

April, 2010: Three Years Later, and what has come?

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The third anniversary of the April “coup” has been marked in Kyrgyzstan with a national holiday. Since 2010, Kyrgyzstan has undergone a transition government under Roza Otunbaeva, ethnic violence between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the Southern provinces, and has made progress towards the establishment of a democratic political order under the Presidency of Almazbek Atambaev. During this transition, Kyrgyzstan has had to deal with persistent issues of corruption, crime, regionalism, and a weak economy. Kyrgyzstan has also recently embarked on an ambitious plan to develop the state and economy over the next four years.

What led to the 2010 coup?

Kyrgyzstan has struggled with a weak economy since the beginning of independence, and this contributed to the overthrow of the Askar Akayev regime in 2005. However, the hope for economic improvement and increasing standard of living went unrealised under the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiev. Increasing prices for utilities and corruption within Bakiev’s inner circle led to deteriorating socio-economic conditions, increased regionalisation and criminalisation, and encouraged an exodus of the Russian-speaking population, as well as labour migration to Kazakhstan and Russia.

Bakiev’s consolidation of authority resulted in a strengthening of nepotism: the Bakiev family established their dominance through takeovers of economic enterprises and political organisations, and links to organised crime. Bakiev gradually pushed all the associates of the 2005 revolution out of power, and proceeded to harass opposition members, made repeated amendments to the constitution, cracked down on independent media (including intimidation tactics), and established the nationalist Ak-Jol (White Path) party to dominate the Jogorku Kenesh.

These internal issues strengthened the domestic resolve against Bakiev’s regime, but the international factors also played a major role in Bakiev’s downfall. Issues and agreements pertaining to the Manas airbase increased tensions with the American government, and the disagreements over the Dastan armament facility, and training facilities in the Batken played key roles in growing disillusionment from the Russian government. Furthermore, overtures to China compromised the Bakiev regime internationally, as offers to work on the Kambarata dam and the Manas airbase demonstrated the unreliability of agreements with the Bakiev government.

What have been the results since 2010?

In 2010, the winners of the coup made generous promises about imminent changes in the life of the country and the people: a new Constitution, a fair and incorruptible judiciary, and an economic sector with investors contesting for their share. Three years later, and most people are disillusioned. The only success seems to be the establishment of the Parliamentary Republic that oppositionists had dreamed about.

The picture that is painted is perhaps discouraging, but is not the entire story, of course. Solutions, however, seem to be slow in coming to Kyrgyzstan. State institutions are slowly being restored, and the fragility of the economy is a major factor in the speed with which development can occur. And trust in the government by the population must be gained for lasting change to happen. This causes issues in itself, however, as a nationalist trend within the population has been manipulated, creating a difficult environment for certain foreign investors (read: Kumtor and Chinese enterprises).

The argument is that ideology needs to be reshaped, and cooperation needs to be intensified. Factionalism has emerged as the dominant trend in Parliamentary politics, inhibiting collaboration to improve the country after years of ‘Clan politics.’ Kyrgyzstan’s government has faith that the past will not return, however: since the adoption of the new Constitution, the ‘consciousness’ of the people is able to increase. Freedoms and responsibilities exist now more than before, and local government councils have opposition and non-parliamentary parties that have won elections. The ambitious task of forming a new political culture will, however, take time.

Conclusions

So, what can be made of all this? Certainly, criticism is beneficial, but politicians need to avoid relying on rhetoric. Kyrgyzstan is undergoing a revolutionary, experimental experience: the adoption of democratic values and the reaction against authoritarianism and nepotism is a first in the region. A system of checks and balances is beginning to emerge, and the ‘monopoly on truth’ has buckled. But the new regime still needs to encourage confidence in the population. That will be the greatest challenge, and the determinant of what will emerge in the future.

References

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