

Hanns Seidel Foundation

Online Seminar “Recent developments in Kyrgyzstan – what implications for relations with the EU?”

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“Kyrgyzstan: 3. Revolution and what now?”

Dear estimated audience,

it is a great honor for me to address you here.

I was now witness personally during 3 revolutions initiated by the Kyrgyz people. On the slide you can see here some of my memories from 2010 and 2020.

There were always justified reasons for the revolutions: Wide corruption, political mismanagement, nepotism, and now in 2020 voter fraud.

3 presidents had to leave their post, two of them now living abroad. One has transferred his power like foreseen in the constitution but is now in prison.

So, my dear Kyrgyz friends: This is all difficult to understand for rational thinking European brains.

Off course, Kyrgyzstan has is own dynamic, is a country “sui generis”.

But is it really necessary to destroy each time your parliament and government buildings, to loot shops and factories? That all makes your people’s revolutions not more likeable and gives also a bad crude image to Kyrgyzstan.

If your state can not protect his own parliament and government buildings how it will protect foreign investors?

Each political group emerging from the revolution in Kyrgyzstan as a “winner” promises to their citizens to make everything better, to bring better life. But what is the reality: First of all, they change all staff in public administration (and affiliated enterprises) with their “own” people – without looking for any qualification requirement.

Again, you can say this is the logic of any revolution process, but I have to tell you: Difficult to understand for factually thinking European decision makers.

So, after 3. Revolution, Kyrgyzstan is looking up in a very uncertain future.

The most recent political history of Kyrgyzstan includes violent changes of power, interethnic conflicts, and clashes on the borders with neighbors (see last two years Kyrgyz-Tajik border

area). Together with chronic economic problems (intensified now by COVID-19), this contributed to the political mobilization and political activism of citizens.

The relatively low legitimacy of legal political institutions and processes, including elections, emphasizes the high role of the “street”, which complements the informal legitimacy of political power. The willingness to use violence to achieve their goals leads to a radicalization of protests and a significant number of injured and victims of clashes.

The experience of previous revolutions in Kyrgyzstan shows that the current rapid development of events is not something unusual for the country but reflects the state of its political institutions and political culture.

And there is now a new challenge of ethnic nationalism with religious elements in the country. This situation has been rising possibly long ago but obviously intensified in post-election period.

What are now the implications of all these events for relations of Kyrgyzstan with the EU and also Germany?

My dear Kyrgyz friends, you are close to the point where you can lose your most valuable brand and asset, to be the “democratic island of Central Asia”. You should protect and keep your relatively better democratic achievements, support your active civil society and your successful local self-government units who both did an amazing job during the ongoing pandemic to overcome economical and social problems of your population.

You need urgently political and administrative reforms: For a country with a population of a little bit more than 6 million (therefrom 1 million working in Russia) you do not need 6 administrative levels/layers. You should make the political management and decision-making process faster, more stringent, transparent, and easy to understand for the citizens. The president and his administration have to take the political leadership in the country. The parliament will be responsible for the legislation and control of the presidency (balance of power). The parliament should have a second chamber where all regions and all ethnics of the country are represented (also with concrete authority to act).

Nowadays the decision-making power is distributed between president, parliament, government and also state committee for national security – a construction which makes it difficult to run the country.

People of Kyrgyzstan like “their democracy” – since generations and since the time they were living in tribes. Their model of democracy has a long history and is different to our European styled democracy. Please keep this in mind. Let’s just accept Kyrgyzstan like it is – with all his plus and minus.

Also, the new Kyrgyz political leadership should keep this always in mind. Kyrgyz people do not like authoritarian governance, and they are very sensitive for any abuse of state power. And not to forget: They are very brave people – always ready to defend their freedom and ideals.

Kyrgyzstan nowadays is facing a huge challenge: In just six months the small country should organize 3 elections – for president, for parliament and for most of the local communities (cities and municipalities), as may be also a referendum (plebiscite) for constitutional amendments. Until now just presidential elections are scheduled for January 10, 2021.

And the big task is present to avoid the crucial mistakes which were committed during the last parliamentary elections on October 04 leading to the new revolution. We are talking about vote buying and illegal use of administrative resources – both confirmed by decision of the Central Election Commission on October 06.

A first step in the right direction was done: On October 22, 2020, the Kyrgyz parliament canceled voting in form No. 2, reduced also the electoral threshold for parties to 3 percent (instead of present 7 percent), the size of election budget deposit to 1 million Kyrgyz Som (12.500 Euro) from before 5 million. That will make it easier also for smaller and new political parties to win seats in the (new) seventh parliament convocation.

Coming back to voting in form No. 2: The law provides for a scrutiny period for voters to request corrections of their records or change their voting address, allowing them to vote at a place other than their registered place of residence. Some 441,000 (12 per cent) voters used the right to temporarily change their voting address. As a result, around 30 polling stations exceeded the upper limit of 2,500 voters prescribed by election law. Many ODIHR interlocutors, including most of the contesting political parties, expressed serious concerns about the possible misuse by parties and candidates of this right, and alleged that the changes were an indication of a vote buying scheme.

But Kyrgyzstan, you never walk alone: I am sure that like our Hanns Seidel Foundation also European Union will support you as an important partner country to further develop your “democratic island” with freedom and prosperity for everybody!

Thanks!