

The Kyrgyz events and Kazakhstan

As an OSCE chairman for 2010, Kazakhstan promised to draw the attention of the organization to the security issues of Central Asia. The April events in Kyrgyzstan, which led to the overthrow of the Bakiyev government and his flight from the country, presented an unexpected opportunity for Astana to show its ability to tackle regional problems. After due concerns about the unrest in Kyrgyzstan and appeals for restraint were expressed, the leadership of Kazakhstan undertook some practical steps. Chairperson-in-Office Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev dispatched a Special Envoy to Bishkek and started consultations with high officials including the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and EU Special Representative for Central Asia Pierre Morel. The emphasis of activities was on coordination of efforts of international partners and new Kyrgyz authorities. Astana proved to be rather successful at this task.

Astana's most dramatic intervention in the Kyrgyz affairs in the capacity of the OSCE chairman took place on 15 April, when it mediated an agreement between the Interim Government of Kyrgyzstan and President Bakiyev on his departure from the country and organized his flight to the provincial city of Taraz in southern Kazakhstan. The official statement noted that it was the result of joint efforts of Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, US President Barack Obama and Russia's President Dmitriy Medvedev, as well as active mediation by the OSCE, the UN and the EU¹. To highlight the importance of Kazakhstan's contribution, President Nazarbayev said that the negotiated departure prevented a possible civil war in Kyrgyzstan and presented the pilots involved in the operation with an award.

While the Kyrgyz events played a positive role for Kazakhstan's image and its record of the OSCE

chairman, in terms of security and repercussions for domestic politics, they presented the Kazakh authorities with a number of serious challenges and risks. Out of fear of spillovers of instability and smuggling of weapons, Kazakhstan closed its border with Kyrgyzstan. This further aggravated the condition of the Kyrgyz economy dependent on the transit of Chinese goods to neighboring states. As of April 30, the border remained closed.

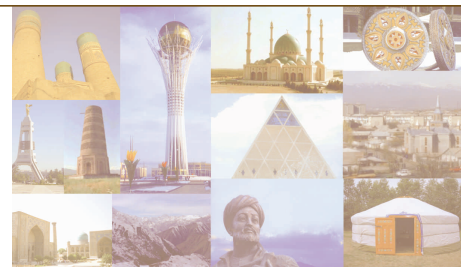
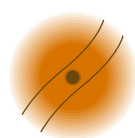
Kyrgyzstan is culturally the closest among Kazakhstan's neighbors. Therefore, the two Tulip revolutions, which ousted the governments of Akayev and Bakiyev, are seen by Astana as dangerous precedents. The conclusion the Kazakh authorities are likely to draw is that poverty and deprivation create ground for social upheavals and it is necessary to pay more attention to poverty alleviation and improvement of social standards for the sake of security.

It can also be speculated that the Kyrgyz events would make it more difficult for the authorities to implement freedom of assembly and other freedoms granted by the Constitution but constrained in reality. On the other hand, they would be more hesitant to use force to suppress demonstrations and other forms of protest that do not receive the official permission required by law, for fear of triggering angry reaction of the crowd similar to what happened in Kyrgyzstan. This cautious attitude was apparent in the fairly mild treatment of a demonstration organized by the opposition in Almaty in April that was not permitted by the city authorities.

Adoption of the National Unity doctrine

In April President Nazarbayev signed the National Unity doctrine, a document that is aimed at shaping a cohesive political community out of the multi-ethnic population of Kazakhstan. The original draft appeared

*Department of Political Science, Kazakhstan Institute of Management, Economics and Strategic Research



in October 2009 and caused major controversy. Nationalist-patriotic groups were particularly upset by the dissolution of the Kazakh identity in the generic Kazakhstani national identity. They threatened protests and hunger strikes that in the end did not take place due to the conciliatory position of the authorities that allowed for public discussions and welcomed alternative drafts. As a result, a public commission was created to compose a new doctrine. They used the original draft, two alternative drafts developed by a group of nationalists led by writer and activist Mukhtar Shakhnov and representatives of Ak Zhol party, and other recommendations (the total number of which exceeded 500).

The new doctrine is much shorter, better written but less specific with regard to concrete policies. It contains three parts: “one country – one destiny”, “different origin – equal opportunities”, and “development of the national spirit”. The first part dwells on the necessity of the development of the sense of belonging and responsibility of each citizen for the country. The second promotes the principle of nondiscrimination on the basis of ethnicity or religion. According to the third one, the Spirit that is to unify the nation should have two pillars: first, traditions and patriotism; and second, innovation, competitiveness and victory. It envisions modernization and growing competitiveness based on the foundation of traditions that would provide for the breakthrough of the young nation. If Kazakhstanis cannot become united, modernized, “intellectual”, they are doomed to remain in the backyard of history².

The heated discussions caused by the doctrine show that the society is not fully ready for the acceptance of civic national identity due to the insecurities of the Kazakh identity.

Extension of the EITI validation deadline

In 2005 Kazakhstan endorsed the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), launched

by British Prime Minister Tony Blair in 2002. The initiative is aimed at increasing transparency over payments by companies to governments and over revenues by the governments of resource-rich countries. By joining the EITI, the countries can improve their investment climate and governance.

To demonstrate compliance with the EITI, an aspiring country needs to undergo a validation procedure that ensures that it is up to the EITI global standard. Kazakhstan had a validation scheduled for March this year, however, it was unable to meet the deadline, and in February it applied for an extension. Civil society groups involved in the process supported the government’s request. It is believed that it is better to use the good will of the authorities, their readiness to cooperation with the EITI and give them a chance to improve the situation. The EITI granted Kazakhstan an extension and set a new deadline September³.

Strengthening of the southern borders

Since the beginning of 2010, Kazakhstan has been strengthening its southern borders: creating more checkpoints, providing them with manpower and equipment. The activities were in line with the creation of the Customs Union with Russia and Belorussia. «Opening up» borders in one direction makes it necessary to «close» them in the other direction. In April, in the aftermath of the Kyrgyz events, the government decided to accelerate the financing of stronger borders⁴. This trend indicates that Kazakhstan is gradually relinquishing its Central Asian integration schemes and that the rest of the region is increasingly seen as a source of instability and security threats.

¹ OSCE Chairmanship. Press release, 15 April 2010 (http://www.osce.org/cio/item_1_43509.html).

² Doktrina natsionalnogo edinstva Kazakhstana. Astana 2010 (<http://www.assembly.kz/?ft=2000&type=93>).

³ More information on Kazakhstan and EITI can be found on the EITI web-page (<http://eiti.org/Kazakhstan>).

⁴ The authorities created camps for refugees along the border that have remained empty. Source: Panorama No.14, 16 April 2010.

The opinions expressed here are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the positions of the Central Asia Observatory (CAO). The institutions that constitute the CAO are not responsible for the use of these contents.