

Kyrgyzstan: Southern Oblasts' Autonomy Threat

Author: [Meder Imakeev](#)

New twist in battle between southern activists and the Bishkek authorities is causing concern among pro-government politicians and opposition deputies alike.

Opposition activists in southern Kyrgyzstan have hinted that they may push for autonomy for three of the republic's oblasts.

Supporters of Usen Sydykov - a politician who was barred from contesting the recent parliamentary elections despite having very strong support - have warned that Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken could break away if the government continued to ignore the voice of the people.

The warning was issued at a meeting in Uzgen, Osh oblast, on November 23 to discuss the crisis in the country. A letter to Russian president Vladimir Putin and other world leaders, describing the tension and discontent in south Kryrgyzstan, was drafted at the gathering.

The Osh villages Myrzake and Kara-Kuldja have already passed a resolution demanding autonomy for the southern oblasts, after the opposition-organised People's Congress in Bishkek, which had been scheduled for November 16, was effectively sabotaged by the authorities.

No venue was provided for the meeting, and more than a thousand people - many of whom had travelled from the south - were rounded up and bussed out of the city.

Southern deputy Dooronbek Sadyrbaev told IWPR that the idea of autonomy was first mooted in June of this year, during one of the many demonstrations following the deaths of six civilians at the hands of the police in Aksy in March.

He alleged that the government is no longer in control of the south and that President Askar Akaev himself has no popular support in Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken.

"The southerners now believe that they are second class citizens who can be shot at and thrown out of the capital city. This call for autonomy is the reaction of a people who feel deceived and betrayed," said Sadyrbaev.

Analysts believe that the government's heavy-handed approach towards opposition protesters who marched on the capital for the congress was the last straw.

"Bishkek behaved very inhospitably and treated the southerners as criminals, and this has provoked these separatist slogans," journalist Rina Prijivoyt told IWPR. "However, this talk is dangerous as it will inflame tensions between the north and south - and could break up the country."

Human rights activist Yrysbek Omurzakov has also voiced concern over this new twist in the long-running battle between southern activists and the Bishkek authorities. "Do the southerners really want to end up being annexed by Uzbekistan, or are they hoping that Putin will take them under his protection?" he asked. "I am not convinced that this move is a serious one, but it may still lead to anarchy in the whole country."

Akaev's public relations advisor Bolot Januzakov blamed the separatist talk on "radicals" who want to overthrow the government, and warned that their actions may push the state to breaking point.

"Ordinary people are being deceived and are blindly following these troublemakers. We have to explain to these people that they are simply being used by their politicians," he said.

Many well-known opposition deputies from the region, meanwhile, have distanced themselves from any talk of autonomy. Azimbek Beknazarov - whose brief detention early last year sparked the Aksy protests - believes the calls are being made in desperation. "I personally do not support them, but what other options do they have?" he asked.

Another southern deputy, Adakhan Madumarov, told IWPR that activists should not demand autonomy even if they are provoked. "No politician has the right to put the integrity of his republic at risk - no matter how embittered he may be," he said.

Meder Imakeev is coordinator of the "Monitoring of the Journalist and Mass Media Rights Violation in Kyrgyzstan" project.

Location: [Uzbekistan](#)
[Kyrgyzstan](#)

Focus: [Central Asia](#)

Source URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/kyrgyzstan-southern-oblasts-autonomy-threat>