

Kyrgyz Institutions Take Shape

Author: [IWPR Central Asia](#)

Date set for presidential elections as authorities improve security, although a pro-Akaev march threatens more trouble.

As the new authorities in Kyrgyzstan got to grips with security issues in the capital Bishkek, the sitting parliament announced a presidential election would be held in June

Up to 3,000 supporters of President Askar Akaev, who insists he is still head of state and is now reported to have flown to Moscow, were reported to be on the march and - by the afternoon of March 25 - to be nearing Bishkek.

The counter-protest began with demonstrations in Kemin, Akaev's birthplace, apparently organised by his minister for emergencies and ecology, Temirbek Akmataliyev, a close associate of his who has been sacked by the emerging opposition-run administration.

Crowds of people then split off from the demo and set off on foot, horseback and an assortment of vehicles. When they got as far as the town of Tokmok, residents panicked, closing their shops and dialing the police. People started gathering with the aim of preventing the marchers from coming into the town.

IWPR contributors attempting to take pictures of the march had stones thrown at them when people recognised them as photojournalists.

Akaev himself was in Moscow, according to the city's Ekho Moskvyy radio station. He is said to have arrived there late on March 25. Prior to that it was unclear where he was, except that he himself said in a statement that he was not in Kyrgyzstan, and there were strong rumours he was in neighbouring Kazakhstan.

SOME MORE PLUNDER - BUT MORE SECURITY

The night of March 25-26 saw a second round of looting in Bishkek, although this time better security measures began delivering results.

Police units supported by ad hoc "people's militias" patrolled the main streets and neighborhoods. The crowds of people attempting to loot shops were smaller in numbers than the previous evening, and were quickly dispersed by police - who had been sanctioned to use firearms - and their civilian assistants.

One alleged looter was shot dead by a shop owner, and a second died of a stab wound. About 50 people were detained for looting.

Late on March 25, Bishkek residents panicked as rumours circulated that the city's water supply had been poisoned. IWPR contributors called the water company and was told it was a false rumour.

Army soldiers were drafted in from a base at Koitash near Bishkek to help civilian units with security.

IWPR was told by a number of opposition sources that much of the looting so far had been instigated by figures from the Akaev administration who wanted to discredit the new leaders by creating unrest.

“We have proven evidence that the looters consist of gangs of thugs who were paid in advance and were organised by Akaev supporters,” said Edil Baisalov, leader of the NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, adding, “I think that rule of law was re-established last night.”

Azima Rasulova, coordinator of the opposition youth movement Kelkel, said the same individuals alleged to have attacked protesters on March 24 had gone on to start the looting. “They had white [baseball] caps and according to our information, they were organised by some of the newly elected deputies. The same evening [March 24], eyewitnesses saw tough looking men wearing the same caps, breaking shopfront windows to let young people go inside.”

WHICH PARLIAMENT?

The date now set for the presidential vote, June 26, is about four months ahead of schedule. President Akaev has repeatedly said he would not stand for a further term in October but some observers suspected he would seek constitutional amendments allowing him to stay on in power.

The legislature, which is the outgoing body rather than the recently – and controversially – elected one, decided to extend its own mandate (currently ending on April 14) until the June ballot.

There had been some confusion about exactly which parliament would rule following the turbulence of March 24. Late on the day of what many are calling the “tulip revolution”, it was the old legislature that convened an emergency session to appoint opposition leaders to run the country.

The two institutions – the older one with two chambers and the new one a unicameral body – then signed a memorandum whereby both would be recognised as valid for about two weeks.

But the supreme court annulled the powers of the newly-elected deputies, and Marat Kaipov, a judge who sits on Kyrgyzstan’s constitutional court, explained to IWPR that this meant the legislature they belong to ceases to exist. Kaipov said the old parliament will have to function until a new one is duly elected and convened.

In apparent defiance of the supreme court ruling, on March 26 members of the new legislature went into session inside the parliament building, just as the old one was meeting elsewhere in the building. And the central election commission ruled that the new parliament did after all have a valid mandate.

Outside parliament, several hundred demonstrators gathered to protest against the newer version of the legislature, which they view as illegitimate.

Perhaps partly as a result of these protests, the authorities appeared to be taking a more definitive line on the issue.

Kurmanbek Bakiev, whose appointment as interim prime minister means he is effectively head of state, told a press conference that “under the constitution, the incumbent parliament cannot be dismissed in the

three months preceding presidential elections”.

PUBLIC GROUPS OFFER TO HELP NEW LEADERS

Non-government organisations, NGOs - the human rights and charitable groups which form a fairly strong sector in Kyrgyzstan – set out their own view of how to tackle the crisis.

On March 26, the Civil Society Crisis Coordination Council, an NGO umbrella group, issued a statement signed by 12 leading organisations urging the interim government to involve NGOs in decisionmaking and offering a number of practical solutions. They offered to serve as conduit for public information, and asked the authorities to consider imposing a curfew.

The NGOs also suggested that the authorities should thank all the people who came to Bishkek for the pro-opposition demonstrations, and then arrange transport to send them back home.

Tokon Mamytov, appointed to head the National Security Service, of which he was previously deputy chief, assured IWPR, “Our NGOs should not be concerned. We are already in control of the situation and we will be able to protect the population. Everything will be fine with Kyrgyzstan.”

REBUILDING FOREIGN RELATIONS

Roza Otunbaeva, the Atajurt movement co-leader and former ambassador, said she would be getting down to work as interim foreign minister as soon as the new cabinet had been completely formed. She predicted that Kyrgyzstan would not shift away from its multi-polar approach to foreign relations.

Some of the states which have required this small state to maintain such a balance of interests abroad began delivering their early verdicts on developments in Kyrgyzstan.

In contrast to United States Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s optimistic remarks, Russia’s president Vladimir Putin voiced regret that in yet another former Soviet neighbour, “political issues were solved by unlawful methods and were accompanied by looting and fatalities”.

Putin suggested that the situation could have been predicted, ascribing it to the weakness of the authorities and the country’s social and economic problems. Kazakh president Nursultan Nazarbaev, too, said unemployment and poverty lay at the root of the crisis.

Uzbekistan’s foreign ministry issued a statement stressing the need for a legitimate and constitutional solution to the Kyrgyz crisis.

If the official Uzbek statement fell short of an expression of delight, the same was not true of opposition and human rights activists in the country, who staged a demonstration on March 25 to celebrate “the victory of democracy” outside the Kyrgyz embassy in Tashkent. Many bore orange placards carrying messages of support.

The same day, the presidents of the two states whose bloodless regime changes have sometimes been seen as the blueprint for Kyrgyzstan’s “bloodless revolution” were meeting in Kiev.

Ukraine's Viktor Yuschenko and Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia expressed solidarity with the people of Kyrgyzstan who they said were struggling for freedom and democracy. At the same time, Saakashvili insisted that neither Ukraine nor Georgia were "exporters of revolutions".

Leila Saralaeva is an independent journalist in Bishkek. Alisher Saipov works for the Fergana news agency.

Location: Kyrgyzstan
Georgia
Focus: Central Asia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-institutions-take-shape>