



Kyrgyzstan



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Population:	5,284,149 (July 2007 est.)
Prime minister:	Igor Chudinov (since December 2007)
President:	Kurmanbek Bakiyev (since August 2005)
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party – Ak Jol People's Party
Last election:	Presidential July 23, 2009
Next election:	Parliamentary December 2012
Sister parties:	None

In 2005 post-Soviet independent Kyrgyzstan's first president Akayev was ousted from power by public protests. Akayev was elected president of the republic of Kyrgyzstan in an uncontested poll on 12 October 1991. He was re-elected twice, amid allegations of ballot rigging, on 24 December 1995 and 29 October 2000, acting as president for almost 14 year until he was ousted from power in March 2005. Akayev, who had earlier served as a deputy in the Supreme Soviet of the USSR, was initially seen as a liberal leader, operating a relatively liberal regime compared with the government of the other Central Asian states and actively promoting the privatization of land and other economic assets.

INTRODUCTION

Presidential elections held in July 2005, were won by Bakiyev, one of the opposition leaders that campaigned to reduce the President's powers and who also promised to wipe out corruption and nepotism in the country and reduce poverty. Although it was stated by international observers that the elections showed an obvious progress in the democratic standards, political and social unrest has posed a major challenge to Bakiyev's rule since his inauguration. Several members of Parliament have been murdered since his grip to power, unnecessary force has been applied to cease violent uprising and assumptions exist that there is a major increase in the influence of organised crime.

But also Bakiyev's own powers are put to the test, as he has been accused by several MPs of not keeping his promises to redistribute some of his powers to Parliament. Moreover, occasionally the opposition organises protest for Bakiyev's resignation. In January 2009, an opposition group demanded his resignation by an open letter in which Bakiyev was accused of being incapable to protect the constitutional rights of its citizens. The opposition also accuses him of not willing to pursue any democratic reforms and his creation of a state in which his rule is largely based on relations with relatives and friends. Although a few days prior to this letter the President announced the reform of the "state machine", it seems the country goes more in the direction of a "control state" rather than a democracy.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Parliamentary elections 2005

The 27 February and 13 March 2005 elections were the first parliamentary elections held since the amendment of



the Constitution in 2003 that had substantially altered the structure of the Parliament and its method of election. A unicameral legislative Assembly counting 75 seats replaced the former bicameral Parliament. The elections were held in two rounds on the basis of a majoritarian electoral system. Candidates could register for election in one of the constituencies. To win a seat, the majority of the votes in the constituency (>50%) should be won. If, in the first round, none of the contestants in a particular constituency would have won enough votes, the two leading candidates contest a second round, held within two weeks, in which a majority vote prevails. The first round was contested by 389 of the 425 originally registered candidates, of which merely 39 were women.

The major pro-governmental political parties were Alga Kyrgyzstan! and Adilet, which together nominated 65 per cent of the candidates. Many of the opposition parties were grouped in coalitions. The elections sparked unrest because of the obvious failure to meet (international) democratic standards, such as a balanced media coverage.

Tulip Revolution

Small-scale protests were organised by the opposition Forum of Political Forces before and during the entire election. These protests intensified after the second round of the elections on 13 March 2005. As many of the results from the 42 constituencies contested were challenged in court, protests over the alleged electoral violations and irregularities spread out across the entire country. On 24 March, the opposition marched to the government building to demand the resignation of President Akayev and after a clash with pro-government protestors, the opposition took over the building. In the chaos that formed, Akayev fled the country.

The Supreme Court then proceeded to declare a Central Election Commission decision to register the deputies of the new Parliament invalid on procedural grounds. Consequently, the outgoing Parliament appointed Kurmanbek Bakiyev, an opposition leader, as the acting PM and President due to Akayev's absence from the country, which was later confirmed by the new Parliament. On 7 April, President Akayev officially resigned and early Presidential elections followed on 10 July.

Parliamentary elections 2007

On 16 December 2007 early parliamentary elections were held after the early dissolution of Parliament on 22 October. The poll came after a referendum that was held on 21 October, which approved constitutional reforms as well as a new electoral code. After the referendum was accepted, President Bakiyev called on early elections, which were the first national elections held under Bakiyev after former President Akayev's forced resignation.

The largest opposition parties in the country, the Ata-Meken and Ak-Shumkar parties formed a coalition called Ata-Meken ("Fatherland"). The Presidential Ak Jol People's Party ("Bright Way"), was nevertheless largely the great winner, gaining almost 47 per cent of the votes and receiving 71 seats in Parliament. Despite the fact that the Ata-Meken party came in second with about 8.7 per cent of the votes at national level, the party did not receive any seats as it did not pass the regional threshold of 0.5 per cent in the south. The Social Democratic party gained 11 seats in Parliament, while the Communist Party got eight seats. In total, 23 women were given a seat in Parliament, making the proportion of women 23.56 per cent. The turn-out was about 71.93% based on 2.3 million registered voters.

Opposition parties spoke of vote fraud and held street protest contesting the elections results. Moreover, opposition parties, including the Ata-Meken party, which failed to gain a seat in Parliament united in a bloc called "For Justice Movement" that organised anti-President protests in early 2008. The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) affirmed that the vote did not comply with some OSCE standards.

Aftermath of the elections

Following the first session of the newly elected Parliament former Secretary of State –Adakhan Madumarov– was named as the new Speaker of Parliament and former Energy and Industry Minister –Igor Chudinov– was elected as the new PM. Both men are from the Ak-Jol People's. Opposition members from the Social Democratic Party and the Communist Party refused to nominate candidates considering their limited number of seats.



Constitutional referendum 2007

On 21 October 2007, a constitutional referendum was held. At stake were provisions that included a change from a single constituency to a proportional all-party list electoral system, and an increased number of deputies within Parliament from 75 to 90, due to which a dispute occurred between the executive and the legislative branch. Also, the government would now be formed by the party with the most seats. Moreover, the threshold for political parties to get in Parliament became 5 per cent. The electoral code amended that coalitions in parliamentary elections were no longer allowed. According to the Kyrgyz Central Election Commission (CEC) 75.04 per cent of the citizens voted for the constitutional amendments and 75.45 per cent voted for the new electoral code. The international community stated the poll did not meet international standards.

Presidential elections 2009

On 23 July Presidential elections were held. Incumbent President Bakiev won the elections with 76.43 per cent of the votes. Bakiev's main challenger, Almazbek Atambayev, came in second with 8.39 per cent. He pulled out of the election together with the other main opposition candidate Jenishbek Nazaraliev, claiming massive fraud was taking place. After the results were announced the opposition refused to accept the outcome of the vote, and accused the authorities of election fraud. Also Omurbek Tekebaev, leader of the Ata-Meken party, called the vote illegitimate for the "constitution states that the elections should be held in the last week of October 2009". Moreover, on election day and during the following days sporadic opposition demonstrations to protest the election results were held in the capital Bishkek, as well as in other cities. Authorities have clamped down on unsanctioned gatherings since the vote and dozens of people were arrested.

Fraud allegations

Kyrgyzstan's local independent monitors said government officials were considering the alleged violations that took place during the voting and vote count, but in general they called the election fair and free. The OSCE nevertheless reported ballot-box stuffing and multiple voting, among other irregularities, and stated the election fell short of democratic principles. U.S.-based rights group Freedom House also urged the international community to put pressure on the government to encourage democratic reforms.

On 2 August Bakiev was inaugurated for his second presidential term. In his inaugural speech Bakiev listed fighting corruption and reducing poverty as among the main concerns for his government. No rallies were reported on inauguration day.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Political crisis regarding constitutional changes

During his campaign for the presidential election, Bakiev pledged to curb down the powers of the president in favour of the parliament once in office. However, once he was elected president he did not live up to this promise. This prompted many in opposition to the new president, who had himself been one of the opposition leaders during the Tulip Revolution. After months of small protests, the opposition For Reform movement, uniting many of the opposition parties, called for a demonstration in Bishkek, demanding constitutional changes or else for Bakiev to step down. On 2 November 2006, 30.000 protesters from various parts of the Kyrgyz Republic gathered to show their discontent with their president, many of them protesting an entire week until an agreement between president and parliament was reached.

On 8 November, under pressure of the demonstrations, a new constitution was adopted. The powers of the president were substantially curbed to make way for a mixed parliamentarian-presidential form of government. Further important agreements were the enlargement of parliament from 75 seats to 90 seats, and changes in election procedures aimed at establishing a party system of governance. 50% of the seats will in the future be allocated to parties according to proportional representation. Whichever party establishes a majority of the seats is then allowed to appoint the new Prime Minister who would have the right to form the government. Following these constitutional changes, protests stopped.



However, much of the constitutional changes made on 8 November would not last very long. On 19 December 2006, the entire government of Prime Minister Kulov resigned, in an act many believe to have been instigated by president Bakiev. Following the resignation of the cabinet, the parliament proved unable to form a new government due to the changes in the newly implemented constitution that had not yet been implemented in parliament. Since there had been no elections since the changing of the constitution, there was no biggest party to appoint a new Prime Minister and a majority of 45 votes, needed because of the agreement to enlarge the parliament, was not easily reached.

Bakiev then proceeded on 30 December to announce the disintegration of the entire parliament, which according to him had shown to be unable to fulfil its tasks. New elections were thus to be held, in which many of the members of parliament would lose their seats. However, an alternative was offered by Bakiev to parliament, in which parliament would agree to amendments on the new constitution that would give the president back many of his powers lost on 8 November, including the right to appoint the government. If so, new elections would not be due until 2010. A majority of the parliament did in the end support this proposition in order not to lose their seats, and thus the constitution was changed again.

Attempts by the opposition to have the Constitutional Court annul these new changes on grounds of the invalid procedure failed. Changes to the electoral system were not amended, leaving the possibility for Kyrgyzstan to build a political party system open.

The new constitution was signed on 15 January 2007, after which the cabinet could be installed again. Parliament did, however, refuse to reappoint Kulov as prime minister, rejecting his nomination two times. Kulov then went into opposition, claiming the regime of Bakiev to be corrupted. On 29 January, the Kyrgyz parliament approved Azim Isabekov, an economist who acted as Agriculture Minister in the former government, as the new prime minister. His new government was appointed on 8 February.

In the meantime, the opposition was reuniting itself. Next to the already existing For Reforms Movement, a new opposition movement, the United Front For A Worthy Future For Kyrgyzstan, formed under the heading of former prime minister Kulov. The two opposition movements then proceeded to jointly put new demands for constitutional reforms, and for early presidential elections, later radicalizing these demands into the immediate resignation of president Bakiev. A third, more moderate, opposition movement headed by members of the Asaba party, is also demanding constitutional reforms, but does not want to force Bakiev from power.

On 29 March, Isabekov resigned as prime minister within two months of his appointment. This happened after his attempt to fire 7 ministers in a bid to appease the opposition was blocked by president Bakiev. Meanwhile, the opposition was preparing for a new round of rallies over Bakiev's refusal to make the promised constitutional changes. Already the next day, Bakiev appointed the moderate opposition politician and leader of the Social Democratic Party, Almaz Atambaev as the new prime minister. Immediately forming a working group to submit proposals for constitutional changes, this choice of prime minister should help to end the political crisis in the country. However, as Atambaev had over the past few months carefully distanced himself from the opposition, this attempt failed. A proposal to form a new coalition government was rejected by the opposition United Front and the For Reforms Movement.

Meanwhile, protests against the president were mounting. From the beginning of April, the opposition movements organized rallies throughout Northern Kyrgyzstan. A hunger strike started that same day in the capital Bishkek, with about 100 hunger strikers camping in front of the Kyrgyz parliament. On 10 April, the new government of Atambaev was officially approved by the parliament, but this would not temper the demonstrations. Most ministers were simply reappointed. On 11 April, protests culminated in a huge rally in the centre of Bishkek, where a crowd estimated to number more than 10,000 people gathered to voice their disapproval of president Bakiev.

It remains unclear till this point what will happen in this stand-off between president and opposition. It is clear that public confidence in Bakiev has dropped, and most people do not believe anymore that he will indeed make the constitutional changes that he promised to make in 2005. However, Bakiev does not seem to be willing to hand over his power, stating that he is the legitimately chosen president of the country. As long as this situation remains, the political crisis in Kyrgyzstan will continue.



Gender representation

Although there is no legal discrimination against women presenting their candidacy for elections, women are significantly underrepresented in Parliament. Underlying factors include traditional societal values and high barriers such as the inability of women candidates to gather sufficient funding. Especially in the rural areas women are generally not active in politics. Furthermore, the 2005 electoral system, where all deputies were elected from single mandate constituencies, appears to have impacted negatively on women's participation in the elections. The newly changed electoral system that provides for 50% of the seats to be allocated to parties according to proportional representation may prove a significant advancement for the future.

Participation of minorities

National minorities were significantly underrepresented as candidates during the parliamentary elections in 2005. Out of 389 candidates, only 12 percent came from minority groups whereas 35 percent of the population comes from such groups. 5 percent of the candidates were Uzbeks, whereas 14 percent of the population of Kyrgyzstan is, and 4 percent of the candidates were Russian, compared to 13 percent of the population. Other ethnic groups in Kyrgyzstan include Dungan (1%), Tatar (1%), Uyghur (1%) and Ukrainian (1%). 3 percent of the candidates came from such groups. However, the final composition of parliament ensured a certain level of representation to national minority groups. Out of 75 seats, Kyrgyz candidates won 60 seats; Uzbeks won 7 seats; Russians won 3 seats; and representatives of other minority groups won 3 seats.

There were allegations during the elections that decisions to redraw constituency boundaries were taken in order to favour one ethnic group over another. Whether this was truly the motive remains unclear. However, redrawing the constituency boundaries did prove divisive in areas where significant national minorities are present. The 90 percent Uzbek population of Osh was divided into three constituencies significantly large to add a Kyrgyz majority. This clearly discouraged the participation of Uzbeks in the election; there was no Uzbek candidate in any of the Osh districts.

In the 2005 presidential elections, no minority candidate stood for elections. This was partly due to the Kyrgyz language test that should be passed, and that would be live broadcasted on television. No issues relating to national minorities featured during the campaign.

Poverty and the HIPC

Poverty among the Kyrgyz population is widespread. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to a severe economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan caused by the loss of transfers from the Union's budget and disruption of the economic linkages with former Soviet Republics. Although the second half of the 1990s marked considerable economic improvement and the per capita income has since doubled, poverty levels remain high. Income equality has worsened in recent years. Almost half of the population lives below the poverty level, and 13 percent of the population lives in extreme poverty. Poverty is worst in rural areas, where 55.5 percent of the population lives in poverty. In urban areas this is 28.3 percent. Since the 2005 Tulip Revolution, GDP has slightly decreased again, marking a departure of the positive trend since the second half of the 1990s.

Kyrgyz export depends heavily on gold production, which makes up 25 percent of export and 8 percent of the real GDP. Fluctuations in gold prices and -production increase the volatility of GDP growth. Since the first years of 2000 market-oriented structural reforms have been implemented with support of the IMF, World Bank and other international donors. In 2005, the Kyrgyzstan has been invited to join the Heavily Indebted Poor Countries program (HIPC) of the IMF and the World Bank.

The HIPC initiative is an agreement among official creditors designated to help the world's poorest, most heavily indebted countries to escape from unsustainable debt. The program is subject to conditionality; countries need to fulfil governmental, fiscal and monetary conditions in order to be able to join. If so, multilateral creditors will reduce the debt of the participating country.



Currently, Kyrgyzstan has a debt of \$ 1.95 billion. After debt relief by the HIPC initiative 4 million of debt will remain. To participate in the HIPC initiative would thus mean a debt relief of more than billion. This is, to those in favour of joining the program, the most important advantage. They argue that Kyrgyzstan might not be able to find another way of paying off debts, and want to solve Kyrgyzstan's economic dependence in such a way that the country will not become isolated.

On the other hand, there are many people against participation in the HIPC initiative. The initiative's conditionality is seen as outside interference that will reduce the country's sovereignty. Furthermore, many Kyrgyz oppose the status of a heavily indebted poor country. Moreover, they feel that it is not their responsibility that debts have been made in the past under corrupt regimes. It is the donors who are partly to blame for this, and they should therefore take their responsibility without wanting to impose conditionality. This notion was heavily promoted by several NGOs.

On 20 February 2007, the Kyrgyz government decided not to join the HIPC initiative, bowing to public opinion. However, the majority of the government had been in favour of joining the initiative, thereby attracting widespread protests over the past years. Even now that the decision has been made not to join the HIPC programme, many people still feel angered about the government's previous intentions to join up, and many argue that the government is still cooperating too closely with the International Financial Institutions. This is felt as a betrayal to Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty and pride, and continues to cause considerable tension.

Corruption

Corruption has been a continual problem for Kyrgyzstan over the past years. In the 2006 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) of Transparency International, Kyrgyzstan ranked 142nd out of 163 countries surveyed, with a score of 2.2 on a scale of 1 to 10 with 10 being the least corrupt. This is a decrease compared with 2005, when Kyrgyzstan had a CPI score of 2.3.

Low salaries in the (semi-) public sector make the bribery of officials commonplace. The judicial branch is under control of the President and his representatives since the President can easily fire judges from their function. Whereas being a Member of Parliament grants a certain amount of immunity from the law, criminals are attracted to government positions. Politics and criminality become more and more entangled.

Society is largely built on family- and clan loyalties, with jobs being directed accordingly. Within the civil service, extensive patronage networks and the legacy of the nomenclatura system have made it difficult to establish a professional merit-based civil service. Significant regional power centres exist, with a profound split between northern and southern provinces.

Although Bakiev and Kulov pledged to fight corruption during the presidential elections, little has been done until now. Anti-corruption strategies mainly consist of proposals to change the legal framework, but relatively little attention is paid to successful implementation of such changes. During the period of the Tulip Revolution in 2005, many shops and markets in Kyrgyzstan have forcefully been taken and occupied by 'new owners'. Up until now, little has been done to put this right.

Bakiev seems determined to hold his grip on power, undermining his claims that he will put an end to corruption. Furthermore, since Kulov has left the government and joined the opposition, he has made allegations of corruption in Bakiev's government on several occasions. According to Kulov, deputy prime minister Daniyar Usenov had admitted to him that he had paid 0.000 to get this post. All in all, it remains to be seen if Bakiev is really committed to putting an end to corruption.

International relations

Kyrgyzstan is a small country with slightly less than 5.2 million inhabitants. The country is too poor to be economically viable without considerable outside assistance and which lies in a volatile corner of the globe. Former



President Akayev was soon to recognize this, and started seeking international partners and relations immediately upon Kyrgyzstan's independence. Recognizing that Kyrgyzstan was on the short term more likely to seek help from the international community than to contribute, contacts were searched on a principle of neutrality, meaning that Kyrgyzstan would move between different political blocks. As a result, in 1998 Kyrgyzstan was the first member of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). The country is now a member of most major global and regional bodies, including the United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Partnership for Peace of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Kyrgyzstan's relative democracy, especially whilst located in an area where many authoritarian leaders firmly hold their grip on power, has given the country considerable leverage in the international community creating goodwill with (western) democratic countries. This has made sure that a considerable flow of money has been directed to the country in form of democracy assistance and development aid. However, as was the case with the Tulip Revolution, Kyrgyzstan's authoritarian ruled neighbours sometimes consider the relative democracy as a threat, fearing that it might spill over.

Furthermore, being a former Soviet Republic, a neighbour of China, and a relatively democratic country located on a geo-strategic position for the West, the Kyrgyz Republic tries cautiously to balance different major outside influences to its advantage.

Relations with other Central Asian states

Kyrgyzstan borders three of the other four Central Asian States. Of these, Kazakhstan is of biggest importance to Kyrgyzstan, due to its high-speed economic growth and huge financial resources. Kazakhstan is looking for new markets for goods and investments and is therefore likely to give a boost to the Kyrgyz economy once the dust has settled after the political turmoil of the past years. Uzbekistan has big economic and political influence in southern Kyrgyzstan due to the large Uzbek population in that region of the country, making up 14 percent of the entire Kyrgyz population. This influence played out by the Uzbek president, who has in the past threatened that he bears responsibility for the well being of all Uzbeks, including those outside the borders of his own nation. The rights of the Uzbek minority are therefore a sensitive issue.

Tensions over the status of Uzbek enclaves among common borders have continued to mount, and remain unsolved. Furthermore, since 2000 tensions with Uzbekistan have increased because of disputes over the two countries' fuel-for-power arrangement, in which Kyrgyzstan sends hydroelectric power to Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in return for fossil fuels. Uzbekistan's unilateral steps against cross-border terrorist organizations and its mining of the common borders have also brought complaints from Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, the mounting political instability in Kyrgyzstan can prove a considerable threat to the region, since terrorist activities in its border areas are no longer contained. Furthermore, tensions remain with Tajikistan over a border dispute. Tajikistan does not recognize the borders along the Isfara valley to the southwest of Kyrgyzstan. These borders are very porous and relatively unprotected, creating a crossover zone for terrorists and smugglers.

Relations with China

China is Kyrgyzstan's biggest neighbour and is increasing its influence on Kyrgyzstan both economically and politically. Economically, Kyrgyzstan's natural resources are of great interest to China, which has already invested heavily in hydroelectric projects in the country. Furthermore, China's boom economy is always looking for new markets. Politically, China tries to blunt the further penetration of US and Russian military power in Kyrgyzstan, whereas both countries have opened military bases in the country in the beginning of the 2000s.

Furthermore, China tries to maintain good contact and cooperation with Bishkek regarding the countries' common border. Kyrgyzstan borders China's Xinjiang province, a region with 8.4 million of China's Uyghur population. Many of them have migrated to Kyrgyzstan, making up about 1 percent of the population. This is of concern to the Chinese government because of the separatism in Xinjiang and the possible threat of Muslim terrorism. Moreover, China has for long been unsatisfied regarding its borders in Central Asia, and due to its demographic pressure has a



keen interest in expansion of its territory by annexing territory of neighbouring states. This has already happened in 2002, when China and Kyrgyzstan concluded a controversial border treaty in which Kyrgyzstan agreed to transfer 90.000 hectare of territory to China in an attempt to settle a long border dispute. The treaty sparked enormous protests in Kyrgyzstan and is said to be one of the underlying reasons for the people to protest against Akayev's regime in 2005. However, due to the unequal power balance between China and Kyrgyzstan, Bishkek has reason to be interested in friendly relations with its huge neighbour.

Relations with Russia

Relations with Russia are of primary concern to Kyrgyzstan because the country has been very dependent on the Soviet structure in economic and security matters. The disruption of the economic linkages following the collapse of the Soviet Union led to a severe economic crisis in Kyrgyzstan in the early 1990s, causing the country to actively seek reintegration with the old Soviet states. One of the first ways in which this was realised was the establishment of a customs union with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus in 1996. In aspects of national defence Kyrgyzstan has always remained dependent on Russia, not having developed an armed force of significant size and relying on Russian assistance to control the country's borders. However, Kyrgyzstan has often wished for more attention and support from Moscow than it was able to obtain, being a small and remote country of little strategic importance to the Russian Federation. It has only been in the past few years, with the increasing influence of the European Union and China in former Soviet states, that Russia has started to pay more attention, seeing aid to Kyrgyzstan as a successful precedent in its new policy of gaining influence in its "near abroad".

The presence of US troops in Kyrgyzstan for antiterrorist operations in Afghanistan since 2002 prompted the Russians to increase their military presence in the state as well and has marked a significant increase in interest in the area by the Kremlin. In 2005, a bilateral treaty was signed that greatly expanded Russian military aid, arms sales and aid in building energy infrastructure in Kyrgyzstan.

Relations with the US

Multifaceted US assistance to the newly independent Central Asian States started in 1992 with the adoption of the Freedom Act. Initially, US assistance focussed mainly on democratization and the promotion of free market economies. Kyrgyzstan, being the most democratized country in the region, profited a great deal from US goodwill, making it the Central Asian State that received most donor funding. Furthermore, security cooperation has played an increasingly important role in US-Central Asia relations, because of the US interest in preventing nuclear proliferation in the region. In the mid-1990s Kyrgyzstan joined the NATO's Partnership for Peace program. This quickly led to US military presence in the country, whereas US military officers began participating in Partnership for Peace exercises.

The Partnership for Peace program was also of importance to stability in the region with the Central Asian states working together under a wider mandate to sustain the peace. However, before 9/11 Central Asia was marginal to US national security, posing little immediate threat. Since then, the region has assumed new importance on the basis of its geo-strategic position. In December 2001, the US and Kyrgyzstan signed a basing access agreement allowing US and NATO forces to use Manas airport in Kyrgyzstan to support the war in Afghanistan. This agreement was extended for a year in 2002, and for another 3 years in 2003. In 2006, new negotiations were held regarding the US military presence in Kyrgyzstan, in which the US pledged to pay 0 million as a rent to keep using Manas. Next to the strategic importance of the airbase to NATO, this sum can also be seen as a form of development aid to Kyrgyzstan.

Relations with the European Union

Relations between Kyrgyzstan and the European Union are structured along the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that was signed in 1995 and entered into force in 1999. Although relatively small volumes of bilateral trade and direct investment are flowing into Kyrgyzstan from the EU, the EU does consider Kyrgyzstan of significant importance as it sees the country as a potential leader of political and economic reform in Central Asia



and as an advocate of closer cooperation and integration in the region. Money has therefore been directed to Kyrgyzstan in the form of aid directed to support the consolidation of democracy and the developing of a market economy in the country. Aid has also been given to Kyrgyzstan for the implementation of the PCA. Furthermore, regional aid is being given to alleviate poverty and to develop better relations between the Central Asian countries. However, Central Asia has never been a priority area of the EU and relations are not extensive. The EU is therefore a relatively small player in Kyrgyzstan, when compared with Russia, China and the US. This might change when the EU decides upon a new strategy towards Central Asia, with current chair of the EU Germany having pledged to put more priority on the region.

Political persons, –parties and deputy groups

Kyrgyz politics relies mainly on persons. Parties have little influence and are often unknown by the Kyrgyz public. 52 percent of the population is unaware of any political parties in Kyrgyzstan; another 5 percent knows about existing parties, but is not informed about any of their platforms. Similarly, most politicians do not regard political parties as much more than a vehicle to get into parliament. Many politicians, however, never wished to affiliate to any party because the constitution forbade party-membership for the President, Ministers and other important officials. This has changed with the constitutional changes in November 2006. A party can be registered when it has as little as 10 members, and more than 80 Kyrgyz parties formally exist. Most of those are inactive, have a minimum amount of members, and revolve around 1 or 2 key figures. In many cases, politicians who were elected from the same party list do not work together in parliament and instead choose their political associates once they are elected. Within the parliament, deputy groups are formed by MPs that did not rally for the elections together, sometimes on the basis of rather vague links.

SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

The political party structure of Kyrgyzstan is relatively fragmented and in an ongoing process of development. Most political parties are centred on a single individual rather than focussed on a party policy platform.

Social–Democratic Party

Chairperson: Almaz Atambaev

The Social–Democratic party of Kyrgyzstan was founded in 1993 by Aabygany Erkebaev. The party calls for a socially oriented policy of development and the establishment of a parliamentary system of politics in Kyrgyzstan. Currently, the party's leader, Almaz Atambaev, is the Kyrgyz prime minister. This has led to some tensions within the party, whereas most members are (moderately) opposing president Bakiev. The party is represented in parliament by M. Eshimkanov, who is very critical of president Bakiev. Because the party is one of the few parties in Kyrgyzstan which genuinely calls for a liberal democracy, it has pretty good ties with the west. The party is said to have contacts with the Socialist International, but it does not have any status.

Ata–Meken

Chairperson: Omurbek Tekebayev

Omurbek Tekebayev founded Ata–Meken in 1992 following a split from the Erkin Kyrgyzstan party. The party calls for a democratic state and economic reforms and can be considered centre left. It favours compromise between various social sectors and government bodies. Tekebayev, who was Speaker of Parliament from March 2005 till February 2006, but resigned after a clash with president Bakiev, is an important opposition figure to the current president. Ata–Meken is currently strengthening its ranks with member of parliament representing different regions, thereby hoping to widen its support base.

The Communist Party

Chairperson: Ishak Absamatovich Masaliev

This party, which says to have about 2000 members, is one of the largest parties in Kyrgyzstan. The party was



founded in 1992 and is represented in the Jogorku Kenesh by one person, its leader Masaliev. He is the son of former party-leader Absamat Masaliev, who led the party until his death in 2004. The party's ideology could be considered as social-democratic. It accepts the pluralistic political system and the market economy but is strongly opposed to the privatization of public assets such as the energy system. In 1999 a small Stalinist group has split away from the party, calling itself 'The Communists Party'.

OTHER POLITICAL PARTIES

Ak Jol People's Party (Bright Way)
Chairperson: Elmira Ibraimova

The party was founded by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev on 15 October 2007, to run in the parliamentary elections in December 2007. It came on the first seat and gained 71 of the 90 seats in Parliament. Most of the Ak Jol members are veteran politicians, i.e. individuals who are already engaged in the government and parliament. In the 2007 Parliamentary elections, the party formed a major bloc with several political forces. One of its top priority in the elections was to fight corruption, which seemed rather controversial given Bakiyev's reputation – a head of state that runs a country where corruption is rising among member of his government and close relatives. The party is strongly contested by local NGOs and opposition parties, accusing the party of dominating the political landscape in their own strict autocratic way. Ak Jol is similar to Tajikistan's People's Democratic Party and Kazakhstan's Nur Otan party. Bakiyev is in control of the dominant political bloc in Kyrgyzstan, just like it is the case in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. Presidents in this country are capable make use of administrative resources and local government officials to win majorities in Parliament and marginalize the opposition. It seems that President Bakiyev is heading towards the same direction.

Adilet (Justice Party)
Co-chairperson: Toichubek Kasymov, Kubanychbek Jumaliev, Altai Borubaev

Adilet was founded in 1999 on a platform of economic modernization. The party wants to ensure economic development, introduction of economic priorities with account of local conditions and financial stabilization and reduction of the inflation rate. Furthermore, the party wishes to attract all kinds of internal and foreign investment into the economic sector. However, the pro-Akayev party has lost much of its relevance after the ouster of the former president.

Union of Democratic Forces
Chairpersons: Kubatbek Kalbekovich Baybolov and B. Beshimov

This party, which claims to have about 6000 members, can be considered as one of the largest parties in Kyrgyzstan. It was founded by Kubatbek Baybolov, an entrepreneur who owns a lot of small businesses in Bishkek. He is the only representative of the party in the parliament. The party's ideology could be considered liberal.

Moya Strana (My Country)
Chairpersons: Z. Kurmanov and G. Kulikova

This party, which claims to have about 6500 members, is probably the largest party in Kyrgyzstan. It was founded in 1998 by a group of people including Djoomart Otorbaev. The party's ideology can be considered as liberal. In the 2005 elections, 3 MPs of Moya Strana were elected into parliament, who all belonged to different deputy groups. Iskandery Gaipkulov belongs to the 'Meken' deputy group, which entirely consists of MPs from the south of Kyrgyzstan. Kabay Karabekov, a former journalist who is very critical of President Bakiyev, belongs to the 'El birimdigi' deputy group. Jantoro Satylbaldiev, a former ally of Akayev who gives priority to fighting corruption, was leader of the deputy group 'El menen', but has resigned from parliament upon being appointed as governor of the



Osh region in May 2006.

Alga Kyrgyzstan (Forward Kyrgyzstan)
Chairperson: Bolot Begaliev

This party was founded in 2003 by Bermet Akayeva, a daughter of former president Akayev, in support of then President Akayev. 24 of the 75 MPs elected in 2005 belonged to this party, but the party has since disintegrated as none of the MPs felt committed to it since Akayev was ousted from power. Many of the MPs from Alga Kyrgyzstan can now be found in the deputy groups 'Birimdik' and 'Jibek Jolu'.

Ar-Namys (Dignity)
Chairperson: E. Aliev

This party was founded in 1999 by Felix Kulov. This party quickly became Kyrgyzstan's leading opposition party against President Akayev, and announced to run for parliamentary elections in 2000. However, quickly after this announcement Kulov was arrested for corruption and sentenced to seven years imprisonment by a military court, and the Ar-Namys party was banned from the elections. The party then formed the People's Congress of Kyrgyzstan electoral alliance together with three other opposition parties, of which Kulov became the chairperson. In 2004, Ar-Namys joined the For Fair Elections opposition alliance in preparation for the 2005 elections that would lead to the Tulip Revolution and the ouster of President Akayev. During these events, Kulov was released and cleared from all charges, and quickly became one of the leading candidates for the presidential elections. He decided, however, to join forces with Bakiev, becoming his Prime Minister until he and his cabinet resigned over the new constitution in November 2006. Parliament did not accept his re-nomination to the post of Prime Minister in the beginning of 2007, after which Kulov decided to join the opposition forces again, claiming that President Bakiev had tried to get rid of him. The party is likely to follow Kulov and to join the opposition.

Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan)
Chairperson: Bektur Asanov

Erkin Kyrgyzstan was founded in 1991 and could be considered a progressive democratic party. Tursunbek Bakir Uulu, the current ombudsman of Kyrgyzstan (since 2002) who was the most vocal critic of Akayev, belongs to the party. Since his appointment as ombudsman he has called for the abolishment of the death penalty, the release of Felix Kulov from prison and an end to the ban on the Islamic movement Hizb-ut Tahrir. He also called the 2005 parliamentary elections the least free and fair the nation had ever seen. Bakir Uulu also was one of the candidates in the 2005 presidential elections when he came second with 3.8 percent of the vote.

The Uzbek Party

The Uzbek party holds one seat in parliament and is represented by its vice-president Alisher Achmedovich Sabirov. The party tries to further the interests of Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek population. Currently ethnic Uzbeks make up 14 percent of the Kyrgyz population, but for demographic reasons their proportion is increasing, and the party is therefore likely to grow.

Asaba (Flag)

Chairpersons: Azimbek Beknazarov and Roza Otunbaeva

Asaba was founded in 1990 as an opposition party against former president Akayev. Its leaders, Azimbek Baknazarov and Roza Otunbaeva, were both prominent opposition figures during the 2005 Tulip Revolution. Directly



after the revolution, Asaba supported the newly elected president Bakiev. However, they have switched to (moderate) opposition again out of disappointment over Bakiev's current policies and his refusal to secede power to the parliament. The party has a nationalist platform and calls for the review of the agreement with China involving the transfer of 90,000 hectare of territory to the country.

DEPUTY GROUPS IN THE JOGORKU KENESH

There are six deputy groups in the Jogorku Kenesh, which together have 63 members. Only 9 deputies are non-affiliated. According to the rule of procedure, 7 MPs are needed to form a deputy group. This gives certain advantages such as more speaking time and a staff person paid by parliament.

El menen (With People)

El menen consists of 14 MPs. Its leader is Jantoro Satylbadiev. Many members of this deputy groups are businessmen and had positions under Akayev. The common ideology of this group can be called centrist/liberal.

El Birimdigi (People's Unity)

El Birimdigi consist of 13 MPs. The group consists of people critical of president Bakiev. 4 out of 7 ethnic Uzbek MPs are in this group.

XXI Vek (XXI Century)

XXI Vek has only 4 members, but is nonetheless registered as a deputy group. Its leader is Masaliev, the leader of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan. The other 3 members are all wealthy businessmen, one of which is ethnic Uzbek.

Meken (Homeland)

Meken consists of 10 MPs, who all come from the South of Kyrgyzstan. The group is well organized, has its own internal rules of procedure and meets regularly to decide on a common position in the Jogorku Kenesh.

Birimdik (Unity)

This group consist of 11 MPs, who have little in common except having all been supporters of former president Akayev.

Jibek Jolu (Silk Road)

This group consists of 8 MPs; most of whom are former supporters of Akayev. The leadership of this group rotates every 6 months.