

INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE: A RISKY REVOLUTION[©]

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The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has come under strong attack lately. Many have written it off altogether, arguing that it is a relic of the Cold War, unfit for the security needs of the 21st Century. The recent events which have engulfed Kyrgyzstan show the opposite is true.

Today, it is the OSCE that is on the ground in Kyrgyzstan facilitating a political process leading to compromise, maybe to a new interim government and preparing conditions for a new election. As Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE, I sent my Personal Representative for Central Asia to Kyrgyzstan to maintain dialogue between the disputing sides, and help them reach an agreement.

The situation in Kyrgyzstan is truly complex, and the conflicting interests are numerous. In order to succeed in Kyrgyzstan, we will not only need to attain maximum local cooperation, but also coordination between third party negotiators. In this light, Russian and American support is welcomed. We should all work together to create an all inclusive interim process.

The whereabouts of President Akayev remain unknown, while the opposition claims to be in control of the country. While it is fortunate that violence has been kept to a bare minimum, my message to all parties in Kyrgyzstan is the same: democratic legitimacy can only be derived through democratic process. The looting of state and private property must stop immediately, and law and order must be reestablished. Preparations must be made in order to enable an appointment of a stable interim government.

This means a consensus must be reached within the opposition, as well as between the opposition and the incumbent (outgoing) government, in order to prepare for new parliamentary and presidential elections.

I believe new elections should be organized sooner rather than later. Kyrgyzstan is also suffering from grave economic underperformance. In order to kick-start the economy Kyrgyzstan above all needs stability and transparency, which can only be derived through a free and fair election. The OSCE can do its part by offering both election preparation assistance, election monitoring assistance, as well as, assistance to the interim government. But we have to be clear. The role of the OSCE cannot be to pick a new government; we can only help by facilitating the process and offering our expert help.

Some have taken this opportunity to criticize the OSCE for its election observation missions, implying that Kyrgyzstan would not happen otherwise. This criticism is unjust and out of context. The positive impact of democracy, free and fair elections cannot be denied neither in America nor in Russia (not to speak about Europe and Asia). In fact, election monitoring throughout Europe and Central Asia has helped to strengthen democracies. I do agree, however,

with those who argue that the OSCE should be reformed. Rather than killing what the OSCE does well in order to level the playing field between the three security baskets – human dimension, economic-ecological dimension, and socio-political dimension – let's instead improve parts which don't work as well.

While the recent events in Kyrgyzstan have probably taken most of us by surprise, the yellow, or "lemon" as some call it, revolution in the Central Asian Republic is not a carbon-copy of Ukraine and Georgia. Aside from having a common interest of removing President Akayev from power, the Kyrgyz opposition has no common domestic agenda. This raises the possibility of a political stalemate, which could stall new elections, or even create a political vacuum.

I'm worried that any stagnation on the political front will be used by various extremists and organized criminal networks to further their agendas. According to some reports, the number of terrorist and organized crime elements has increased southern Kyrgyzstan. By acquiring weapons and using force they are accumulating influence; only through swift political action can we reverse this development.

Finally, all of us must prepare contingency plans in case the political sides fail to agree, and massive violence does break out. Bloodshed is still a possibility in Kyrgyzstan.

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