

Kyrgyz Parties Join Forces

Author: [Aziza Turdueva](#)

Plans to introduce proportional representation prompt parties to form strategic alliances to win seats and influence.

Kyrgyzstan's political parties are already jockeying for position ahead of changes to the constitution that are expected to increase their representation in parliament.

If the reform goes through, the country will get a proportional representation system, and many parties are now busily building coalitions to improve their chances of winning a hefty slice of the vote.

The reform package was published on November 14 after months of discussion by a specially-convened Constitutional Conference, and once a process of public consultation has been completed, they could be approved by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev by the end of the year.

The changes would mean that some seats in the 75-member parliament would be elected proportionally, on the basis of party lists, while the rest would continue to be awarded by the current first-past-the-post system of "single-mandate" constituencies. The precise number of party-list seats will not be known until separate legislation is drafted once the revised constitution is in place.

Kyrgyzstan had proportional representation until 2003, when the system was abolished.

The country has 65 parties ranging across the political spectrum, 23 of which have emerged since the March revolution. Both the sheer number of parties and their hitherto limited scope for participation in government has reduced their role to a secondary one.

"The minor role and insufficient activity of political parties in Kyrgyzstan is to be explained by the lack of a proportional system of elections in recent years," Arnams party leader Emil Aliev told IWPR. "Now we are hoping that if not 100 per cent, then at least 50 per cent of parliament will be elected on a proportional basis. This will stimulate parties to be more active, and it will strengthen the trend towards consolidation."

For many, the strategy is clearly to forge alliances with like-minded forces and contest elections on a single bloc-based list.

On November 18, for example, 18 right-wing parties announced they were forming a bloc, including Erkindik (Freedom), the Republicans, Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan) and Kyrgyzstan Kelechegi (Future of Kyrgyzstan).

Arnams (Dignity), which is associated with Prime Minister Felix Kulov, is already in a centrist coalition, the People's Congress of Kyrgyzstan, with Atameken (Fatherland), Adilet (Justice) and the Social Democrats. Now they are considering forming a wider coalition which might include the Union of Democratic Forces, Moya Strana (My Country) and Justice and Progress.

"We have a great deal in common in our programmes, political views, and views on constitutional reform.

We need to consolidate," said Aliev.

On the left, the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan is planning to team up with Jany Kyrgyzstan (New Kyrgyzstan).

Many of the parties on the right and left opposed the government of former president Askar Akaev. But since March, some pro-Akaev groups have formed parties such as Akyikat (Justice) and El Yntymagy (People's Unity), and they too seem to have caught the coalition bug.

Not content with forming alliances between existing parties, politicians Kubatbek Baibolov and Bakyt Beshimov announced on November 29 that they were setting up an entirely new party to be called the Union of Democratic Forces, which would seek to build a "wide coalition of political forces".

Many see the consolidation process as essential to strengthening the role of parties which currently consist largely of fragmented groups based principally around personalities rather than policies.

"In Kyrgyzstan, parties have been dwarf-like, because they were created by political leaders for their personal goals," said Edil Baisalov, head of the NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society. "Leaders created parties out of personal ambition and interest, and thought only of how to further their own political aims goals. Without a unifying process, the role of parties will remain a minor one."

Kurmanbek Dyikanbaev, a leading figure in the Moya Strana party, added, "One of the reasons why party activity has been at such a low level is that they are numerous and fragmented. Unifying them into larger political groups will help increase their role in society, and make the government pay more attention to them."

The attempt to build a stronger and more influential role for parties comes at a time when the political environment remains unsettled, with frequent street protests by civil groups with a diversity of concerns, and a government still attempting to control the agenda rather than be controlled by it.

Justice and Progress leader Muratbek Imanaliev warns, "The situation in the country is currently complex. Public opinion is very polarised. So the parties need to help the present regime... [they] should do their bit to maintain stability and develop the country.

"But the regime will only listen to them if they have platforms, and unite into larger political organisations."

According to Baibolov of the new Union of Democratic Forces, "Parties must stand for a dynamic but evolutionary transition to a new system.... A revolutionary, spasmodic leap to a new state is no longer feasible in Kyrgyzstan, the people won't accept it."

The only parties that appear happy to stay small and stick to their core constituency are Elmuras (People's Heritage) and the Jany Kuch (New Force), the only two led by women. Both parties have largely female memberships, and neither leader - Toktokan Borombaeva and Tokon Shailieva, respectively - plans to team up with other parties.

“We believe we'll get a lot of support from the electorate without uniting with other political parties. In the 2000 election, two candidates from our party got into parliament via the party list. This time we're hoping for more seats,” said Shailieva.

The consolidation process may be about to gather more pace. On November 15, Erkindik party announced that it had collected 300,000 signatures on a petition demanding the dissolution of parliament. The constitution says that once the signatures have been checked for authenticity, the government should hold a national referendum on the issue.

The election to the current parliament, in two rounds of voting in February and March this year, was criticised as unfair by anti-Akaev politicians, and gave rise to demonstrations that eventually grew into a popular revolt.

After the March revolution, the incoming transitional government decided after some hesitation to recognise the parliament, rejecting calls to annul the election results and reinstate the previous legislature.

If the proposal were to go through, Erkindik wants to see a fresh election next June – this time by proportional representation.

Aziza Turdueva is a correspondent for Radio Azattyk, the Kyrgyz service of RFE/RL.

Location: Kyrgyzstan

Focus: Central Asia

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyz-parties-join-forces>