country of its deep-rooted ills as quickly as they would like.

This is why concrete and urgent assistance from the OSCE community — ranging from anti-corruption initiatives to entrepreneurship development schemes — is equally crucial before, during and after the elections.

Developments in Kyrgyzstan and, most recently, in Uzbekistan have shown that the effectiveness of the OSCE's long-term planning depends on its comprehensive diagnosis of a country's particular situation — and that there are no tailor-made solutions.

I believe that it is time for a strategic reconsideration as far as the future of Central Asia is concerned. There is no doubt that the dire economic plight in many countries in the region is a major destabilizing factor and that greater emphasis needs to be placed on this area — which does not necessarily mean we should be any less vigilant about the human dimension of the OSCE's involvement.

Let us now seize the opportunity that has been opened up to help Kyrgyzstan finally direct its energies towards its political and economic transformation, based

on a sound foundation of democracy, economic well-being and the rule of law.

In doing so, as the Chairman-in-Office reminds us constantly, we will also be doing ourselves a favour by demonstrating the Organization's continued relevance and its firm commitment to the security of Central Asia and the wider OSCE region.

Alojz Peterle, a member of the European Parliament, is the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office for Central Asia. From 1990 to 1992, he served as Prime Minister of the first democratically elected Slovenian Government. He is also a former Foreign Minister.



Alojz Peterle (right) in Bishkek with Kyrgyzstan's Acting President Kurmanbek Bakiev

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights: Election time-line in Kyrgyzstan



Residents of Aravshan, a village near Bishkek, prepare to vote in the second round of parliamentary elections.

27 February 2005: parliamentary elections.

Based on reports of 175 ODIHR observers from 28 countries, the elections are found to be more competitive than previous ones, but "sadly undermined by vote-buying, de-registration of candidates, interference with the media and a worryingly low confidence in judicial and electoral institutions on the part of voters and candidates".

13 March: second round of parliamentary elections.

Elections are re-run in the 42 out of 75 single-mandate constituencies where the first ballot produced no outright winner. Based on reports of 82 short-term observers from 17 countries, the elections show some technical improvements, but "some areas of concern remained unchanged".

Late May: preparations for presidential election on 10 July.

The ODIHR launches an Election Observation Mission, with 15 election experts based in Bishkek and 26 long-term observers deployed throughout the country. They are expected to be joined by about 300 short-term observers, working in two-person teams all across Kyrgyzstan, to monitor the opening of polling stations, the voting, the ballot-counting and the tabulation of results.

Investing in stability

Work plan
demonstrates
OSCE's
commitment to
Kyrgyzstan



Supporting the Chairmanship-in-Office in quickly and effectively reacting to developments in the OSCE area is a key function of the Conflict Prevention Centre. Following the dramatic events in Kyrgyzstan, I accompanied Alojz Peterle, Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office, on his visit to Bishkek in early April. The aim was to facilitate a process of political dialogue and negotiation in the country and to develop, together with the Kyrgyz authorities, key areas of assistance from the OSCE.

BY LAMBERTO ZANNIER

We had a number of meetings with Kyrgyz officials, representatives of political forces and civil society, and members of the international community in Bishkek. Together with Ambassador Markus Müller, Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, we decided that the best way forward was to set up a concrete work plan, in co-operation with our Kyrgyz partners.

The work plan would contain the most essential elements needed to accomplish two goals: firstly, to avoid a deterioration in the situation in the country, and secondly, to stabilize the complex scenario that was emerging, pending a decision on the date of the presidential election.

Three factors set the stage for better conditions for the development of the work plan: the announcement of an election date, which we had advocated in our consultations and in a press statement; President Askar Akaev's resignation; and the concrete steps that were taken towards the rehabilitation of former Vice President Felix Kulov.

The first comprehensive version of the work plan was already completed when I returned to Vienna on 13 April. The following day, it was presented to the participating States. On 3 May, following further consul-

tations in Bishkek, the Kyrgyz Government gave its much-awaited approval of the plan.

The work plan identifies major priority areas in the short- and long-term and includes a list of individual projects. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek and its Field Office in Osh will play a pivotal role on the ground. We in the Conflict Prevention Centre are actively supporting them, while keeping all delegations in Vienna informed on behalf of the Chairmanship.

For the immediate future, it is crucial that Kyrgyzstan prepare itself well for the historic election on 10 July, and that the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), as well as the Centre in Bishkek, actively contribute to this process. The ODIHR has received, and has accepted, an invitation to observe the election, and a major Election Observation Mission was deployed in late May.

It is also vital that law and order be maintained. In consultation with the Strategic Police Matters Unit, we have identified urgent tasks within the work plan's interim police projects. These include supporting the Kyrgyz police with advisers and trainers, and with essential equipment.

I am encouraged by the fact that the OSCE participating States are supporting our preventive approach at this time. It will, of course, be an expensive endeavour,

Emotions ran high at the central Ala-Too Square a few hours before the march to Bishkek's White House.
Photo: Gerhard Schaumberger

with several projects requiring immediate funding, and I am pleased that a number of countries have already stepped forward with pledges.

In the medium term, work on freedom of the media, and assistance directed towards economic growth and in ecological matters, should be at the forefront of the OSCE's activities in the country. Another priority is building effective and inclusive institutions reflecting the needs of the broad cross section of Kyrgyz society.

In the longer term, challenges include tackling legislative shortcomings, fighting corruption and continuing to promote OSCE standards and commitments in different fields.

By addressing each of these key issues, we in the OSCE are demonstrating our firm commitment and resolve to contribute to a more peaceful, prosperous and democratic Kyrgyzstan.

It is now time for implementation.

Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, Director of the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), heads a 45-member team. Part of the Organization's Secretariat in Vienna, the CPC is often described as the "information hub" for all field activities. It supports the Chairman-in-Office and the Secretary General in implementing the Organization's tasks in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation.



OSCE

Kyrgyzstan: Counting on the OSCE

The OSCE's objective view is a prerequisite for fair, honest and transparent elections, said Kurmanbek Bakiev, Acting President of Kyrgyzstan, on 30 May. He was addressing the Permanent Council in Vienna just two months after the change of regime in his country. Here are excerpts from his address and from his press statement:

Let me express my gratitude to the OSCE Secretariat and the Slovenian Chairmanship for their assistance in developing the special OSCE work plan to ensure stability and sustainable democratic and economic development in the Kyrgyz Republic, and also my hope that it will be approved as soon as possible and will receive the financial support of the OSCE participating States.

There have been a lot of discussion and varying interpretations of the events of 24 March in the international mass media. The "people's revolution"

in the Kyrgyz Republic was due mainly to a regression in the democratic governance of the country, a high level of corruption and low living standards.

The final factor that exhausted the people's patience was the two rounds of parliamentary elections in February and March this year.

The people of Kyrgyzstan — and this is set out in the Constitution — have been able to demonstrate their ownership of power, with the support of the country's political parties, community-based organizations and NGOs.

Corruption has penetrated so deeply into all aspects of our lives that we will have to continue addressing this problem for a long time to come. The Government attaches the highest priority right now to fighting it, and to further pro-

moting the principles of democratization, reducing poverty and improving living standards.

Some 94 per cent of the country's area is covered by mountains, and the rural people, especially those living in the mountainous areas, have a very low standard of living. The Government must focus on this problem.

We are also counting on our long-time co-operation with the OSCE. Security issues and action to combat terrorism and trafficking in narcotic drugs and human beings, as well as other cultural, humanitarian

and economic issues, are extremely important; nevertheless, we believe that, given the current situation, the country's economic development must be at the top of the agenda.

Co-operation with OSCE experts and their

objective assessments are extremely important for the Kyrgyz Republic. They will make it possible for us to hold elections that are free from serious irregularities, are based on the principles of fairness, honesty and transparency, and are in compliance with OSCE standards.

Kurmanbek Bakiev is running for the presidency of Kyrgyzstan in July. He served as Prime Minister for more than a year (2001-2002), and as Governor of Chui province (1997-2000) and of Jalal-Abad province (1995-1997).



A little boy in the nomadic community around Chartyr-Kul Lake near the Chinese border plays with an OSCE key chain. The picture was part of an exhibition of the work of French photographer Eric Gourlan at the Hofburg in May. www.regard.com.fr



ALEXEY DUNDICH, 23, RUSSIAN



DILDORA KHAMIDOVA, 22, UZBEK
FROM OSH, KYRGYZSTAN



JONATHAN KOROWICZ, 31, IRISH



NURIA KUTNAEVA, 27, KYRGYZ



ALEXANDRU NARTEA, 24, MOLDOVAN

OSCE as mediator in Kyrgyzstan

Young people in Central Asia stress role of dialogue

Some three weeks after the unrest in Kyrgyzstan, the *OSCE Magazine* invited the first candidates for the one-year master's programme in political science at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek to give their candid comments on developments in the country and the role of the OSCE in stabilizing the situation. Despite the fact that they were in the middle of thesis-writing in anticipation of their graduation in July, 10 of the 40 students responded to the call. Several wrote well-crafted analytical and personal essays that deserve more space than the *Magazine* could offer. For a full transcript of the contributions, please write to: osce-magazine-at@osce.org

The chain of events that triggered the Kyrgyz revolution seems like a poorly managed series of accidents. The Kyrgyz people protested against electoral violations, but what happened then — an evening of looting — was not at all in keeping with revolutionary democratic principles.

The Tajiks lament: "They do not know what war is; they do not know what they're doing." The Uzbeks are baffled: "Imagine if we were to behave that way." The Russians take the concerned, geopolitical view that it is "a crack, a split in the security map". Etcetera. And against this background, the Georgians and the Ukrainians, who rushed to associate the Kyrgyz people with the Orange Revolution, rejoiced for their brothers-in-arms, but in their haste did not pay attention to how the situations differed.

Nonetheless, despite the contradictory nature of the outcome of the revolution, it was certainly a progressive element in the process of the country's development. The time has come for change, something which was scarcely possible under "family rule". What changes will occur will depend upon the specific nature of the government. The Russian Revolution of 1917 had profound consequences. The Kyrgyz version: to be continued.

Alexey Dundich

The fact that many people in the capital blamed the southern population for organizing the demonstrations, calling them "wild Southerners", upset me. Yes, the protests started in my home town, but the population of Osh just wanted the election results to be reviewed.

Of course there is a need for change, but I feel that the course of change is more important than change itself. Will the opposition bring peace, democracy and welfare to the people of Kyrgyzstan? For me, this is a key question, and right now I don't feel that optimistic about it.

After the events in March, I believe that conflicts should be an integral part of democratic societies, in the sense that they help introduce changes that make societies healthier. The challenge, though, is how to keep conflicts peaceful and non-destructive. My studies at the OSCE Academy are providing me with the opportunity for a fruitful debate about the nature of conflicts and better ways of dealing with them.

Since Russians and Uzbeks account for a significant proportion of the electorate, I think that the OSCE should involve ethnic representatives in the election commission.

Dildora Khamidova





RAKHMADJON SOBIROV, 24, UZBEK



DANIYAR SUYUNOV, 24, KYRGYZ FROM UZBEKISTAN



JAFAR USMANOV, 22, TAJIK



VIOLETTA YAN, 26, KYRGYZSTANI BORN IN TOMSK, RUSSIA



DINARA ZARIPOVA, 26, KYRGYZ

I reacted to the March events with a mixture of concern, surprise and fascination, along with a healthy measure of cynicism and the hope that events would not work against the population.

As an Irishman who had been living in Kyrgyzstan for almost four years, I had wondered at the contradictions of the old order.

Never had the police been so wanted in Bishkek! While many people took advantage of the absence of law enforcers by taking part in the lootings, many police officers and ordinary citizens showed civic pride and responsibility by defending the capital, expressing solidarity with their compatriots, and presenting a united front against lawlessness.

The OSCE should continue to work with the country's law enforcers, taking advantage of the experiences that many of them went through during the two weeks of unrest. Many realized for the first time that authority is a

matter of commanding respect and that respect is earned by standing up for principles that are worthy of respect.

Some point out that the tribal nature of Kyrgyz society implies that the Central Asian States are fragmented

and that tensions can only be balanced, not reconciled. While history has an important part to play, this does not mean that Central Asia cannot by itself and with the goodwill of its neighbours become a stable and prosperous region.

Jonathan Korowicz

On 24 and 25 March, national television was showing cartoons while foreign news agencies were depicting the same violent scenes over and over again.

Perhaps the events of 24 March cannot be called a "revolution" in the strict sense of the word. However, there is no denying that the revolution did happen in the minds of the people. Just three months earlier, they would never have thought it possible for their demands to be heard. In the spring of 2005, people started believing in their own possibilities. This belief should be steered in a positive direction.

Now people are aware that every vote counts. However, the country's political culture is still not well developed. One of the negative consequences of the revolution is that people understand power from the perspective of being

part of a crowd — as in the "self-acquisition" of plots of land near Bishkek.

The most crucial task now is to prevent a civil war from erupting. In fact, however, the Kyrgyz people are being forced into just such a conflict — witness the regionalization and tribalization of politics, and the sowing of the seeds of intranational and interethnic discord.

Nuria Kutnaeva

The events proved that "rule of law" and "peace and order" are not abstract concepts, but do affect everyone. Unfortunately, it is only when these are taken away from our everyday lives that we start appreciating them.

I believe that the OSCE is the most appropriate organization to deal with situations such as the one in Kyrgyzstan. The Organization's support should focus on reconciliation and dialogue between the old and new stakeholders, and between civil society and the authorities.

Various observers have been offering a prognosis regarding possible

similar scenarios in other post-Soviet States. I doubt whether there will be a spillover effect in my own country, Moldova, where internal political developments are quite stable. However,

the events in Kyrgyzstan should send a clear message to all leaders in the CIS region: Power should be exercised only on behalf of the best interests of the people.

Alexandru Nartea

I believe that the events in Kyrgyzstan are providing food for thought in my country — both for the Government and for the people. I would not wish to have a Kyrgyz scenario in Uzbekistan, where it might result in an even more disastrous outcome. My country's government authorities, I believe, will not ignore the events in the neighbouring country.

However, this should not imply that every means should be employed to avert similar events. Instead, the Uzbek Government should do its best to prevent violence by getting rid of the main reasons for popular dissatisfaction, such as poverty, human rights violations and lack of transparency.



For their part, the OSCE participating States should observe the developments in Central Asia attentively and be ready to respond to changes in the region. The OSCE's comprehensive approach to security can cope in crisis situations only if the approach is balanced and truly "three-dimensional". This is sometimes difficult and requires teamwork among the participating States.

Support for the newly established OSCE Academy is crucial. By investing in the future decision-makers of Central Asia, this educational institution can be a leader in the promotion of OSCE principles throughout the region.

Rakhmadjon Sobirov

Recent events in Bishkek have shown that change has begun in the Central Asian region and that this phenomenon is irreversible.

It is clear that the Kyrgyz Government does not have the experience or the resources necessary to solve the many problems that have been building up in the country. Regular roundtable discussions, aimed at seeking solutions, should be initiated. These should involve government officials and representatives of civil society, international organizations and the media, with the OSCE acting as an independent arbiter.

Resolving even just one problem successfully and then publicizing the fact through the media would go a long way towards demonstrating that issues can be dealt with through negotiations in the framework of the law.

Daniyar Suyunov

“We did it!” This expression of deep relief and satisfaction could be heard from almost everyone on the evening of 24 March, right after the seizure of the government headquarters.

Have there been any lessons learned? Central Asians are still confusing — consciously or unconsciously — the notion of democracy with that of total permissiveness. Authorities are confident that they will rule their respective “estates” for decades. Citizens yearn to learn what “civil society” is all about; they try to be that civil society, but not to behave like a civilized crowd.

The OSCE should hold regular meetings and consultations with all the political forces in Kyrgyzstan to prevent an escalation of the current crisis. A “North-South” dialogue should draw in people from different backgrounds. Representatives of government, political parties and NGOs should be offered training to improve the country's political culture.

Jafar Usmanov

Will the transfer of power in Kyrgyzstan be peaceful? This concern was what had motivated me to choose the parliamentary elections as the topic of my master's thesis, which I started writing in January.

The events in March made me realize how peace and stability can be fragile if the Government fails to communi-

cate with its population, if the rule of law is widely disregarded, and if pre-conceived notions about the public's supposed reluctance to engage in politics dominate the early-warning approach.



While watching reports on CNN in the Situation Room of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre, where I was an intern, I could not help wishing that the media would interpret the events in Bishkek correctly so as not to contribute to the escalation of the conflict. After all, it was my city and my country and I, as a citizen, would inevitably be responsible for dealing with any possible consequences.

The OSCE's “exclusive” early-warning approach should continue to be a trademark of the Organization in the Kyrgyz Republic and in Central Asia as a whole.

Violetta Yan

I was disappointed by the flight of the President at a time when the country was in deep trouble. If he had stayed, it would have shown that he cared about Kyrgyzstan's future and he might still have commanded people's respect, even after resigning.

Some of the consequences of the events are: The country's constitutional and legal framework has been undermined, including through the illegal seizure of lands; people believe that everything can be solved through the use of force and by evading the law; more people, especially those who are Russian-speaking, want to leave the country; and a North-South division of the country is a possibility.



One of the country's greatest needs is greater transparency in the decision-making process. The OSCE should bring its influence to bear on the Government to ensure that decisions are taken in an open manner and that professionalism is the major criterion in making appointments.

Dinara Zaripova

Gerhard Schaumberger, former educational expert at the OSCE Academy, and Dinara Asanbaeva, Academic Supervisor, co-ordinated the students' contributions. For more on the OSCE Academy, an independent public foundation since August 2004, please access: www.osce-academy.net/en

Scenes from a revolution, on pages 16 to 18, were captured by Urban Karlsson, Community Policing Expert (Sweden) in the OSCE's Police Assistance Programme, Kyrgyzstan.