

An incomplete revolution©

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After returning to Bishkek for the second time since the revolution, it is clear to me that the interim government has made progress in returning a sense of stability to Kyrgyzstan. Life in the capital seems to be calm; the outlook seems brighter.

But much work remains to be done. The country's interim rulers, who took power when former President Askar Akayev fled Bishkek last month, need to restore public confidence in the political process by fully embracing democracy. A step-by-step approach is the best available option for ensuring a safe transition to democracy and economic prosperity in this Central Asian republic. At the same time, political pressure should be applied on the new government to ensure that they honor their commitment to the democratic process.

The first priority is obviously the upcoming July 10 presidential election. In order to be legitimate, the election must be free and fair, and above all transparent. Irregularities at this point would seriously compromise Kyrgyzstan's territorial integrity and internal stability. I would not rule out the possibility of another outbreak of violence in Kyrgyzstan if the transition is not inclusive and democratic.

A free and fair presidential election is a fiction unless we can ensure that the right of equal participation for all candidates. It is not clear that Kulov, a former Bakiyev backer and arguably the most popular political personality in Kyrgyzstan today, will run for the presidency; nor can we be sure at this point that he will be treated as an equal candidate. At the same time, we can't speak of a free and fair election if we can't keep corruption and organized crime out of post-revolution politics. Today one can't avoid noticing that both are a serious problem. We hear that the south of the country is still overrun by drug trafficking, weapons smuggling, and organized crime syndicates. This degree of lawlessness is a matter of great concern. The OSCE, in helping monitor the elections, can help ensure that these disturbing developments don't stand in the way of a free and fair presidential election.

In the post-election period, the priority should be on restoring law and order, and rebuilding Kyrgyz security forces. The police and security structures must be streamlined, and the loyalty of the police force aligned to the state. It is impossible to have a functioning order, let alone a democracy, without the means to enforce the rule of law.

The EU, the U.S., and Russia should all help the Kyrgyz government with the equipment and training of their security forces. The OSCE is well positioned to coordinate this process. It is in the interest of all to have a functioning security structure in Kyrgyzstan. Restoring control over the southern provinces would be a step in the right direction.

There is an urgent need to help the Kyrgyz develop a proactive counter-organized crime and counter-terrorism initiative.

However, we should not confuse security with authoritarian rule. Security reforms have to be pursued hand-in-hand with constitutional reforms. It is simply absurd to think that democracy has to be compromised for security. Democracy is the best long-term security policy.

The authorities in Bishkek will no doubt also have to pursue economic reforms and build infrastructure and human capacity. Constructing a national development plan—as is customary for EU candidate states—would be of value. Such an approach would help define priorities and assess the level of domestic capacity to pursue legislative, legal and economic reforms in Kyrgyzstan. But one thing is clear: Economic prosperity in Kyrgyzstan can be assured in the long run only through the creation of a vibrant small and medium size enterprise sector. SMEs are the heart of a modern economy.

If things move in a well-planned way, with well defined short-term goals, we will succeed in making the democratization of Kyrgyzstan irreversible. However, we should not lose sight of the big picture. Events in Kyrgyzstan have opened a window of opportunity for the spread of democracy, human rights, and economic prosperity throughout the Central Asian region. This is what the OSCE is about. Let's seize this opportunity.

As we in Europe and elsewhere discuss democratic and economic reforms with the countries of the Middle East, and with countries in the Caucasus, it is only realistic to also develop a grand strategy for the future of Central Asia. The EU would be better off with a comprehensive regional approach for Central Asia. A purely bilateral approach, it seems to me, is deficient at this point.

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