



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Centre in Bishkek

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Signing Ceremony of Charter of Accord for Presidential Nominees

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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests,
Presidential Nominees,

We have come together today to witness a historic moment for the Kyrgyz Republic. It is not only a moment for celebration, but also a moment for reflection.

The Charter of Accord that will, in a few minutes, be presented to you is a crucial landmark in the country's democratic development, an encouraging first step down a potentially long and difficult road.

As any professional on democratic transitions will tell you, democracy is not a final zenith to be eventually reached and then neglected. It is a delicate equilibrium that needs to be constantly nourished and cherished, especially by the nation's leaders who are publicly entrusted with this task.

Today, the seven men and women here before you are making that first step, taking responsibility upon themselves for the future of this fine nation. Each of them has expressed their intention of being Kyrgyzstan's next President. Yet, the contest that will be fought in the coming weeks will be of greater gravity than perhaps any democratic contest that the nation has yet experienced.

The document they are about to sign is not a legally binding document. It holds no weight before a court of law. Yet, international practice has shown that such a Charter can improve the quality of an election enormously if each of the nominees is committed to it.

As such, it is a morally binding document. A so-called 'gentlemen's agreement' about how the electoral game will be played with an understanding that there shall be no dirty tricks, no underhanded tactics: an honest, fair, and clean fight. It is each candidate's 'word of honour'. In many countries of the world, breaking one's word is akin to destroying one's personal and professional reputation.

The Charter before you has been drawn up taking into account the experience of more than a dozen countries that have encountered similar issues in the course of their democratic transitions. The potential benefits of such a Charter are its inherent consensus building character, which can strengthen commitment to the election process among involved stakeholders.

Another possible benefit is that it may help to develop confidence among citizens in the democratic process as a reasonable and rational mechanism for effecting peaceful change. The public nature of such a Charter binds political actors before the citizens of their country to act in a certain manner and at the same time alleviates concerns that citizens may have regarding the manner in which politics are decided in their country. Such a Charter may assist in changing perceptions that politics is something decided among elites and behind closed doors and draws citizens in as an integral part of the political process.

Such a Charter also compels various political forces to communicate regularly with each other during a transitional situation, to agree on basic ground rules, and to meet regularly during the campaign period. This commitment, in itself, often alleviates numerous problems and tensions that often arise from inherent mistrust and misperception on the part of nominees of the intentions of their adversaries. Frequent communication is often best way of building trust.

The OSCE has fundamentally supported such a document, in the understanding that it can lead to a course of peace, stability and long-term development. The OSCE, however, is not the guarantor of this document. It is the nominees, themselves, that must guarantee that they hold to the tenants of the agreement that they make here before you today.

Of course, if there are infringements of the electoral process, if there are violations, there is the election law, the legislative structure of the country through which nominees can prosecute their cases. The law and the courts are the one remedy for any wronged party, be they political leader or common citizen. It is in this way that redress must be sought.

But each of the nominees has chosen to take an additional step – to make a moral commitment before the citizens of this country, before each of you. To give you their word of honour that they will endeavour to hold the interests of the state before their own individual, personal interests.

And in this respect, it will not be the law, it will not be the international community that will decide whether or not this historic agreement has been met.

It will be history itself. It will be the grandchildren of each of you who will read in their history books some time from now and reflect. Reflect whether the events of 2005 were a turning point for the Kyrgyz Republic, whether these heady days marked a sea change from a system of government that was becoming increasingly distant from the interests of its citizens, to a new order that marked the first step forward down the long road to democracy, stability, and prosperity for all of its citizens. Or whether these days marked another missed opportunity for what might have been.

This decision is in your hands as is the future of this great and beautiful nation. I wish you all the best in the coming weeks. And may the victor succeed cleanly, fairly, and in full observance of the undertakings you have made today.