

Kyrgyz Leaders Eye Ukraine Nervously

Author: [Sultan Jumagulov](#)

Authorities seek harsh powers to head off Ukrainian-inspired election trouble, a fear which opposition members dismiss as nonsense.

Kyrgyzstan's government has been rattled by recent events in Ukraine, where mass protests by the opposition forced a re-run of a presidential election they said was rigged.

So concerned are Kyrgyz leaders to head off a repeat of the "orange revolution" that they are planning a crackdown on political protests.

The confrontation between opposition candidate Victor Yushenko and regime favourite Victor Yanukovich does not have exact parallels in Kyrgyzstan, where President Askar Akaev is undisputed boss. But the spectacle of a mass uprising that blocked an election whose results were previously seen as a foregone conclusion will be unsettling for a regime that plans parliamentary and presidential ballots in February and October next year.

And Akaev, who has said he will not stand in the presidential election, will have taken little comfort from the failure of outgoing Ukrainian leader Leonid Kuchma to ensure a smooth transition for his anointed successor Yanukovich.

A new draft law currently before the Kyrgyz parliament would make it illegal to hold public meetings, demonstrations and rallies without prior permission from local government authorities at least nine days in advance.

Demonstrators would be forbidden from gathering anywhere near the residences of the president and prime minister, the parliament, and court buildings. They would also be barred from strategically important sites – ranging from main roads and railways to oil pipelines and electricity power lines.

Protest meetings will not be allowed to continue past 11 in the evening. Government officials will also be armed with a list of reasons for denying permission for a public gathering, and stopping one that has started.

The non-government group Civil Society Against Corruption roundly condemned the proposed law. "Enacting this draft law could be a step towards establishing an un-democratic, corrupt police state, which will destroy the democratic freedoms that have been achieved," it said in a statement.

Parliamentary deputy General Ismail Isakov warned that the potential crackdown on protestors would have exactly the opposite effect that the authorities were hoping for, and could pave the way for more demonstrations against the government.

"My voters complain that the local state administrations are constantly trying to remove opposition members from the elections. If the authorities do not stop this, then the Ukrainian... scenario will be repeated in our country. And the authorities will be to blame, not the opposition," Isakov told IWPR.

Akaev announced earlier this month that parliamentary elections would take place on February 27, promising the process would be democratic, transparent and honest.

However, speaking at a conference on democracy in Bishkek, he warned that no "colour" revolutions would be permitted in Kyrgyzstan, referring to Georgia's "rose revolution" which brought down President Eduard Shevardnadze in November 2003, and the recent post-election turmoil in Ukraine, where Yushenko supporters wore distinctive orange scarves.

Boris Poluektov, deputy head of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service, is also predicting election trouble. At the beginning of December, he told the Russian news agency Interfax that radical opposition members were planning to hold protests on the eve of parliamentary elections so as to destabilise the political situation.

"At parliament sessions, some deputies have already started working on Georgian scenarios," said Poluektov.

Opposition members deny they are preparing a coup modelled on either Georgia or the Ukraine. Deputy Adakhan Madumarov, co-head of a recently-formed political movement Atajurt (Fatherland), believes the authorities are overreacting to events in other post-Soviet countries.

“If the authorities really want to ensure honest and fair elections, and not to commit grave violations as was the case in previous ballots, then there will be no “colour” revolutions here,” he said. “The opposition itself is interested in a peaceful transfer of power.”

In the past, Akaev has condemned the Georgian uprising against Shevardnadze. He was also among the few, including Russian’s Vladimir Putin, who rushed to congratulate Yanukovich on winning the poll. Their congratulations proved to be jumping the gun, as the election results were annulled by Ukraine’s supreme court on December 3, and a new vote is due to take place on December 26.

At the Bishkek conference, Akaev repeated a theme he has taken to focusing on, saying his opponents “used dirty political techniques from the West” because they lacked real popular support.

It’s a charge the opposition vehemently deny.

“I take ‘dirty techniques’ to mean vote shuffling, bribery or intimidation of voters, and this is only possible when you have administrative and financial resources. As everyone knows, the opposition does not have any such resources,” said Kurmanbek Bakiev, the former prime minister who now heads the People’s Movement of Kyrgyzstan, a coalition of nine opposition parties.

Bakiev said he often meets foreign ambassadors – from Russia as well as the West – and discusses how to hold democratic elections within the bounds of the law and without human rights violations.

“There has never been a conversation where I have felt that someone wants to impose their will or rules on us. And God forbid, there has certainly been no talk of financial support,” said Bakiev.

Sultan Jumagulov is a BBC correspondent in Bishkek.

Location: Stavropol
Russia
North Ossetia
Kyrgyzstan

Focus: Central Asia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-leaders-eye-ukraine-nervously>