

Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan

Anvar Bugazov

SILK ROAD PAPER
July 2013



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center

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www.silkroadstudies.org

“Socio-Cultural Characteristics of Civil Society Formation in Kyrgyzstan” is a *Silk Road Paper* published by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program. The Silk Road Papers Series is the Occasional Paper series of the Joint Center, and addresses topical and timely subjects. The Joint Center is a transatlantic independent and non-profit research and policy center. It has offices in Washington and Stockholm and is affiliated with the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University and the Stockholm-based Institute for Security and Development Policy. It is the first institution of its kind in Europe and North America, and is firmly established as a leading research and policy center, serving a large and diverse community of analysts, scholars, policy-watchers, business leaders, and journalists. The Joint Center is at the forefront of research on issues of conflict, security, and development in the region. Through its applied research, publications, research cooperation, public lectures, and seminars, it functions as a focal point for academic, policy, and public discussion regarding the region.

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ISBN: 978-91-86635-63-3

Printed in Singapore

Distributed in North America by:

The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
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1619 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, D.C. 20036
Tel. +1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785
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Distributed in Europe by:

The Silk Road Studies Program
Institute for Security and Development Policy
V. Finnbodavägen 2, SE-13130 Stockholm-Nacka
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Preface

Kyrgyzstan is among the most attractive lands at the “heart of Asia,” populated by people notable for their enquiring minds, flexibility, and openness. No wonder that since gaining independence in 1992 it has attracted so many ardent admirers abroad. But nowadays many of these champions of Kyrgyz development are puzzled and frustrated at what they see.

This Silk Road Paper should be essential reading for any businessman, diplomat, foreign parliamentarian, or civil society activist visiting Kyrgyzstan. Indeed, Kyrgyz themselves, who are never at a loss for words when called upon to explain their country’s fate, will benefit from reading this slim volume.

Why? Because in no country of the former Soviet Union is there a wider gap between high expectations and current realities than in the Kyrgyz republic. At the same time, current efforts to achieve the country’s lofty aspirations are so dogged that watchers everywhere are eager for insights on the prospects for success. This study provides those insights.

In this closely argued yet absolutely clear and accessible study, Anvar Bugazov explains what might be called the “Kyrgyz paradox”. In the process he not only clarifies Kyrgyzstan’s worrisome recent history and future prospects but offers insights of value to anyone interested in what societies anywhere must do if they seek to disentangle themselves from an authoritarian past.

Professor Bugazov is the ideal person to have undertaken this research. He is a thoroughly modern political scientist who is steeped in the theory and methodology of modern western research in the social sciences. At the same time he is a true son of Kyrgyzstan, with deep connections with, and concerns for, the object of his study. This combination of objectivity and passionate engagement enables him to write with insight and passion.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the establishment of independence, Kyrgyzstan became the poster child of all those who dreamed of a true “civil society” arising on former Soviet soil. Such enthusiasts claimed that heroic traditions of nomadism, which rewarded individual initiative and empowered

women yet placed a premium on group cohesion, would speed a smooth transition from top-down Communist centralization to political pluralism and a civil society. Conveniently excluded from this rosy picture was the fact that both Kazakhs and Turkmen also had comparatively recent traditions of nomadism yet were evolving in sharply different directions than those expected of Kyrgyzstan.

Bugazov delves into the deep wellsprings of Kyrgyz political behavior. He lays bare the dynamics of what he calls the Kyrgyz “clan” system and shows its continuing impact on the polity. He shows how political parties there can outwardly resemble political parties in western democracies, Korea, or Japan, yet function entirely differently. He clarifies the peculiar role of law in the system, and he offers fascinating insights on the nature of leadership on this Turkic society, and the purposes and forms of alliances into which political leaders enter in order to preserve their resources and power.

This volume will deliver a cold shower to those who have looked to Kyrgyzstan to build a political system that would justify the slogan “Switzerland of Central Asia” invented by its first president, Askar Akaev. Some proponents of civil society or foreign investors may come away from this book in a gloomy mood. But Bugazov’s actual argument is far more nuanced and, in the end, definitely positive. He offers practical prescriptions and sober advice that will enable Kyrgyz citizens and their many friends abroad to navigate the complex transition in which the Kyrgyz Republic finds itself. A truly civil society and open polity in Kyrgyzstan is by no means inevitable, but still achievable, provided its builders are informed by the kind of wisdom Anvar Bugazov supplies.

S. Frederick Starr

Chairman

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, Joint Center

Executive Summary

In several countries, citizens have been demonstrating their civic engagement in recent times by overthrowing their authoritarian leaders who had ruled for many years. However, the collapse of authoritarianism does not imply an automatic transition to democracy. The traditional culture, with its distinct historical and socio-psychological roots, continues to dominate the social life of these countries, and has a considerable impact on the formation of their political systems. In these countries, formal and informal social institutions, reflecting different political traditions, sometimes entwine in quite an unusual way – in both the state system and in everyday life. Contemporary Kyrgyzstan is an example of such a state. In 1991, Kyrgyzstan gained independence following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and society was looking to the future with faith and hope. This was not surprising, for there were many good reasons for such optimism.

For the first time, a scientist of world-wide reputation, an intellectual with liberal views not associated with the party bureaucracy, Askar Akaev, was elected to be the country's president as the result of a fair election. New people who came to power with him proclaimed their commitment to building a democratic state with a market economy and to creating a civil society with respect for human rights. Since Soviet times, cultural and educational institutions operated in Kyrgyzstan, among them theaters, museums, schools and universities. Factories had a skilled workforce. The reforms carried out in Kyrgyzstan seemed promising for the purpose of changing life in the country for the better over the course of time.

The United States of America was a beacon for the young Kyrgyz state. The world community welcomed the choice of Kyrgyzstan and international financial and political structures were ready to provide full support and assistance to each of the supposed reforms. However, over twenty years after the declaration of independence, the real situation in Kyrgyzstan appears to be

far from perfect. Indeed, the government is working hard to keep the economic and political situation stable.

For many specialists, analysts, and experts, such developments were unexpected. Since gaining independence, Kyrgyzstan has been receiving substantial financial assistance. By now, its total value has amounted to about three billion dollars. For a country with a population of little more than five million people, that is quite a substantial sum. However, the country still finds itself among the world's poorest nations.

Unlike Kyrgyzstan's near and distant neighbors, the country has nonetheless remained a place where numerous international human rights organizations, domestic non-governmental organizations, oppositional forces, political parties, and a relatively free media continue to operate. However, the political system that has been formed in the country generally resembles a traditional patriarchal state rather than a modern democratic one.

The purpose of the present study is to try to understand the reasons for this paradox. Why did the dismantlement of communism lead to the demise of what the country once had, but not to the emergence of a new society of free citizens? Why was Soviet totalitarianism replaced with a strange symbiosis of traditional and patriarchal foundations in social and political relations?

Modern Kyrgyzstan is by no means a traditional society, which has been analyzed in detail by Samuel Huntington in his now-classic work, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.¹ However, from a methodological point of view, this work is also valuable as we attempt to address some topics related to the peculiarities of Kyrgyz society's modernization processes. In particular, we attempt to characterize the type of political institutions that are being formed in the country in order to show the role of political leaders and the meaning and structure of political parties in modern Kyrgyz society.

An analysis of the political situation in modern Kyrgyzstan reveals a political structure which is constituted of a rigid vertical power structure based on the unity of command and the absolute subordination of the junior to the senior.

¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968.

Of all the state structures in this system, the defense and law enforcement agencies, among them the Ministry of Defense, the Ministry of National Security, the Ministry of Interior (the police), and so on, are the most effective and important. State power is concentrated in the hands of individual political leaders and this concentration has led to a “paternalization” of power. Instead of the freedoms usually associated with a modern civil society, the country has freedom of tribalism and corruption, while the majority of ordinary law-abiding citizens find themselves experiencing dire living conditions. Indeed, many people have been driven backwards in the course of the state’s development.

In this regard, the present research sets out to answer a number of questions: Why is a turn for the better in Kyrgyzstan so difficult despite a very clear understanding of the advantages of a democratic system? What are the reasons for the current structure of the country's socio-political relations? What motivates Kyrgyz society, unlike its “stable” neighbors, to assert the principles of Western liberalism in the country, and why are the results of this movement still so far from the desired ones? How does the “freedom-loving” spirit of the nomadic Kyrgyz people, who do not tolerate any kind of violence, coexist with the humility and submissiveness Kyrgyz society has shown under the present circumstances?

The argument in this study is that the resolution of these and other issues is largely connected with the necessity for further development and implementation of the experience gained by the international community, especially the socio-cultural fundamentals of the Euro-Atlantic civilization, including tolerance, multi-ethnicity, and intercultural communication. Although the history of Kyrgyzstan is ancient, the Kyrgyz people do not have sufficient experience for asserting themselves as a unified nation, nor do they have enough practice in political self-government. Such perception and experience should be part of the process of building a democratic society, perhaps in a new Eurasian form, based on universal liberal values.

Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is one of the smallest Central Asian states, situated among the Ala-Too mountains. Those who have visited the country consider it to be a place remarkable for its natural beauty and for being populated with open and hospitable people. Recently, however, Kyrgyzstan has been increasingly attracting attention as a place of social cataclysms and political paradoxes rather than as a country famous for the beauty of its mountains and lakes.

Over the past seven years, the country has twice changed president and government. In both cases, the process for these changes was unconstitutional. Despite the assistance provided by international financial institutions, Kyrgyz society has failed to acquire any obvious economic benefits. Despite the government's declared commitment to democratic principles in society and efforts made for their implementation (for example, Kyrgyzstan was the first among the former Soviet Republics to switch over to a parliamentary form of government), the country is still far from achieving its goal. Governance in the country is weak, the political elite is split, and the economy is in dire straits being fully financially dependent on the international community.

Many experts believe that the reason for this situation is stereotypes remaining from old times. According to the former head of the presidential administration, Emilbek Kaptagaev, "...it will take long to get rid of them."² It is difficult to disagree with this statement. Once, when discussing with colleagues the features of the Kyrgyz national and historical understanding of the world, one of the participants of the conversation retold a case connected with one of his relatives. At the end of the nineteenth century, an elderly Kyrgyz visited a Russian merchant as a guest and for the first time saw the large house of the merchant built out of wood and brick. Inside the house there

² Emilbek Kaptagaev, "Obschestvo Kyrgyzstana nahoditsya v plenu stereotipov i shtampov proshlogo," *24kg*, October 22, 2010, available at <http://24kg.org/election2010/85403-yemilbek-kaptagaev-obshhestvo-kyrgyzstana.html>.

were spacious, light rooms and outside, flowers and a well-attended garden. The house was beautiful and in good condition. The guest examined the house thoroughly, thanked the host for his hospitality and returned to his *aul*.³ His wife and children gathered in the *yurta*⁴ to hear about the house, in which the old man was staying. He shook his head and said: “The house is big, but uncomfortable for living there – nowhere to hitch a horse to.” Indeed, for novelties to become a part of the life, they must be perceived and accepted by people as their own. Perhaps obsolete stereotypes are not the only reason for poor perception of novelties.

In principle, such paradoxes are not uncommon in history. The experience of social development suggests that technical progress does not necessarily lead to progress in social life. One can know everything about gunpowder while being unable to form a strong army; one can invent a compass with no navigational skills developed; one can be aware of democratic principles and fail to create a democratic society. In modern Kyrgyzstan, there are thousands of citizens responsible to society for their actions. At the same time, there is no sustainable civil society in the country and it is unlikely to develop anytime soon, even if the number of conscientious citizens doubles or triples. The majority of American and European researchers of the Central Asian region in general and Kyrgyzstan in particular would tend to agree with this conclusion.

The nature of these paradoxes can be compared to that of earthquakes. Earthquakes are caused by a collision of different plates that form the basis of the Earth’s crust. In a society, this is the clash of old and new trends, traditional and modern tendencies in spiritual culture; a clash of archaic phenomena and paternalism with the democracy of civil society in politics, of the millennial history of the ethnic community with that of the formation of the nation and a new state in conditions of globalization.

³ A small village in Kyrgyzstan.

⁴ A *yurta* is a portable frame dwelling of nomads with a felt covering that is easily carried by camels and horses; felt coating provides protection against the rain, wind and cold. An opening at the top of the dome provides daylight and allows smoke to escape from the fireplace. *Yurtas* are often used to this day by livestock breeders of Kyrgyzstan.

A correspondent from Euronews once asked Kyrgyzstan's former president, Roza Otunbaeva, if there was a contradiction as a result of Kyrgyzstan being the only country with both Russian and American military bases on its territory. The president provided an answer that appeared quite paradoxical at first, but was in fact correct: "Sure, the current situation in Kyrgyzstan may appear to be a paradox, but for our policy everything is logical and clear." As we see it, the words of the president rightly characterize the specific situation in connection with the question asked and the whole scope of socio-political relations in the country.⁵ Indeed, the picture of modern Kyrgyz society and its political system is not new. We encounter it now and then and feel its impact on our daily life. Karl Popper once observed that the evolution of human society is a unique historical process and research on it gives us few grounds for finding certain "rhythms," "models" or "trends" that underlie this evolution. This is hardly necessary, because they cannot be articulated, "based on observation of only one, though unique process of human evolution."⁶

⁵ Rosa Otunbaeva, "Situatsia v Kyrgyzstane vyglyadit so storony kak paradoks, no dlya nashei politiki vse logichno i yasno," *Belyi Parus*, March 15, 2011, available at www.paruskg.info/2011/03/15/40905.

⁶ Karl Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge and Kagan Paul, 1957.

Civil Society: Theoretical Prerequisites

At the present time, there is hardly a country in the world that would not publicly declare its commitment to the principles of democracy and human rights. Another issue is how this rhetoric correlates with facts. Turkmenistan is a good example. In its constitution, Turkmenistan is called a “democratic and legal state.” However, according to human rights organizations, human rights are regularly violated in the country. In the recent (2010) report of Freedom House, Turkmenistan was listed among the nine countries with the worst conditions in this sphere. According to Human Rights Watch, the government in Turkmenistan remains “one of the most repressive in the world.” Reporters Without Borders has put the current president of the country, Gurbangaly Berdymuhamedov, on the list of “media-predators” – that is, political leaders responsible for the infringement of freedom of speech. The president of neighboring Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, also feels certain that in his country citizens enjoy freedom and rights, including the freedom to acquire and disseminate information and their own ideas, this being “the cornerstone of the democratic society’s development in Uzbekistan.”⁷ According to the same Human Rights Watch, the Uzbek government does not tolerate any criticism of its actions and does not want any coverage of the human rights situation in the country. On the contrary, pressure on civil society is growing as well as the desire of the authorities “to silence independent voices in society.”⁸

In Kyrgyzstan, similarly, the real situation in the sphere of democracy also greatly differs from what the government bodies consider it to be. It is clear

⁷ “Report of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov at the joint meeting of the Legislative Chamber and Senate of the Oliy Majlis,” *Belyi Parus*, November 15, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/11/2010/15/35448#more-35448>.

⁸ Steve Sverdlov, “Tihaya diplomatiya proigrala v bor`be za prava cheloveka v Uzbekistane,” *Ferghana.ru*, March 17, 2011, available at www.ferghananews.com/article.php?id=6921.

that each party considers itself to be right. This recalls an ancient Oriental parable about a group of blind people brought close to an elephant. One, the most timid of them, resolved not to come any closer to the animal, and kept asking what the elephant was like, while standing at a distance. His bolder companions dared to go up and touch the animal trying to answer the question. One grabbed the trunk and said the elephant was like a snake; another touched the tail and thought the elephant resembled a rope; the third touched its foot and began assuring the others of their mistake – in his opinion, the animal was like an old rough column. Not to find ourselves in a similar situation and understand the logic of each party's "truth," we will try to consider the basic methodological principles, which make the meaning of such words as "democracy" and "civil society" understandable to most people. Has the understanding of these categories changed in the course of time? What differences are there between them?

Political System

One does not need to be an expert to understand that democracy in the U.S. or Kyrgyzstan, in Great Britain or Somalia is not the same. Political science uses the term "*political regime*," which means a system of methods for exercising state power; the extent to which democratic rights and freedoms are realized; and the attitude of state power to the legal basis of its own activities.

Democratic, authoritarian, totalitarian and other political regimes are characteristic of modern states. In a *democratic* state, government authorities are elected by the people; the expertise, scope and functions of each authority are regulated by the constitution and laws. The society in question accepts the supremacy of the law; all citizens have inalienable rights and freedoms protected by courts. No racial or ethnic discrimination is allowed. In an *authoritarian* society, state power is nominally determined by law, exercised arbitrarily by a limited number of persons using the administrative apparatus, armed forces and punitive agencies. Human rights are restricted by the requirement to observe regulations and laws in force. In such a political regime, the official ideology as a rule permeates among all spheres of society. In a *totalitarian* state, administration is not determined by law. Human rights and independent justice are absent from the functioning of society, which is

under the complete control of the state and institutes thereof, such as the administrative apparatus, the secret police, punitive agencies and armed forces. Dissidence is also eliminated, because society as a whole must take the position offered by the official ideology.

Currently, the most common form of political regime is a democratic republic. This form of political regime most clearly exhibits the modern understanding of what social management should be like. According to the outstanding French historian and philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville, the United States of America was the first state that managed to put the principles of democratic society into life.⁹

For a long time, foreign experts, politicians and political scientists considered Kyrgyzstan a state that had firmly settled on a course of democratic reforms. As they saw it, Kyrgyzstan was the country with the most developed civil society in its region. In practical terms, this was reflected in a fairly tolerant attitude of the authorities and the population of Kyrgyzstan to numerous domestic and international organizations, among them human rights organizations carrying out activities in the country.

Public support of democratic values and practical steps for their implementation, taken by the country in the early years of independence, unlike the neighboring republics, contributed to the formation of an image of Kyrgyzstan as the most democratic state in Central Asia. Some experts even considered the non-constitutional changes of power that have now taken place on two occasions as a manifestation of the “freedom loving” spirit of the Kyrgyz people, tolerating no tyranny and oppression. Is it really so? Was the world community mistaken or not?

Civil Society

To answer the question objectively, we should remember, at least in general, what a “classical” democratic civil society is.

Many scholars at different times tried to determine in their works methodological principles of analysis to be applied to a society, in order to

⁹ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, New York: The Library of America, 2004 [1835].

explain how it is formed and how it functions, and how democracy comes into being followed by a civil society. We must recognize that none of the concepts existing in modern literature can give a complete picture of the scope of the social processes. The development of modern methodological thought shows that different interpretational-modeling “images of the world” can exist; therefore a constructive understanding of reality can only come from denial of the monopoly of ideology and recognition of the competition of various ideological positions. Each of these positions is open to criticism and does not claim absolute correctness.

To understand the essence of modern socio-political systems and the differences between them, various methods and theories have been used in this research. First of all, this is a comparative method, Auguste Comte’s positive philosophy method, supposing transition from facts to theoretical generalizations; Eugene Duhring’s typology of society based on organic and mechanical solidarity; Max Weber’s sociology of action; Ferdinand Tönnies’ theory of societies and communities; Karl Popper’s concept of open and closed societies; and Samuel Huntington’s political framework of a changing society, among others.

The culturally and technologically developed countries that constitute the basis of modern Euro-Atlantic civilization have been the first to be referred to as open democratic states. These states have relatively safely passed the stage of mechanical solidarity and conventionalism in the public consciousness characteristic of this stage.¹⁰ It should be emphasized that democracy in Europe could not have achieved the results it has without a general uplift in economic

¹⁰ According to the author of the expression, Emile Durkheim, “mechanical solidarity” is characteristic of archaic, undeveloped societies, in which human actions and deeds are similar, because such societies are alike and, therefore, interchangeable. Such a society aims at complete subjugation of an individual and regulation of his (or her) consciousness and behavior. By contrast, “organic solidarity” is based on division of labor, vocational specialization and economic inter-linkages of individuals, where every individual is, to a certain extent, independent of society, free and self-acting. An important condition of joint activity of individuals is appropriateness of their professional functions to their abilities and aptitudes. Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, New York: The Free Press, 1938.

and cultural life, which is connected to the Renaissance and the ensuing New Era and Age of Enlightenment.

If we recognize the truth of Max Weber's statement that cultural values are the reason for social development and that the intelligentsia is the carrier of these values, then we should add the following: for a radically new economic relationship based on personal initiative and enterprise to appear in a society, the socio-cultural state of such society should be appropriately changed and prepared for possible innovation.

The necessary transformation of society's spiritual life and its political system took place in the epoch of the Renaissance. The accumulated production and technical experience, the development of science and technology, and the rationalization of the state administration began to break fixed traditional notions of the world. People were freed from many internal and external constraints of medieval morality. In society, the features of the new psychology were being formed, which reflected the spirit of an emerging era – a feeling of abundant life, emancipation, love of freedom and creative attitude to work. Social education began, which in most European countries, and later in the U.S., became an ideological basis of forthcoming social upheavals – a social and economic transformation of civilizational character.

Researchers are unanimous in assessing the role of this period and its importance for the development of art, science and philosophy. We must recognize that the socio-cultural state of society has played the same significant role in the development of economic relations. Society started perceiving private interest as a dominant value openly proclaimed as the supreme goal and motive of human activity. Accordingly, the psychology of the masses began to develop new features: the desire to work, thrift and willingness to devote life to achieving certain goals, which, in turn, needed a theoretical justification. The teaching of Protestantism with its inherent principles of duty, honesty and commitment has performed this role. Weber convincingly demonstrated in his works the relationship between the rationalistic spirit of religious motives expressed in the “the spirit of capitalism” concept and the emergence of a new socio-economic system.

According to Weber, the productivity of West European capitalism was expressed in the fact that unlike the previous archaic forms of capitalism, West

European capitalism created an adequate type of labor organization, namely rational and rhythmically operating industrial production based on effective machinery, using technological advances of science and suggesting a rational market; rational law and governance; and, more importantly, rational organization of free labor, which simultaneously forms an animalcular “cell” and the universal element of the new “sociality.” This is what distinguishes modern capitalism from archaic capitalism.

Kyrgyzstan still faces the challenge of rationalizing social ties and relationships. Further on, we will consider some features of the modern Kyrgyz state, but it should be noted already at this point that the process of national statehood formation is not complete.

Alexis de Tocqueville made a significant contribution to the development of the theory of the civil society. In his work *Democracy in America*, he delivered a number of important statements, which boil down to the following: a bourgeois state acting as a weapon in the struggle for equality with the privileges of aristocracy has established control over all spheres of public life. Second, “despotism of the state” can be withstood by the “community” (i.e. public) organizations and agencies that mediate between the state and individuals, and by some public institutions (legislative recognition of political and civil associations’ freedom, etc.) which, like the “community” organizations, are closely connected with civil society. Only the social responsibility formed by these institutions can overcome individualism and preserve and strengthen freedom for the sake of which such a society exists.

As far as a civil society was developing and strengthening, it was increasingly turning into the only possible means of social transformation in the world without using extreme coercive measures fraught with the danger of destruction and social regression. The introduction of universal suffrage in England, France, the U.S. and other countries provided an opportunity to use the guaranteed freedoms and human rights by everyone, without exception.

A civil society assumes that every citizen is aware of himself (or herself) being a part of the system, its essential element, and understands that he pays money earned for the services provided to him. When choosing a government, he in a sense delegates the right to manage to the government in order to further his interests. This is a model in which an individual is the master of his life,

property and rights, taking interest in the revenues of the state and having time to go to the polling station and make a choice. The whole government machine works for the good of every individual, defending and protecting him against possible threats.

On the other hand, what can one say about the “democracy” of a state – in this case Turkmenistan – whose head stated the following while addressing secret service officials? “I am confident that you will be ... uncompromising fighters to those, who slander our democratic law-governed secular state and try to disrupt the unity and social cohesion of our society.”¹¹ Needless to say, anyone attempting to criticize the existing regime will be considered a “slanderer.” This is still typical for many countries in Central Asia.

Most experts of the West European community believe in the actual existence of only one type of such a civil society – a liberal democracy, which in turn can be differentiated into several separate historical subtypes, among them a civil society of mature capitalism and transnational corporations, industrial and postindustrial development and, finally, a modern civil society of the epoch that can be characterized as the epoch of information systems development and globalization.

Proponents of different socio-political doctrines express opposite views regarding the essence of the specific character of civil society. Some of them interpret it as a system of market and other forms of private life not controlled (or with very limited control) by the state. To others, civil society means a society of individual freedom, which guarantees human rights and freedoms enshrined by the international community. There are some groups (orthodox-minded leftists) who “in general have a negative attitude to separation of and opposition between the state and civil society, believing that such an approach obscures the class nature of the state and power.” The fourth group (social democrats) tends to consider a civil society as “participative democracy” (i.e. parliamentary democracy as a synonym of democracy). The fifth group

¹¹ “Gurbangaly Berdymuhammedov ukazal vragov turkmenskoi demokratii,” December 5, 2011, available at <http://news.rambler.ru/7704162/>.

(mainly neo-liberals) identifies a civil society with an “open society” contrary to totalitarianism.¹²

Against this background of different views and evaluations, a civil society model developed by Jean L. Kohen and Andrew Arato has gained general recognition. The authors of the model have analyzed life-sustaining activities of the existing industrially developed nations. From the viewpoint of Arato, a social order of any society consists of three equally important and interacting sectors of public life: political society (state), economy and civil society.¹³ The latter, according to Kohen and Arato, is a complex of unions, associations, and unions of interest (professional, creative, cultural, educational, everyday life, and, to add to this, political), connected by horizontal network relations rather than by vertical hierarchical dependencies, whose role is secondary.¹⁴ In the description of a civil society, the authors highlighted relations of individuals connected by common interests in the private and public spheres, and their influence on the political society, i.e. the state.

Such variance of opinions is caused by the absence of clarity in the social sciences regarding the criteria of civil society’s maturity. Under what conditions can one assert that the prerequisites of society – and subsequently the basics thereof – has appeared? When does its main frame come into being? In any case, one can state that the *attributes of civil society* of any type include as follows: democracy, equality and freedom limited only by law; sovereignty with regard to the state, legitimacy, legal and social character of state power, common equality before the law; political and ideological pluralism, protection of human and civil rights and liberties; mixed economy and availability of socially oriented market mechanisms; unity of the spiritual realm ensured by national and confessional specificity, openness of culture and cultural exchange, a sufficiently high level of welfare, education, training and civic engagement; peacefulness and readiness to interact and collaborate with other

¹² Kamaludin S. Gadzhiev, “Grazhdanskoe obschestvo: kontseptualnyi aspekt,” *Kentavr*, no 2, (1991), 22.

¹³ Andrew Arato, “Kontseptciya grazhdanskogo obschestva: voshozhdenie, upadok, razrushenie i vossozhdanie,” *Polis*, no 3 (1995).

¹⁴ Jean L. Kohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992, 564.

nations; independence of creative, scientific, cultural, and religious communities from the state; and developed civic culture in the spiritual realm.

According to many theorists, compulsory properties of civil society additionally include such features as dominance or predominance of private ownership in economy, non-interference of the state in the privacy of citizens and their business activities, priority of private interests over public ones and competition in all spheres of human society's life. One should bear in mind that a civil society, first and foremost, reflects the system of "non-governmental public relations and institutions that express a variety of interests, needs and values of society members and enable individuals to exercise their civil rights."¹⁵

Civil Society and the State

Modern political science has acknowledged that the *raison d'être* of civil society lies in ensuring trust and reciprocity between its members and elements. This would require cooperation with the state, support of its democratic aspirations and participation in forming a just rule of law. Thus, a civil society acquires the features of a political society, whereas the state, preserving its sovereignty, becomes a generator of civic initiatives and ensures the integrity of civil society. Their functions are closely intertwined, with it not being so important whether the state or civil society takes the brunt of responsibility for the stability of society. The main thing is the will of the people, which must be taken into account by the state or society as well as the laws, spiritual and moral norms and traditions that have become nationwide and were accepted by the majority of the people.

It was already Hegel who viewed the state as not opposed to civil society, but rather as growing from it. This means that, being a negation of the tribal, family-based order, the state creates a new quality – a revised form of civil society, which includes the tribal and civil status of the social organism.

¹⁵ See for example, Nikolai I. Matuzov, "Grazhdanskoe obschestvo: suschnost' i osnovnye printcipy," *Pravovedenie*, no 3, 1995, 88; Erkaïm Mambetalieva, "Vzaimootnosheniya grazhdanskogo obschestva i gosudarstva," *Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoy stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk*, Bishkek: KNU, 2001, 157.

Since modern civil society is an environment that meets the requirements of the global market, the state should eventually appear to be a “global state.” Contemporary globalization is evidence of this trend. Currently, such a model of social relations is applied in European and American society. The state has stopped being a body protecting the interests of a minority and became law-based and social, thus turning into an instrument for aggregating the interests of the general public.

However, as has become evident in recent years, it is only a strong state that can perform the function of protecting citizens’ interests against external and internal attacks. Society is capable of self-restraint, implying that the state can retain power greatly needed by citizens. Conservatives, socialists and neo-liberals recognize this. In some countries, society is even likely to make room for the state, and the latter will expand its intervention into the civilian sector. Sometimes this process becomes painful and can cause mass discontent. For example, in the U.S., new and more stringent regulations have been introduced for passengers using all types of transport, as well as other security measures connected with the increased threat of terrorist attacks. Yet this also makes it very important to prevent violations of civil and human rights. In principle, both civil society and the democratic state consider strict observation of human and civil rights as their ultimate goal.

As has already been mentioned, all civilized democratic states today position themselves as legal and social entities, protecting people’s interests and cherishing the foundations of civil society. In most of them, the legal system has become an object of the state and public control, which involves the masses. Under conditions of free general elections, representative political bodies have acquired the features of social institutions. The information revolution has turned public opinion into a powerful factor stimulating and regulating the activities of the state apparatus in the interests of the public. Independent media has become a means for effective public control over state structures.

The powers of repressive and coercive structures are restricted and controlled by law; traditions and customs as a means of social relations control give way to legal norms and rules. In the eighteenth century, Thomas Hobbes compared the state with the mythical monster Leviathan. Everyone was ready to obey

the monster out of fear. At the present time, the image of a modern democratic state has much in common with a strict, but wise and just judge, whose integrity is a guarantee of order and equality for all. At least, we would like it to be so. The power of such a state is not based on the army or police, but on respect for the laws in effect.

According to Tönnies, "... in the social order, the right is being gradually transformed in its content and forms. A contract in essence is becoming the basis of the entire system, while the electoral will of society ... is increasingly becoming the only source, observant and promoter of the legal order. ... The right is supported ... only by law and is already turning into the product of policy ..."¹⁶

Later, American and European political science adopted a clear distinction between the civil society and state regarding their origin, role and purpose. Anglo-American philosopher Thomas Paine was one of the first to recognize this distinction. He did not deny the importance of the state, believing that approval of power is ensured by consent of the governed. However, the more perfect the civil society, the more able it is to regulate itself and, therefore, it does not require government intervention."¹⁷

Thus, a democratic state does not seek to subjugate civil society; instead, it penetrates, "enters" it, becoming a major factor of maintaining integrity and progressive development of the whole social organism. Contraposition is only justified when the state monopolizes separate functions of public administration and its staff avoids public scrutiny. But such a situation in the globalized world imbued with strong traditions and principles of the law-based state, is disapproved of by the entire international community, not to mention the population of those countries where the government tries to usurp the role of the dominant social structure.

Of course, the idea of progressive thinkers regarding the transformation of the state from Leviathan into the defender and spokesman of the interests of society as a whole has yet to be fully realized. But even though the corporate

¹⁶ Ferdinand Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, Leipzig: Aufl., verbesserte Achte, 1935.

¹⁷ Cited by Kamaludin S. Gadzhiev, "Grazhdanskoe obschestvo: kontseptualnyi aspekt," *Kentavr*, no. 2, 1991, 22.

welfare state is not able to ensure civil peace in society, it can at least provide stable civilized mutual understanding and partnership of the carriers of different social interests.

A modern democratic civil society similar by type to those existing in the U.S. and Western European countries is not devoid of antagonism, but everyone agrees that the contradictions within its framework must be overcome on the basis of the existing rule of law and prevailing moral traditions through compromise. The best option will be consensus achieved by the opposing parties and trends. The goal of civil society is to ensure trust and reciprocity, which is possible only through harmonization of interests, which will always be different across social strata. No doubt, this is not always possible, as is evident when we see thousands of immigrants from Asia and Africa living in European countries and sometimes trying to express themselves through protests and drawing public attention to their problems – even in a destructive way. An example is the parliamentary decision to ban the wearing of Muslim headscarves at schools in a number of European countries. The fact that the protesters are representatives of a non-European socio-cultural community shows the relative stability and maturity of the basic state structure, including civil society.

A strong state is a legal state. However, we are considering here the opposite type of society. In the terminology of Tönnies, it is not even a society; rather a community largely based on traditions and customs. Due to the dominance of such traditions and customs in various spheres of life activities, such societies are often called traditional, and Kyrgyzstan is one of them.

The Place and Role of Traditionalism in the System of Social Relations in Kyrgyzstan

Many Kyrgyz politicians, when communicating with Western public figures and diplomats, do not pass up the opportunity to recall that the Kyrgyz Republic is considered to be “an island of democracy” in the Central Asian region. But Kyrgyz democracy has its own peculiarities, which do not meet democratic standards adopted in the United States and in the European Union.

In his writings, Hegel finally put an end to the interpretation of society as a totality of individuals. According to him, it is a certain state of public relations that changes its quality in the process of development. But civil relations are crucial to Hegel, because they are connected with the transformation of coercive legal and moral norms into consciously performed civil obligations. Our basic task is to find out to what extent social relations in Kyrgyzstan correspond to the concept of a democratic civil society.

Even the presence of certain civil society institutions (social movements, parties, associations, etc.) is not yet evidence of its actual existence, because civil society is a process, a function, rather than any real substance. Informal structures of society are merely a public space, and within its framework our thoughts and desires take the form of laws necessary for maintaining the public agreement or contract between free citizens of any society.

There are reasons to argue that it is too early to speak about civil society in Kyrgyzstan as a fully formed one, and likewise to term Kyrgyzstan an actualized state. A civil society cannot be created in a country that has not passed certain stages of economic, social and cultural development, while non-state social relations and institutions enabling people to exercise their civil rights may be present in such countries.

A democratic civil society, the essence of which was discussed above, occurs only at a certain stage of historical development, when economic, social, political and spiritual prerequisites necessary for the normal functioning of

society have matured. As Emile Durkheim put it, society must pass the stages of mechanical and organic solidarity. According to the Kyrgyz political scientist Mars Sariev, the Kyrgyz are nomads who “have jumped out of feudalism into socialism and then quickly to capitalism...therefore we do not have well-established institutions in mind or in culture.”¹⁸ And without this, the emergence of a new socio-political system is impossible.

Freedom

According to Hegel, a “society” as an entity controlled by the state cannot be established before it becomes aware of the necessity to achieve that goal. With reference to history and according to Hegel, people must feel like citizens, whose basis of existence is freedom.¹⁹ Hegel and later Karl Marx considered civil society to be one of the stages towards absolute freedom, in which a personality, society and the essence of human existence merge. In a simplified form, this idea was expressed by Marxists in a well-known formula, borrowed from ancient philosophers. The formula states that under an ideal social order, the free development of each individual is a condition for the free development of all individuals.

According to the liberal doctrine, the main function of civil society is to ensure the freedom of the individual. In the space of freedom, social connections and relations are established, a civilian sector is formed, and a dialogue between society and state is developed. A lack of freedom as a condition of political life has always been a distinguishing feature of authoritarian regimes. According to an influential Kyrgyz politician, Temir Sariev, freedom is above all a choice, a possibility to express thoughts freely without fear of being punished by the state for opposition; it is, after all, a possibility to satisfy the needs according to knowledge, abilities, intellect and mentality; to feel independent in society as a citizen and an individual; to have free and guaranteed conditions for realization of the potential for personal benefit and for the benefit of the country as a whole. According to Sariev, “... [in order to] to achieve the above mentioned effectiveness, it is vital to have free choice in everything – in

¹⁸ Mars Sariev, “Chem obernetsya smena vlasty v Kyrgyzstane?” *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011, available at www.lenta.ru/en/conf//sariev.

¹⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of law*, Moscow: Mysl', 1990, 279.

politics, economics, and, what is most important, in our routine everyday life, which determines the final result. Gaining such freedom is possible, if we all establish and develop democracy, where free choice is a cornerstone [upon] which relationships will be built between an individual and society and between society and the state.”²⁰

The definition is adequate; but are all these signs of freedom present in modern Kyrgyzstan? For example, then President of Kyrgyzstan Roza Otunbaeva in 2010 said that "freedom of expression was characteristic of our people since ancient times. This is confirmed by the proverb: “Bash kesmey bar, til kesmey jok” [Even if a person can be killed, the person cannot be forbidden to speak – literally, a head can be cut, but not a tongue].” According to Otunbaeva, now the Kyrgyz nation “... at all times [prefers] freedom above all, has chosen it and a new path of democratic development.”²¹

The former speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament and former Secretary of the National Security Council, Adahan Madumarov, perceives the situation in the country in a different way. The slogan used by Boris Yeltsin – “take as much sovereignty and freedom as you want” – was correct, but society was not ready for it. Generally speaking, to us the word freedom means irresponsibility.”²² According to the above-mentioned Mars Sariev, the consciousness of the people of Kyrgyzstan is something quite different from the one in the neighboring countries: “We will never accept the usurpation of power, no one will ever put shackles on us, and this is the real fruit of democracy.” “We have felt a sweet word, “freedom.” But he had to admit that “... our taste of freedom is warped, of course; we have understood it in our own way, a little crooked.” “Unfortunately,” says the political scientist “Kyrgyzstan personifies a free rein, nomadic psychology, nomadic democracy and absolute love of freedom.”²³

²⁰ Temir Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, Bishkek, 2008, 104.

²¹ “Vystuplenie Presidenta Rosy Otunbaevoi na pervom zasedanii Jogorku Kenesha 5 sozyva,” *Akipress*, November 10, 2010, available at <http://kg.akipressreported.org/news:289521>.

²² Adahan Madumarov, “Po sravneniyu s vremenshikami Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Salievich okazalis` krasavchikami i nastoyashimi demokratami,” *Ferghana.ru*, October 7, 2010, available at www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6755

²³ *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011.

We cannot help but agree with Otunbaeva's statement repeating a well-known and wise observation: "the people have full authority to determine the further path of their development. After all, only that nation, which is the arbiter of its own destiny, is worthy of freedom."²⁴ The question is, to what extent is the Kyrgyz nation capable of deciding its fate in a self-conscious and independent manner?

One of the major problems in Kyrgyzstan is the absence of civilized forms of social relations in society, while such forms exist in Europe and the U.S.. In fact, nowhere in the world do they exist in a complete form suitable for use. Civilized forms of social relations are created in the process of establishing a civil sector by members of society. In the opinion of some Kyrgyz experts, "...we are presently just laying the foundations of the social space, which can form a new citizen of independent Kyrgyzstan aware of his being a real social force capable of consciously formulating and guiding a collaborative process to the democratic mainstream."²⁵ It is very important to understand that the spirit and mood of true democracy should be an inseparable part of the individual and his worldview.

A classicist of the German social sciences, Ferdinand Tönnies stated that in a community or a traditional society, "... the substance of the people as an original and dominant force creates houses, villages, cities and countries. Then, in many manifestations, it also creates strong self-willed individuals – princes, feudal lords, etc. as well as artists and scientists. All of them, economically and socially, stem from the totality of the nation, its will and its strength ... and can be as powerful as a certain unity only thanks to the nation ..."²⁶

According to Hegel, morality is realized in the family, civil society and state. The vertex of morality is the appropriate (just) state.²⁷ A contemporary Kyrgyz analyst, Emil Abildaev, agrees with the statement that "a civil society and law-based state arise and develop simultaneously, mutually complementing and

²⁴ *Akipress*, November 10, 2010.

²⁵ Zhanuzak Iskandar, "Plyaska asurov. Koe chto o parlamentskoi forme gosudarstvennogo upravleniya," *Belyi Parus*, October 7, 2010, available at www.parusk.info/2010/10/07/33598#more-33598.

²⁶ Tönnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 107.

²⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of law*, 279.

assuming each other.” Indeed, a civil society cannot but be democratic, while a legal state, destined to interact with it, accepts and reinforces its own successive democracy based on the civil society. But they are autonomous in this interaction, as are public and private relations in a civilized society.

These relations form a civil society and are the basis of democratic institutions and mechanisms, which overmaster public authority as well. According to Abildaev, the formation of civil society contributes to the consolidation of a political system, thus providing all citizens with the opportunity to participate in public affairs “based on the rule of democratically enacted laws and equality of everyone before them”.²⁸ It is true, but can we say that a legal state and civil society exist in Kyrgyzstan?

In reality, this is hardly the case. For example, according to Ulukbek K. Chinaliev, there is still a delicate balance between the state and civil society, as is, true to the author, characteristic of “authoritarian regimes”²⁹ Mars Sariev’s point of view is more radical: “we had no statehood before the Tsarist and then Soviet power ... There was nomadic military democracy, the alliance of tribes, united under the Khan.³⁰ But even the Khan, elected by tribal leaders, could be overthrown at any time, if he did not serve at somebody’s interests. Actually, that is what we do now with every president, who becomes undesirable. It's a throwback; déjà-vu.”³¹

Nomadic People, Tribal Relations, and Contradictions

These are not the only reasons for the frequency of the changes of power in Kyrgyzstan; there are additional causes worth mentioning. Indeed, in modern Kyrgyzstan one can increasingly hear of the Kyrgyz as a temperamental, freedom-loving, formerly nomadic nation, which has managed to create in due time a primitive form of tribal democracy. “For a thousand years,” says

²⁸ E. Abildaev, *Politicheskaya sistema Kyrgyzstan: problemy i perspektivy*, Bishkek: Ilim, 2001, s. 260.

²⁹ Ulukbek K. Chinaliev, *Osobennosti formirovaniy grazhdanskogo obschestva v Kyrgyzskoi Respublike*, Moscow: NIK, 2001, 81.

³⁰ Khan (from Mongolian *khaan*) – a Turkish and Mongolian title originally denoting a tribal leader; in the states formed after disintegration of the Mongol Empire “khan” is the title of a king or sovereign.

³¹ *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011.

President Otunbaeva, “our people lived in conditions of nomadic democracy, preserving their traditions and values.”³² That is true, but this form of democracy is very peculiar. “In fact, it is a conglomerate of tribes where important decisions are taken at a general meeting of their leaders and elders – the Kurultai, which is in essence a parliament, according to Mars Sariev ... the Kyrgyz show very strong corporate, tribal and clan interests.”³³

This deserves closer examination. The point is that “even after the transition to a settled and urban life, the Kyrgyz long remained nomads – not literally, of course, but mentally they have retained and continue to maintain clan and tribal order. The strength of tribal ties and relations among the Kyrgyz people is mentioned in many historical documents. A Russian explorer of Semirechye and member of the Central Asian military campaigns, Nikolay Grodekov, described the tribal relationships existing among the Kyrgyz at the end of the nineteenth century in the following words: “An individual is protected only by his kin. His kin is responsible for his actions ... a penalty is imposed on the kin and not on an individual, and charges are paid by kin.... a bride belongs to kin, not to an individual. A widow goes to the next of kin of the deceased, while a divorced woman must choose a new husband among the kin members of the former husband. The next of kin is always a foster parent. Guests are welcomed according to the degree of kinship ... Parish heads elected by people manage to hold the position only if they belong to the strongest kin in the parish.”³⁴

According to the academician Vasily Bartold, “after the Kyrgyz were subject to the Russians, they, unlike the Kazakhs, did not live in small auls; they lived in clans. In addition, each tribe preserved its former territory. Raising the level of education had a relatively small impact on mitigation of the morals” in this

³² “Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rosy Otunbaevoy na pervom zasedanii Jogorku Kenesha 5 sozyva,” *Akipress*, November 10, 2010, available at <http://kg.akipressreported.org/news:289521>.

³³ *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011.

³⁴ Nikolay Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoj Oblasti*, Tashkent: Tipolitografiya S.I. Lahtina, 1889, 12.

matter.³⁵ The relations between the people of one tribe were much closer than, say, the relations between residents of a town or even village.

Consequently, according to the Provisional Regulations on administration of steppe regions and the Syrdarya region from 1867, it was recognized as necessary to divide the nomadic population on the principle of parish and village in order to separate Kyrgyz clans. The new parish division deliberately included the parts of two clans into one administrative unit, thus initiating an endless internal struggle in the parish. “The internal state of the parish, according to eyewitnesses, can be characterized as covert and explicit partisan struggle, intrigues, false denunciations, false deeds, exactions, riots, protection of *manaps*,³⁶ who turned into money lenders and exploiters of the population, by administration bodies.”³⁷ In the opinion of the head of Turkestan district, even in this case, such administrative division of the Kyrgyz population by aul and parish “did not achieve its aim and the clan origin is still strong.”³⁸

The strength of tribal relations was influenced by other factors: the Kyrgyz people “having powerful relatives are more prosperous, because at difficult times, the rich help their poor relatives and often pay their tributes (taxes); the poor, in turn, pay for it by their labor ... the morality of the Kyrgyz people belonging to a large clan is much higher than the morals of the strangers from separated clans.”³⁹ Indeed, the clan relations of the Kyrgyz are as strong and long-lasting as inter-clan discord is long-lasting and sharp.

Experts explain the cause of conflicts between clans in different ways. Some of them point to historical circumstances. According to Alexander N. Bernshtam, the migration of the Kyrgyz from the Tien Shan Mountains to Xinjiang in the sixteenth century, from Tien Shan to Ferghana in the seventeenth century, the violation of their territorial integrity, and the endless dissociation of the Kyrgyz tribes and accession of their parts to different states

³⁵ Vasily V. Bartold, *Kyrgyzze. Istorichesky ocherk*, Compositions in 9 v. v.II, Part 1, Moscow: Nauka, 1963, 50-58.

³⁶ Manap is a representative of the Kyrgyz feudal clan nobility, who, having no personal property, lived at the expense of the population and disposed of its property.

³⁷ Grigory Broydo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, Bishkek: Uchkun, 1991.

³⁸ Konstantin Pahlen, *Otchet po revizii Turkestanskogo Kraya*, v. 4. *Narodnye sudy Turkestanskogo Kraya*, St. Petersburg: Senatskaya tipografiya, 1910.

³⁹ Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoj oblasti*, 16.

(Kokand, China, Kazakh Khanates) have led to additional confusion, preventing the development of ethnic unity, and disturbing the creation of an economic and cultural community. The period preceding the accession of the Kyrgyz to the Russian state in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, is a period of the Kyrgyz people's struggle for independence in conditions of patriarchal/feudal factionalism.⁴⁰

External factors have played a certain role. Some historians of Turkestan (N.N. Pantusov, N.I. Grodekov, and others) have shown that, beginning with the fourteenth century, the Kyrgyz were alternately under the dominion of the Chinese, Kalmyks, and Sarts from Kokand, who usually enslaved other tribes with the help of a Kyrgyz tribe. None of the historians investigating this area has ever found any unifying trends, because unification was always hampered by tribal and clan struggle resulting in the division into parishes, or the decrease of their size.⁴¹

The accession of the Kyrgyz to Russia did not solve the problem of inter-clan differences. "The Russians came to Kyrgyzstan in the middle of the nineteenth century, but for the 140 years of their reign, complains a popular Russian newspaper, they have failed to instill the idea of the state in the Kyrgyz people and to raise them from the sense of tribal, clannish consciousness to nationwide consciousness."⁴² But let us be fair: the tsarist government did not strive for this. On the contrary, at the beginning of Kyrgyzstan's accession to the Russian Empire, the division into parishes was carried out in accordance with clans, whereas further administrative division was in accord with clan divisions, because the tsarist government considered unification of a big clan under the reign of its patriarch to be politically dangerous.

It was in the Soviet period that inter-clan differences were somewhat "moderated" and not displayed publicly. As a part of the Soviet state formation in the form of the Kyrgyz SSR, the Kyrgyz people were positioned as a

⁴⁰ Alexander N. Bernshtam, "K voprosu o proishozhdenii Kyrgyzskogo naroda," *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 19, no. 2, 1955, 16-26.

⁴¹ Broydo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, 37.

⁴² Daria Aslamova, "Kyrgyzy ustavshie ot svoei anarhii: Zhdem kogda russkie vernutsya i navedut u nas poryadok," *Komsomol'skay Pravda*, November 17, 2010, available at www.kp.ru/daily/24571/743263/.

uniform nation, which achieved definite successes in its socio-economic, cultural and political development. A variety of studies connected with this period in the history of the country reflect the achievements of Kyrgyzstan. But as it turns out, even in this relatively prosperous period of history, the tribal differences among the Kyrgyz continued to exert influence on society.

The central government in Moscow tried not to interfere in tribal affairs. Moscow used to appoint the appropriate person as head of the republic, while the clans took complete control of all local offices. It was a European “package” with the old Asian content. Here is how the first president of independent Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, reminisced about it: “In the 1990s, when I became president, the first goal to be achieved was the balance in personnel matters, so that all minorities were represented in the branches of the government. Representatives of all clans were to be involved in more or less equal proportions, and it resembled working with pharmaceutical scales. These problems always existed in Central Asia. For a short period, I headed the Department for Science in the Central Committee of Kyrgyzstan, and I saw that party authorities did not advertise, but always took into account this specificity of Asia. If the [party’s] secretary general⁴³ was from the south, then the prime minister was from the north, and the chairperson of the Supreme Council came from the Issyk-Kul region.”⁴⁴

Since gaining independence in the 1990s, the Kyrgyz very quickly recalled their division into kin and tribes, wings and clans. Of course, clan divisions today differ from those which took place prior to the colonization and “sovietization” of the Kyrgyz tribes. About twenty years ago, identification according by tribal principles seemed a kind of exoticism; by the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, it had become firmly established. According to Temir Sariiev, “kinship relations,” or the “special relationship between father and son, with the relatives” are those unwritten laws of the Kyrgyz people, in conformity with which they continue to live ... Unfortunately, in recent years we have departed from some unwritten rules,”

⁴³ The Secretary General was the highest official in the USSR Communist Party structure.

⁴⁴ Askar Akaev, “Rosa Otunbaeva khotela stat’ general’nym sekretarem OON”, *Gazeta.kg*, July 7, 2010.

argues the author, “because of rapid urbanization, and yet the notions of kinship remain, and they must stay at any pace of society’s development. This is the stem of the Kyrgyz and we must preserve it.”⁴⁵

Typically, this “special relationship between father and son” is characteristic of young nations, heavily influenced by traditions and having passed through no crisis of national self-awareness. However, according to the official version, the Kyrgyz ethnic group, like Kyrgyz statehood, is more than two thousand years old. The problem seems to be in the efforts to spur the creation of the nation in Kyrgyzstan. There is nothing wrong with this, except one thing: the nation in Kyrgyzstan is being formed according to the ethnic rather than the civic principle.

This statement is correlated with the idea of the Kyrgyz political scientists Elmira Nogoibaeva and Ainura Murzakulova regarding the formula of the Kyrgyz national community. They argue that it “... is not a community of ethnic origin, but an idea one can and obviously must believe in. The idea of uniting society based on the agreement of the people, who support the goals of this idea. This was the beginning of creating a nation from separated tribes in the name of one goal, which was transformed into a great idea of survival and development.” In the opinion of the political scientists, the idea of the future nation of the Kyrgyz must have this particular meaning.⁴⁶

In this regard the United States is often and rightly taken as an example. America is a multi-ethnic country, where many ethnic groups retain their language and traditions, national-historical and socio-cultural identity. At the same time, they constitute a single nation of U.S. citizens and are able to act as a single nation.

According to Mars Sariev, the idea of people’s community and statehood has yet to be formed in the mentality of the Kyrgyz people – unlike the Uzbeks, Tajiks and Turkmens, who trace their statehood (the Khiva and Bukhara

⁴⁵ Temir Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 186-187.

⁴⁶ Elmira Nogoibaeva, “Samyi sloznyi etap politicheskoy borby predstoit posle vyborov I formirovaniya pravitelstva”, *Akipress*, September 29, 2010, available at <http://analitika.akipress.org/news:1041>.

Khanates) back to ancient times. “These are huge formations, which have left their trace in the minds of the people. We had nothing of the kind.”⁴⁷

Nomads did not build cities; today, their descendants are facing a problem of choice connected with socio-cultural identification. Søren Kierkegaard once wrote: “It is so difficult to choose oneself, that in this choice absolute isolation is identical to the most final continuity. It is due to such continuity that any possibility of becoming different or, rather, representing oneself differently is excluded in advance.”⁴⁸

For a long time, the clan-based nature of the Kyrgyz state was hardly of great interest to anybody. Later, when the threat of Kyrgyzstan’s disintegration with the inevitable subsequent destabilization of the entire Ferghana Valley became quite real, all experts and politicians started discussing the situation and expressing negative opinions. According to Marlène Laruelle and Alexander Knyazev, the situation in Kyrgyzstan is characterized as “polymorphism of unconsolidated political entities, tribal, regional and intra-regional contradictions.”⁴⁹

Such a negative assessment is quite understandable. Any clan balance in Kyrgyzstan is fragile, and the slightest upset in the balance can cause a disastrous situation. That is what we have been witnessing over the past six years. “We will just lose our own statehood, sinking into the mire of endless quarrels,” said the well-known Kyrgyz politician Felix Kulov. “We need to achieve national unity for the sake of stability, prosperity and development.”⁵⁰

The Kyrgyz can be broadly divided into two clans, Northerners and Southerners, who appear to have always competed with each other for power. They are then divided into even smaller parts, because almost every leader seeking power tries to form his or her team based on the principle of kin, following a well-known Kyrgyz proverb: “Do not go hunting with a man from

⁴⁷ *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011.

⁴⁸ See Søren Kierkegaard, *Either/Or: A Fragment of Life*, Abridged Version. London: Penguin, 1992.

⁴⁹ Marlène Laruelle and Alexander Knyazev, “Tsentralnaya Aziya pogruzhaetsya v "totalnyib konflikt?” *Ferghana.Ru*, September 30, 2010, available at <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6745>.

⁵⁰ Felix Kulov, “Hvatit delit` stranu na chasty,” *Izvestiya*, August 30, 2010, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/365297>.

another kin – at the right time he will hinder you from shooting.” One can only add that this kind of “order” is rapidly progressing and threatening the very existence of the state. The real political situation in the country is a ground for such pessimistic forecasts.

In this regard, it is appropriate to recall Karl Schmidt, one of the founders of the “history of forms” school. The famous German biblical scholar said that no sense of community exists, where *there is no enemy*. He believed that if a group loses the ability of referring itself to the enemy, such a group disintegrates and loses itself. Could this statement be a reflection of Kyrgyz society in recent years – a search for an eternal enemy? The Kyrgyz seem to be looking to find such enemies. Askar Akaev, his successor Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Roza Otunbaeva, the north, the south, and so on. Who or what is next? The situation is reminiscent of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*: the war of all against all – what Hobbes called the natural state of man before formation of the nation.

In this situation, the prospect of a nomadic people ever creating a successful state is often dismissed, because the concept of “Motherland” is interpreted quite differently by nomadic and settled peoples due to differences in lifestyle and mentality. For the settled peoples, the Motherland is a place where they live and work. The Motherland is the land that gives them life and for which they can defend to the death. For nomadic peoples, the Motherland is primarily a clan, a tribe, the people with whom they live. A clan roams and the Motherland roams with the clan.

This is a serious argument, but it can be overcome. Why, for example, is the situation not equally deplorable in Kazakhstan, whose tribal division has the same historical roots and influence? According to some Kyrgyz analysts, the problem is explained by lack of a *leader* capable of consolidating representatives of all strata and groups of society and playing the role of the “father” of the nation. According to Elmira Nogoibaeva, with the diversity of nominated politicians, no ideal potential leader has appeared in our political arena so far, to perform the functions of the speaker of parliament or a member of the government. “Unfortunately,” adds Mars Sariyev, “we do not have such personalities as Atatürk, Lech Walesa, Vaclav Havel, or Fidel Castro. We do

not have people of that magnitude, who would have been the conscience of the nation to some extent.”⁵¹

A grain of truth seems to be present in these judgments. After all, what is the main purpose of the *elite* in any society? It is to be the main body of society, keeping together the other strata thereof with its energy. However, the “elite” in Kyrgyzstan may soon disappear. People who consider themselves government managers appear incapable of calculating the benefits of getting together to address the most urgent tasks. According to Yuri Barvinok, “the dissociation of the Kyrgyz elite, which was best manifested in the elections, is [shown] by the fact that in its environment there are no cementing ideas and personalities that could embody these ideas. The rift and disintegration of the elite is the last stage, beyond which is the door to the non-existence of the state. And all this is because there is no inner deterrent in the Kyrgyz elite community and this community is afraid of calling an external power.”⁵²

The role of the leader and elite in a traditional society will be elaborated below; here, it is appropriate to note that the incompleteness of the process necessary for the formation of the state creates a particular tension in Kyrgyzstan, and this tension gives rise to nostalgia, anxiety and destructive impulses. The desire for stability exploits ancestral roots, the ideology of blood and soil. Politics becomes an instrument of discrimination and incitement of one clan against another. The nation of Kyrgyzstan as a state-forming entity is no longer located in the center of the political system. “In the general game, it just exists in the structure of the relations between the great superpowers. As a part of the protocol.”⁵³ It is no mere chance that many foreign analysts refer to Kyrgyzstan as a “failed” state.

Naturally, in such conditions it is difficult to speak about the presence in Kyrgyzstan of a consolidated nation and transformation thereof into a democratic society. On the contrary, the situation is complicated by the fact

⁵¹ Mars Sariev, “Chem obernetsya smena vlasty v Kyrgyzstane?” *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011, available at www.lenta.ru/en/conf//sariev.

⁵² Yuri Barvinok, “Sobstvennaya tsel’ kyrgyzskoi vlasti – eto illuziya,” *Belyi Parus*, March 7, 2012, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2012/03/07/59255#more-59255>.

⁵³ Vladimir Farafonov, “Kyrgyzstan – osennie uroki gosudarstvennogo poslushaniya,” *CentrAsia*, October 21, 2010, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1287646020>.

that Kyrgyz society has a dual character, which can be compared with dual citizenship. This is another paradox of the social structure in modern Kyrgyzstan.

The Town-Village Dichotomy

The urban Kyrgyz population is inclined toward the modern civil American-European type of society. In the villages, however, there exists the unconditional dominance of a patriarchal structure with its strong traditional order. The comprehension of the role of the individual, and views on society and the state, are also quite different. This explains why there has long been an opaque, but bitter struggle in modern Kyrgyzstan between the two camps – the “traditionalists” and their opponents.

Traditionalists strive for forcing the country to live in conformity with the old rules, and they appeal to the values that Kyrgyz traditionally held. As it turns out, many “traditional” values are still alive in Kyrgyzstan, and the influence of such has not been substantially weakened over the decades that the Kyrgyz lived as part of the USSR. As one observer notes, “young people gladly turned to stealing brides, girls quickly came to terms with the lesser roles dictated by a ‘traditional’ model. [It was] as if the Soviet Union never existed and there was no gender equality, international solidarity and strive for joining the modern world civilization and the fruits of globalization.”⁵⁴ Thus, individual rights are often ignored.

Present-day Kyrgyz society is represented by the vast majority of rural dwellers with a way of thinking and worldview characteristic of the village. Almost two-thirds of the Republic’s population are rural residents and just over one-third (35.7%) are town dwellers.⁵⁵ In fact, the country only has two larger cities – Osh and Bishkek. Before the beginning of the twenty-first century, the population of Osh mostly consisted of Uzbeks, and the population of the capital was mainly ethnic Russian. Thus, if the average American is a product of bourgeois culture, the average Kyrgyz is a product of a rural culture,

⁵⁴ Daniyar Karimov, “Kak vy yahtu nazavete...,” *Procella*, November 25, 2010, available at <http://procella.ru/index.php?newsid=625>.

⁵⁵ Uran Ergeshbaev, “Migratsionnye protsesy v Kyrgyzstane i ih sotsial`no-ekonomicheskie posledstviya,” *Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni doktora ekonomicheskikh nauk*, Moscow: RAN, 2009.

which may be a great culture, but it cannot be expected to give rise to the worldview characteristic of today's information society. Culture must evolve. The process of urbanization among the Kyrgyz people is only just beginning, and legal consciousness in society is also still evolving.

The real state of affairs shows that between the rural and urban areas there is a large gap, yet the village is trying to “eat up” the city. There are many reasons for this. In the countryside, the overwhelming majority of profits go to the middlemen and resellers instead of the farmers. As a result, for over a decade, many farmers have been unable to purchase equipment, buy quality seeds and breed pedigree cattle. The popularity of labor in rural areas has declined sharply, and the migration of unskilled rural population to the cities continues, thus exacerbating the deplorable situation in the labor market. All this has led to significant growth of the number of uneducated young people.

During the presidency of Askar Akaev, a parity between “tradition” and “modernity” was somehow observed. The epic “Manas” contributed to the idea of national unity. This promoted an ideology within the framework of the core cultural genotype, though an archaized one. Kurmanbek Bakiev, Akaev’s successor, almost completely destroyed the structure of the urban society, trying to turn it into a loose formation of a rural type, organized on the principle of a large farmhouse. Strong pressure was exerted in this direction by economic, political and cultural means primarily used by the main representatives of the southern region. “Lots of migrants from the countryside came to the cities. They did not get permanent jobs and decent living conditions and do not have them to this day ... The city, as it is, stopped being a center of cultural and economic life and turned into a crowd of rural marginal persons.”⁵⁶

Bishkek is still a city and territory of modernism, but it is increasingly becoming a “city-like” village. The capital is increasingly living in compliance with the laws of traditional rural provinces, according to which the political system was developed and political struggle is being waged. Therefore, the indigenous population of Bishkek as an independent political entity passively

⁵⁶ Vladimir Farafonov, “Kyrgyzstan: osnovnye priznaki efemernogo gosudarstva,” *CentrAsia*, February 4, 2011, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1296803280>.

participates in politics: the mechanisms of clan mobilization inherent in rural life do not work there. The Russian-speaking population of Bishkek is politically passive, being alien to the traditional system. For the same reason, the new Kyrgyz urban generation striving to integrate into the bureaucracy or politics is forced to do so through the traditional system, restoring their ties with the clan, i.e. replacing their modernist (urban) outlook with the traditional one, at least during work hours. No wonder that during the two revolutions in Bishkek, original Bishkek residents were mostly passive observers.

Transformation of Individuals into Citizens (Individualism and Collectivism)

It is common knowledge that without transformation of individuals into citizens there can be no civil society. According to the Bible, man appeared first and only after this did society appear. Scientists believe that civil society was formed in the same order. The essential difference between Hegel's and Marx's conceptions is Hegel's assertion that civil society does not absorb an individual, but makes him its fundamental element. They "exist only for each other and get into each other by means of each other. Facilitating the achievement of my purpose, I contribute to the implementation of the universal purpose, and the latter, in turn, enhances [the] implementation of my goal."⁵⁷ Therefore, remaining a consistent *Étatist*, Hegel was methodologically developing a liberal idea of personal immunity in all public structures, including civil society. The doctrines of Marx and his followers do not contain such conceptions.

It is independent individuals that create a civil society. Each person is regarded as the owner of certain assets having value, and the person's value lies therein; the state protects the existing order. "The concept of social justice is replaced by the scale of prices, i.e. law. Any value is rational and replaceable by its price. This sometimes gives rise to a harsh attitude toward poverty. A poor

⁵⁷ Hegel, *Philosophy of law*, 212-213.

individual is an outcast.”⁵⁸ This state of affairs mainly characterizes the urban environment.

In a traditional society burdened by a patriarchal character, the situation is quite different. Individualism is seen as the destruction of society. Communal ethical values lay the basis of the concept of justice. The source of the legitimacy of state structures is in the authority of father, elder, president. Citizens are children obeying the established chain of command in the family. In political terms, the very idea of democracy, personal independence and responsibility is negated.

According to German scientist Wilhelm Humboldt, the purpose of the state is to serve society. Its functions should boil down to ensuring external and internal security of citizens. Of special danger is state paternalism weaning individuals from overcoming difficulties.⁵⁹ But it is precisely such paternalism that exists in Kyrgyzstan and in other Central Asian states. “In our family,” recalls Temir Sariev “the authority of our father was always indisputable. I remember how my mother’s promise to complain to [our] father about our behavior would instantly make us children stop making noise and fooling around. It was not only a matter of customs and traditions. A distinctive feature of families with many children is a necessity of having someone with indisputable authority over all.”⁶⁰

Traditionalism, as the classics of European sociology understand it, is a type of perception and behavior, which is a certain legally conditioned lifestyle having an ethical image. This is a type close to the archaic. In this traditional society based on mechanical solidarity, the private is subordinated to the public; the individual to the collective. The collective is dominant in all spheres of society’s consciousness. An individual does not see himself isolated from society. A person in such a system means nothing; the main thing is results, performance and a common level.

⁵⁸ Vladimir Farafonov, “Konnitsa kak tochka otscheta kyrgyzskoi gosudarstvennosti,” *CentrAsia*, January 29, 2010, available at www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1288349820.

⁵⁹ Wilhelm Humboldt, *O predelakh gosudarstvennoi deyatelnosti*, Moscow: Tri Kvadrata, 2003, 103.

⁶⁰ Temir Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 24-25.

The formation of civil society requires an individual with quite different qualities. Here is how Weber describes people who have made the transition from a traditionalist to a capitalist society. A shift from traditionalist capitalism to modern capitalism “was performed, as a rule, not by daring and unscrupulous speculators or adventurers ... not by the owners of ‘big money,’ but by people who had a harsh life experience, who were cautious and resolute at the same time, restrained, moderate and persistent by nature, completely loyal to their cause and having strictly bourgeois attitudes and principles.”⁶¹

In Kyrgyzstan, in contrast, the value of labor as a necessary condition of human existence and source of income has fallen sharply. “Only idiots work now” is the slogan of the present day. Mental and physical stress and discipline, which are a prerequisite for normal labor, have been forced out of the set of young people’s values. “It is much easier to make money through financial fraud and speculation (for members of the upper stratum) or by odd jobs and even banal robbery or looting (for the poor).”⁶²

Another important factor affecting the social system in Kyrgyzstan is the *family*. To European and American thinkers, whose ideas underlie the modern postindustrial civilization, of utmost importance was the spiritual self-regulation of individuals and elements of social citizenship designated to determine the existence of a person in the system of social and political ties. In the East, including Kyrgyzstan, Confucianism with regard to patriarchal family with its clear hierarchy and mutual responsibility of each family member and the family as a whole has long been considered a model of social organization.⁶³

Here is how it plays itself out in everyday life among the Kyrgyz people, according to Temir Sariev: “... my brothers and sisters work in business, but all money earned is always common. Many of my acquaintances cannot understand how this can be, but this order was established from the very

⁶¹ See for example Max Weber, *Izbrannoe. Obraz obshestva*, Moscow: Yurist, 1994; Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, New York: The Free Press, 1938.

⁶² Rustam Bukeev, “Index schast’ya – ot hleba do solntsa. Zdorov’e natsii spaset Kyrgyzstan,” *Belyi Parus*, January 6, 2011, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2011/01/06/37813#more-37813>.

⁶³ In principle Buddhism, in proclaiming equality and sovereignty of people irrespective of caste or class, considered all social ties as evil.

beginning ... When I started making a decent livelihood, I first of all bought apartments for all my relatives. Only after providing them with a roof over their heads did I begin to build my own house.”⁶⁴

Keeping in mind the dual character of the world outlook in Kyrgyz society, it is easy to understand that not everyone can agree, whether openly or covertly, with such views. This can be easily confirmed by a number of indirect factors. According to expert opinion, the following two factors are the main reasons for migration from Kyrgyzstan: lack of decent wages (according to local standards) and pressure of traditionalism. Many ethnic Kyrgyz prefer to leave the country not only because it is difficult to find a job there. People also run away from the control of their numerous and demanding relatives. Further, not everyone has income sufficient for providing housing for all relatives.

Nevertheless, such *duality* of the social environment in Kyrgyzstan sometimes confuses even specialists. When facing representatives of urban culture, they make some hasty conclusions regarding the whole of Kyrgyz society. Thus, during a roundtable discussion in Bishkek on “How to restore confidence in a post-conflict country,” a representative of the Moscow Carnegie Center, Aleksei Malashenko, said that “Kyrgyzstan is the only country of Central Asia in which a feeling of individuality, self-worth and identity is so vivid. This is closer to Europe. This individualism is a bridge to the West.”⁶⁵ However, this expert was apparently was not familiar with the situation in remote areas of Kyrgyzstan, where there exists a tribalism that cannot be combined with individualism. Most clearly this is manifested in the south of the country.

It is common knowledge that the Kyrgyz and Europeans differ from each other in many respects, not least that the former were historically a nomadic civilization who ceased roaming only with the advent of the Bolsheviks. Therefore, individualism did not exist in their minds. Quite the opposite, in fact, as collectivism was one of the nation-forming elements of Kyrgyz society. “At all times,” said then-President Otunbaeva, “in crucial situations it was typical for the Kyrgyz to solve all problems together through universal

⁶⁴ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 25.

⁶⁵ “Pyl’ v glaza. Psevdodemokratiya v Kyrgyzstane – vsego lish rodoplemennay politicheskaya sistema,” *Belyi Parus*, November 20, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/11/20/35644#more-35644>.

agreement. It was this wise folk philosophy that has helped the Great Kyrgyz Nomad Camp not to fall into the abyss, preserving our nation.”⁶⁶

That may be the case, but again the question arises: is the emergence of civil relations possible in conditions of a traditional society? Until now it was impossible. A free democratic constitutional state and a civil society can be created only under the condition of individual autonomy, which is not only understood as personal freedom of an individual, but as a unity of internal and external opportunities for its development. In this case, a contradiction between the inner and outer content becomes a source of personal development in society.

According to the existing models of civil society, it is only since the emergence of the citizen as an independent, self-conscious individual endowed with a definite set of rights and freedoms, but at the same time bearing moral or other responsibility for all his actions to the public, that the formation of a real civil society has been possible. Therefore, with the exception of some elements, civil society did not exist in the epoch of ancient slavery, oriental despotism or feudalism, because civil qualities are formed only at sufficiently high stages of social development.

In Kyrgyzstan, state institutions are modern in form, but more patriarchal in content because of the great temptation to explain all failures of the authorities as a mismatch of the state system and the so-called “national” values, rather than as their own mistakes. The experience shows, claimed Kurmanbek Bakiev during his presidency, that elections have long ceased to be a process of rivalry between competing programs for changes in the administrative system. Everywhere, they have turned into a clash of technological machines, while people became an electorate processed by the technologists. “In addition, elections increasingly resemble a marathon of moneybags; many millions of funds are squandered, thus causing devaluation of the electoral system. Thus, the western system of human rights cannot easily be integrated into the Kyrgyz society, which is based on communal life and communal responsibility. Apparently, it is predetermined by the course of history.”⁶⁷

⁶⁶ *Belyi Parus*, November 20, 2010.

⁶⁷ For many American and European intellectuals, supporters of Islam are considered to be a part of patriarchal culture incapable of integration and for which an individual is

Currently, so-called “deliberative democracy” is becoming increasingly popular in the world. It focuses on the inclusion of different social groups into the processes of public policy development and implementation. “In my opinion, continues Kurmanbek Bakiev, deliberative democracy is best suited to the current reality of Kyrgyzstan, because this model of democracy has deep roots in the traditions of our people – conducting kurultays.”⁶⁸

This is a speculative proposition, because it cannot reflect the opinion of society as a whole.⁶⁹ Indeed, in the nineteenth century, Grodekov noted the following: “today a person undoubtedly becomes aware of an opportunity to use facilities provided by the existing order – freedom of action, protection of the law against harassment, appeals, etc. The closer to the city, the more respected are individual rights.”⁷⁰ This statement is even more true with regard to the modern Kyrgyz.

It is encouraging that in recent years more papers have appeared in Kyrgyzstan which claim that one of the most significant consequences caused by the collapse of the Soviet socio-political system in the country is the “inevitable erosion of the state-paternalistic system” in the minds of the masses and their “mental focus on individual freedom.”⁷¹ This gives reason to believe that such features do not have the character of fatal inevitability, but are a consequence

nothing, while family and community is everything. See for example Ralph Giordano, “Nicht die Zuwanderung, der Islam ist das Problem!” *Welt Online*, December 10, 2010, available at <http://gabblgob.livejournal.com/124885.html>.

⁶⁸ “Obraschenie Presidenta Kurmanbeka Bakieva k kurultayu soglasiya naroda Kyrgyzstana,” *Akipress*, March 23, 2010, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:183221/?from=rss>.

⁶⁹ Limitations or distortions of “deliberative” or “managed” democracy, let alone manipulated democracy, are identically reflected in the public and governmental structures. In the late 1920s, the political system established in the USSR in 1917, began being supplanted by a mobilization system, which turned society into a kind of military camp. A direct consequence of society’s state of mobilization that has lasted for more than 70 years, was the development of totalitarianism that destroyed many democratic civil institutions founded before the revolution (for example, choice of state power bodies election, pluralism, legal existence of the opposition, etc.) or restricted their activities.

⁷⁰ Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoy oblasti*, 21-22.

⁷¹ Anara Beishembaeva, “Mentalitet kyrgyzskogo naroda v usloviyakh modernizatsii,” *Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoi stepeni kandidata filosofskikh nauk*, Bishkek, 2005, 19.

of the transition from a post-totalitarian society to a new democratic social order.

Social Institutions and Law

Economic historian Douglass C. North places the notion of a social institution at the heart of his theory of transaction costs. According to him, a social institution is “rules of the game in society; more formally – restrictions created by people; and such restrictions give shape to human interaction and create the structure of incentives in the sphere of political, social and economic exchange.”⁷² In North’s opinion, a good understanding of the evolution of institutional structures is of great importance to those who analyze the reasons for the past and present situation in certain countries. This is true, since the existence of rules of the game is necessary in any society with a compound organization, where the coexistence of individual interests and their reconciliation cannot proceed without generally accepted norms, reliable and appropriate power structures, and an apparatus of coercion. Precisely because of such use and structuring of the terms of economic activities, institutions can fulfill their primary task – to reduce uncertainty of the social life characteristic of a traditional society. By creating a predictable social environment and arranging the distribution of information, social institutions facilitate more effective and targeted use of material resources.

The difference in the social development of different countries depends not only on economic indicators; many other factors are also involved. Among the most important is the bounded rationality of economic systems and historical relations of the forces expressing some interest or other in the course of specific political “bargaining.” If considerations of benefit in favor of the persons in power prevail in the state policy, it leads to hypertrophy of the public bureaucracy and paralysis of the economic interest of the majority. The same is taking place in Kyrgyzstan. As many analysts agree, there is an “inter-clan” subsidized economy with an internal market that has low capacity and is inelastic.

⁷² Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

On the contrary, where economic institutions have evolved toward greater promotion of the private interest by introducing the principle of personal liberty (early formation of civil society), the mobilization of significant capital (the first joint-stock companies), cheaper and easier access to business information (freedom of the press, organized markets), and better distribution of risks (insurance, stock exchanges), the established and stable institutional framework has resulted in much higher efficiency of the same production resources and costs.

Reflecting on the processes occurring in the world, Douglass C. North points out that the biggest challenge for the former Soviet states today is “formal transfer of the state property to private owners. At the same time, everything that ensures operation of this private ownership in accordance with the invisible hand of the market is not available: there is no appropriate legal system and education system, because there is no basis for them. “It is very difficult to change informal rules of the game, mediated through the culture of each country. If only formal rules are modified, this can lead to tension and long-lasting political instability.”⁷³ All this is applicable with regard to Kyrgyzstan.

New institutional economics should, in due time, take into account formal and informal rules and norms that exist in society, and use them in solving a number of problems. But the path of the changes appears long and difficult, and in the next 15-20 years it is unrealistic to expect a high rate of development and any fundamental changes.

So far, we have observed that Kyrgyz society is largely a traditional one, based more on mechanical than organic solidarity. Using the terminology of Tönnies, this is a community in a phase of transition from a traditional to democratic state, but it is only at the very beginning of this stage. This can be easily seen by comparing this notion with the description given by the German sociologist. The social structure of the community, he suggests, is a variety of naturally formed numerous and various partnerships, communities and ethnic communities. According to him, the spiritual life of a community depends on imagination; people believe in invisible beings, spirits and gods. Law is based

⁷³ Ibid, 37.

on morals and is a “natural” law; the state’s will is a captive of prejudices, traditions and faith in their basic role.⁷⁴

The validity of the abovementioned argument can be seen in the functioning of an institution such as the “law.” In Kyrgyzstan, its functioning is of a very specific character. “Another troublesome aspect of Kyrgyz culture,” writes Temir Sariev, “is that when one of us breaks the law, he starts looking for a helpful person among his friends and relatives, instead of looking for a lawyer, and tries to find a possibility to use telephone justice to solve the problem.”⁷⁵ The first “trouble” creates the second one – such as bribery. These are two fundamental principles according to which the “law” functions in Kyrgyzstan.

This practice of solving legal issues fell on a very fertile soil. The fact is that the word “law” in the European meaning did not exist in the ancient Kyrgyz language. The word “hak” (*adat*) was used for such concepts as: 1) the truth, 2) God, and 3) the right to receive anything.

To us this may mean the following: first of all, in ancient times, the Kyrgyz “did not see any difference between the authority, high birth and judicial and administrative authorities,” and the privacy practices were not differentiated from the practices of court, as well as the “moral obligations were not differentiated from the legal ones; and home and administrative punishments from judicial ones.”⁷⁶

Secondly, material values have always been the main instrument for regulating the relations among the Kyrgyz, including punishment. According to Nikolay Grodekov “... cruel punishment (death penalty, whipping, amputation, etc.) is not peculiar to the Kyrgyz. Almost all crimes were and are paid by means of kickbacks.”⁷⁷ Third, the ancient law was the right of the strong. The colonial authorities of Tsarist Russia did not remain aloof from the development and establishment of such “rules.” According to contemporaries, at the end of the nineteenth century even the lowest level officials – guards, translators, and so on – were quite wealthy. “Prosperity is based on solid graft. Its forms are somewhat different from the usual forms of

⁷⁴ Tonnies, *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*, 67.

⁷⁵ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 191.

⁷⁶ Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoj oblasti*, II.

⁷⁷ Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzy Syrdarinskoj oblasti*, II.

bribery. The difference is that in Semirechye, ranks of administration are members of the “parties” and in most cases they receive a bribe from the leaders of the party.⁷⁸ This form of bribery between two tightly interconnected entities guarantees insulation from any complaints, but if any occurs, the inquiry into a chief of police will be held by the bailiff and nothing will be found, because, in turn, all ranks of administration are linked in indissoluble bonds, and to give away someone means to give away themselves.”⁷⁹

In the course of time, these traditions strengthened their influence by being embedded in the system of government and legal rules, regulations, and laws. In this context, the law in Kyrgyzstan has always been, and, unfortunately, still is, selective. An official wielding a certain power will never abide by the rules that his subordinates are required to abide by, as this would see him lose his prestige and credibility. However, his demands and requirements must be fulfilled by all subordinates, because to them these requirements are the law.

An example that became publicly known in the Kyrgyz media after it was reported by the Internet portal Akipress.kg concerned a young woman inspector in Bishkek employed at the State Traffic Patrol Department. According to the story, the inspector stopped an Audi car for violating traffic rules. At the wheel of the car was the assistant of the Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs, Lieutenant Sheraliev. After insulting the woman, he hit her twice on the head.⁸⁰ Due to his position, he felt humiliated by the requirement of the inspector to stop. Holding a certain position, he apparently believed that all those below his rank were not worth reckoning with and that he could flout the law.

⁷⁸ When Russian colonial authorities were abolishing the heredity principle at the institution of manaps, they established the voting right. The Kyrgyz called a grouping about the manap a “party,” although in fact the struggle was conducted between the manaps. Members of the “party” dissatisfied with the activities of the volost` manager nominated another candidate from their milieu. “Political” struggle has resulted in a *system of bribes*, which means request for assistance from the colonial administration, which could help one party to overpower another party and exploit the defeated party in every possible way in the period of rule. See Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*.

⁷⁹ Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, 63.

⁸⁰ Press service, MVD (The Ministry of Internal Affairs), *Akipress*, October 29, 2010, available at <http://svodka.akipress.org/news:64461>.

It is safe to assume that he would have behaved quite differently if it had been a minister or a high-ranking official that had stopped him. Indeed, such a person would have satisfied any requirement without raising any objections, even if it had involved breaking the law.

But the most interesting thing about this story is the way it ended. According to news agencies, “officials of the Ministry of Interior (MOI) have not found grounds for initiation of criminal proceedings against a senior police lieutenant who beat the woman, an STPD inspector.” This means the following: if you are a law enforcement official, a police officer, and you were beaten when on duty, this, as it happens, is not a ground for initiation of criminal proceedings. But there is more to come. According to the press service of the MOI, “The Central Investigation Department of the MOI has studied the materials of the official investigation and, based on Article 28 of the Kyrgyz Republic Code of Criminal Procedure, decided to dismiss the criminal case for lack of a criminally punishable act in the actions of the senior police lieutenant.”⁸¹

This gives rise to the question of what one should one do for such grounds to appear? While the victim herself requested the Investigation Department of the MOI to terminate further proceedings, can such an appeal be grounds for termination of the criminal case? If yes, then one may beat police officers in Kyrgyzstan as much as one wishes, because this “action” does not contain any “elements of a criminal offense.” This is of course far from a desirable situation.

In another example, a former Special Forces official, a certain Erkin Mambetaliev, convicted by the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan to life imprisonment for the murder of an MP as well as other murders, was unprecedentedly acquitted on November 10, 2010, by a lower court, after the decision of the judge of Bishkek Court. According to the explanation provided by the municipal court office, the criminal case “was investigated in Bishkek Court based on newly discovered facts.” The court refused to explain what

⁸¹ “V Ministerstve vnutrennikh del Kyrgyzstana ne nashli osnovaniy dlya vzbuzhdeniya ugolovnogo dela v otnoshenii starshego leytenanta militsii, izbivshego devushku – inspektora,” *24kg.*, September 11, 2010, available at <http://24kg.org/investigation/86455-v-mvd-kyrgyzstana-ne-nashli-osnovanij-dlya.html>.

kind of facts those were. Thus, a city court quashed the sentence of the country's Supreme Court. Thus, it is clear that all the *written* laws, including the constitution, are in danger of losing their meaning in a situation where *unwritten* laws dominate in society.

This means that actions do not have to be consistent with the laws of the country, but rather that everything depends on having friends in the "right places," preferably within the prosecutor's office, the tax inspectorate, and customs, among other bodies. Thus, legal nihilism has grown and become strong in Kyrgyzstan. Ignoring laws has become commonplace and is now rooted in the consciousness of people. Indicative of this was former Minister of Justice Marat Kaipov's comment after the election to the Jogorku Kenesh (the Kyrgyz Parliament) in October 2010, when he said "If the authorities take an unjust decision with regard to the Butun Kyrgyzstan (United Kyrgyzstan) Party, we will replace these authorities with others." His comment caused little surprise.

The Clan System as an Obstacle on the Path of Civil Society Formation

The last parliamentary elections and a multi-party system may seem to be sufficient to assume that political relations in Kyrgyzstan resemble those in a Western European democratic society. Nevertheless, it is not that simple. Here is another paradox of the Kyrgyz political system: there are political parties in Kyrgyzstan, but there is no party diversity in the strict sense of the word. Rather, there is an imitation of democratic institutions and a replacement of the concepts connected with parliamentarianism, the electorate and civil society. There is, as in a theater complete with scenery, the illusion of reality, while the whole “multi-party” game is interesting only to local clans seeking to fill the power vacuum.

Before the Kyrgyz Parliamentary elections on October 10, 2010, the Central Election Committee (CEC) had registered 29 political parties. With so many contenders for the political race, society was unable to come up with enough fundamentally different models of political structure and means to achieve social benefits. Therefore, fooling the electorate with numerous “programs” and promises that shamelessly duplicated each other, almost all parties provided a package of social reforms, portraying themselves as the primary and principal candidates.⁸²

Despite the abundance of parties, the political “assortment” in Kyrgyzstan is quite simple. In examining the parties registered by the Ministry of Justice, their leaders, policy documents, and so on, it is nonetheless difficult to conduct an appropriate analysis of their contents, because finding any significant differences between the numerous political parties of Kyrgyzstan and their policy documents is nearly impossible. “A party should follow an ideological

⁸² It is noteworthy that 83 candidates for the presidential post in 2011 were registered for election.

orientation, but this is not what Kyrgyzstan has at the moment,” says Elmira Nogoibaeva.⁸³

The recordings of press conferences and interviews given by Askar Akaev and Kurmanbek Bakiev during their rise to power, at a time when they were more open to the press and touted as democrats, testifies to the above. If the rhetoric of the “former” candidates is compared with the speeches of more recent candidates contending for power, there is not much difference. They all stand for the interests of the people; they all assure that they will not allow a repetition of the past; and that they will give their utmost in the fight against nepotism, corruption, and bribery. If there is any difference between the current parties, then it relates to the closeness of their leaders to the levers of real power in Kyrgyzstan. And the greater the distance from these instruments, the greater willingness of party leaders to risk everything in the struggle for power, precisely because they may have no other choice.

Party Structure

“We have no classical parties of international standard,” recognized the former Speaker of the Kyrgyz Parliament, Zainidin Kurmanov.⁸⁴ A characteristic feature of existing political parties in Kyrgyzstan is that their structure resembles a pyramid. At the heart of it are ordinary members, who usually are members of the kin, countrymen, distant and close relatives of the leader (or leaders) of the party. They are followed by lower and middle echelon managers and party activists. All of them usually perform their duties for a determined fee or a promise to obtain a desired “lucrative” position. It is mid-level activists that enroll “party members” for another “party event,” prepare party lists, and give out rewards to the most active participants. Party members upholding an ideological course constitute a minority.

This is not surprising. The desire to court favor with influential persons in their milieu for the purposes of obtaining money results from an old tradition stemming from the time of Tsarist Russia. According to the memoirs of a

⁸³ Elmira Nogoibaeva, “Samyi slozhnyi etap politicheskoi bor`by predstoit posle vyborov I formirovaniya pravitel'stva,” *Akipress*, September 29, 2010, available at <http://analitika.akipress.org/news:1041>.

⁸⁴ Zainidin Kurmanov, “U nas net klassicheskikh partiy mezhdunarodnogo obraztsa,” *Akipress*, September 29, 2010, available at <http://vybory.akipress.org/news:4281/>.

prominent Soviet leader and an organizer of the Central Asian Republics, Gregory Broido, active bestowing of all those capable of influencing the outcome of the election was already rampant in the past. Broido further stated that: “These costs connected with gifts and bribes during the election become enormous. ... Even in the most run-down parish the election requires two to three thousand.”⁸⁵ The same sort of thing takes place today, but on a larger scale. “Election results in our country depend on money, meals, vodka,” says Adakhan Madumarov. As a rule, votes of electors are bought in a direct or indirect manner. “On the polling day,” he continues, a short “happy life” begins: good food, vodka, concerts and national games.”⁸⁶ Before the election to the Jogorku Kenesh in October 2010, a political analyst, Kabay Karabekov, told the *Kommersant* news agency the following: “In Kyrgyzstan, unprecedented mass bribery of voters takes place. Parties with a good financial base are involved in these activities. Buying votes is particularly prevalent in the regions.” While the electorate are most likely to accept any money, Karabekov concluded that voters are likely to follow their heart in voting.⁸⁷

Parties and Clans

How can the diversity of political parties in Kyrgyzstan be explained? Does it speak in favor of political pluralism? The fact is that the party system in a traditional society resembles its clannish, tribal structure. All three concepts – “party,” “kin,” and “clan” – are essentially identical, and reflect the same well-established system of socio-political relations. In Kyrgyzstan, these relationships are also determined by a geographic nuance: the North–South divide. “It is no secret that all our parties are based on friends and relatives,” said the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Ednan Karabaev in 2011.⁸⁸ The incumbent president at the time, Roza Otunbaeva, testified to this when she

⁸⁵ Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, 77.

⁸⁶ Adakhan Madumarov, “Otunbaeva ostanetsya v istorii kak sama sebya izbravshaya Presidentom,” *Jany Ordo*, no. 1, Bishkek, 2011, 6, 8, 10.

⁸⁷ Kabaye Karabekov, “Predvybornaya gonka vooruzheniy,” *Kommersant*, September 17, 2010.

⁸⁸ Ednan Karabaev, “Dvoinye standarty morali nashikh politikov smyval svoei krov’yu yug Kyrgyzstana,” *24.kg*, January 14, 2011, available at <http://www.24kg.org/politic/90648-.html>.

expressed hope that in the course of time “real parties will remain in Kyrgyzstan, parties united by the community of ideas, not by pre-election alliances based on capital or geographical (local) belonging.”⁸⁹ Markus Ackeret wrote in 2010 in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* that “the parties, even those that have long existed, are leader-based or clan establishments.”⁹⁰ In addition, each clan considers itself worthy of power over all others and, therefore, regularly strives for power. “We have forty clans, and on the flag there are forty golden rays. And all these forty clans should wield the scepter for some time,” said Aleksander Katsev of the Kyrgyz-Russian Slavonic University.

In fact, a large number of formally registered political parties does not serve as evidence that Kyrgyzstan has established a multi-party system, because they do not represent any significant political force that would express the interests of different social strata and identify possible ways for the country’s development. Some political parties account for at least ten members – a minimum specified in the law. Therefore, even the Department of Justice finds it difficult to specify the exact number of parties, because many of them exist only on paper. As soon as they get registered, many of them immediately disintegrate and cease to exist. As a result, the country has a great number of parties, but no real political forces.

According to the mass media, in a country with an entire population of little more than five million, the number of registered political parties was 40 in 2005 and 82 in 2006. According to different expert estimations, in 2010 there were 150-200 political parties. The number of different non-governmental organizations (NGO) is similarly difficult to count; according to various estimates, their number varies from five to ten thousand. The annual turnover of half of all these NGOs does not exceed US\$ 5,000.

In the struggle for power, clans and their representative parties may build alliances, and unite against the existing government and other participants in the political struggle. But the relationship between these allies is not

⁸⁹ “Roza Otunbaeva vystupaya v dipakademii France, otmetila, chto mnogie eksperty pri otsenke situatsii v KR ispol’zuyut ustarevshie stereotipy,” *24.kg*, March 4, 2011, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:339741>.

⁹⁰ Markus Ackeret, “Kirgisistan versucht den Neuanfang,” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 7 October 2010.

determined by any common strategic interests or by any shared moral and political views. Typically, this refers to political leaders with their own financial or political interests and ambitions, which, they hope, can be realized within the framework of the chosen political alliance. These are the so-called “roving” politicians, and their number considerably increases before scheduled presidential and parliamentary elections. As Zainidin Kurmanov put it, “Kyrgyzstan has become a country of nomadic leaders ... moving from party to party.”⁹¹ Associations of this kind are not of a long-term nature; rather, they are situational. Such alliances are rather surprising and unpredictable: for example, the alliance of Felix Kulov with Tursunbek Bakir uulu and Akylbek Japarov of the Ar-Namys Party made little sense. The party of current President Almazbek Atambaev, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan, has at various times become a haven and fulcrum for such different politicians as Bakyt Beshimov, Roza Otunbayeva, Temir Sariev, Omurbek Babanov, Edil Baisalov, and others. Later, almost all of them created their “own” parties and specific niches. The best known union of this kind in the history of sovereign Kyrgyzstan was the tandem of Kurmanbek Bakiev and Felix Kulov in 2005, after the overthrow of Askar Akaev.

Why are such alliances that seem strange at first glance possible? First of all, it is because the local political establishment is not interested in political programs and the implementation of such programs. Basically, these are individuals fearful of losing their sources of income and those who aspire to power, but who failed to be admitted to other parties or allowed to take power. “Party members” of this category usually prefer to “negotiate” for a certain price, in order to preserve control over large cash flows and/or to return to power to restore what has been lost.

Personification of Power

With the abundance of emotions and ambitions in the political system of Kyrgyzstan, a person in power is of great significance. In Asia and the East, in principle, power has always been concentrated in the hands of one person. Oriental philosophy has always supported this point. For example, the philosopher of ancient China, Confucius, and then his successor, Mencius,

⁹¹ *Akipress*, September 29, 2010.

developed a doctrine of the original goodness of human nature, in which they substantiated the idea of humane governance where the emperor should govern for the benefit of the nation. Later, when speaking about the arrangement of governance, the great thinker of the Medieval East, Al-Farabi, known as the second Aristotle, emphasized that if all the qualities necessary for a ruler are concentrated in one person, power must be given to this person. The ideas of Confucius, Al-Farabi, and their followers left a mark on the formation of Eastern societies and had some influence on the mentality of the Central Asian peoples, who actively interacted with the East. For the Kyrgyz community, the problem of leadership is still the basic problem. Any community, whether a small group of people gathered at a table, or a mass of people constituting the population of the region or country, must have a leader. A leader plays a special role in the social development of his or her people. It is no wonder that political entities in Kyrgyzstan are the parties of a leadership type. Their leaders, not their programs, are the basis of their authority.

This assertion has its historic substantiation. For example, from the viewpoint of Friedrich Wilhelm Radloff (known as Vasily Radlov in Russia), the German-born founder of Russian Turkology, in the life of nomadic people it is extremely important to understand that “it is only through the influence of certain persons (tribal leaders) that powerful tribal complexes are formed from very small ones in the shortest possible time,” and how “these personalities usurp the Khan’s power.” He further emphasized that “only the strong hand of a Khan is in a position to keep the state of nomads in peace and on the alert; and the Khan will be able to unite non-connected tribal elements into a strong formation, only if he is able to immediately suppress any uprising against his power, because the nomadic state quickly disintegrates when the strong hand of the Khan weakens and becomes powerless.”⁹²

Today, this notion is as popular among Kyrgyz politicians as ever. For example, Adakhan Madumarov is convinced that it is not critical how a government institution is organized; rather, it is of greater importance what kind of person possesses power. Madumarov confirmed his statement by comparing Russia in the period of Boris Yeltsin and Vladimir Putin: “The

⁹² Vasily V. Radlov, *Die alttürkischen Inschriften der Mongolei – Dritte Lieferung*, St. Petersburg, 1895, 310.

country was as different in these two periods as heaven and earth. Hence, the reason is in the personality, the human being. It all depends on who exactly governs the country.” Madumarov added, however, that the election of a leader depends on the people. “The more responsible and conscious the nation, the more successful it will be in choosing a suitable leader.”⁹³ This statement may seem somewhat contradictory. On the one hand, everything is decided by personality; on the other hand, success depends on the people choosing this person. Interestingly, according to Bartold, the Kyrgyz did not have tsars (*khans*) but had *beks*⁹⁴ (lords) and manaps. Soon after Kyrgyzstan was incorporated into the Russian Empire, the power of manaps came to an end; under the temporary provision of 1867 (later replaced by the provision of 1886), *biys* were elected on an equal basis from among manaps and non-manaps.⁹⁵ As a consequence, the Kyrgyz had no khans, but everyone nonetheless wanted to be the Khan and could achieve this by gaining the support of the majority.

History suggests why Kyrgyz politicians are so eager for independence and leadership: research describing the life and character of the relations within the Kyrgyz community in the past are informative. This is how Gregory Broido described the internal structure of the Kyrgyz at the end of the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries: “The manap was, in essence, an organizer of the whole clan’s life. He determined the camping-ground and the time of migration; court procedures were held under his leadership; agreements with other clans were made through him and relations were established with those government agencies of the country, under whose power the Kirghiz were at that time. The manap never had any personal property, because the property of the whole clan was in his possession.”⁹⁶ This is supported by the works of a number of historians, including Bartold, Egor

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ *Bek* – (beg, bai, biy) means a “ruler” or “master” in the Turkic language. Initially, in the period of clan relations, that person was head of the clan of the ancient Turkic people and headed the Territorial Army in the combined clan army. In the overall hierarchy of the ancient Turkic titles he was the second after the Khan; later, the word began to be used by some societies to denote the title of a landowner.

⁹⁵ Vasily V. Bartold, *Kyrgyzze. Istorichesky ocherk*, 58.

⁹⁶ Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*.

Meyendorff, and Grodekov.⁹⁷ In all works, the *manaps* are depicted as active organizers of the clan's life.

According to Grodekov, Kyrgyz *manaps* are the best leaders, originating from a number of *biys*. If the son of a *manap* is worse than his father, evil or impoverished, he ceases to be a *manap*: "... those who have become *manaps* excelled over other representatives of their nation, they were distinguished by their bravery and generosity and were leaders at a time of anarchy. During the enemy invasions, they gathered the nation and led the people."⁹⁸ With the conquest of any region these *manaps* were the persons through whom all activities requiring power were carried out in the region.

At the same time, a *manap* was a clerk of the administration. For these services he was given the right to the uncontrolled and most brazen exploitation of the whole parish, especially the poor. Through his subordinates – a parish steward, judges, and so on – a *manap* exploited the defeated party, i.e. representatives of that clan which had not received authority in the area. They were to pay the *manap* numerous tributes, and even provided him with the money he needed to prepare future elections and to struggle with candidates from the rival clan. In this activity, the force of *manaps* entirely depended upon the support of the administration.

Today like before, a high level of personification is a characteristic feature of Kyrgyz politics. Temir Sariev argues that sometimes a particular person can play a significant role in history and turn a "golden key" together with the people, in order to open the door to an entirely different world. According to many Kyrgyz politicians, a leader should also possess certain charismatic qualities. The success of the party is very much dependent on the personal qualities of the leaders, because, unlike other members of the organization, he is positioned as a leader of not only a definite party, but as a leader of the nation and society as a whole. A person claiming to be a national leader must possess an extraordinary sense of justice, a special core that can affect people's

⁹⁷ Vasily V. Bartold, *Kyrgyzye. Istorichesky ocherk*, Compositions in 9 v. v.II, Part 1, Moscow: Nauka, 1963; Nikolay Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzye Syrdarinskoj oblasti*, Tashkent: Tipolitografiya S.I. Lahtina, 1889; Egor Mejndorf, *Puteshestvie iz Orenburga v Bukharu v 1820 godu*, Moscow: Nauka, 1975.

⁹⁸ Grodekov, *Kyrgyzy i Kara-Kyrgyzye Syrdarinskoj oblasti*, 6.

consciousness in order to change the destiny of his people and the country as a whole. In the crucial, critical moments, wrote Temir Sariev, such a person burns all bridges behind him and takes responsibility for writing a new page of life. “The problem is that there have not been many outstanding personalities of this kind in the history of mankind. In the past and contemporary history of Kyrgyzstan, they can be counted on the fingers of one hand...”⁹⁹ “A deputy is absolutely free in his statements and voting. However, in order to lead all the deputies in the same direction, the leader of the faction must have high credibility,” says the well-known leader of the Ata-Meken (Homeland) Party, Omurbek Tekebayev.¹⁰⁰

The leaders in Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan in particular need charismatic features; otherwise they will not be “authoritative” leaders, but “weak” ones unable to bring about any sense of purpose. If, in the opinion of society, a leader is weak, he quickly loses power and is removed from the political arena. The leader of the Ata-Jurt (Fatherland) Party, Kamchibek Tashiev, offered the following explanation of why the provisional government could not prevent the June (2010) events in the south of Kyrgyzstan: Massacres became possible, he claimed, because no official in power at that time – Atambayev, Sariev, or Otunbaeva – could have stopped even ten Kyrgyz, because these politicians did not enjoy credibility, and the people did not listen to them.¹⁰¹

It is no coincidence that many experts believe in the necessity of a “strong leader” in the present political reality in Central Asia. This supposedly contributes to stability of the political situation in the Central Asian countries. Moreover, political stability in this region can, the argument goes, be provided only by an authoritarian regime either in its “soft” form, as “strong presidential power,” or its “strict” form – through personal dictatorship. According to Stanislaw Epifantsev, “only the appearance of a strong

⁹⁹ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 4-5.

¹⁰⁰ Omurbek Tekebayev, “Otmnit Konstitutsiyu i dekrety, vse vernut bakievskoi rodne?” *Ferghana.ru*, September, 21, 2010, available at <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6735>.

¹⁰¹ Kamchibek Tashiev, “Esli russkie, uzbeki ili turki skazhut – chto oni na ravne s kyrgyzami ili vyshе ih – gosudarstvo razvalitsya,” *Ferghana.ru*, September, 16, 2010, available at <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6728>.

individual like Atatürk or Peter I can change Kyrgyzstan.”¹⁰² Of interest is the fact that some foreign experts are also inclined to believe the same. Thus, Eugene Rumer of Washington’s National Defense University, speaking about a possible socio-political structure of Central Asia, stated that only “chaos, not democracy” could be a real alternative to the ruling regimes there, because democracy appeared to be an “elusive” phenomenon for the region.”¹⁰³

Undoubtedly, there are grounds for such conclusions. A leader who is misunderstood and not recognized by the people of the clan is really doomed to failure. According to Bartold, even the great philosopher and scholar Ulugbek, imbued with the idea of universal progress regardless of religious and national differences, was completely alone in the history of the Muslim world. Suffice it to say, wrote Bartold, that the activities of the observatory founded by Ulugbek ceased almost immediately after his death, and already at the beginning of the sixteenth century the observatory lay in ruins; in the twentieth century its remains could be found only by means of [archeological] excavation.”¹⁰⁴

For the time being, we deal with the reverse side of personification of political activity: that is, the aspiration for leadership predetermines authoritarianism in the leader of the party and state. Alexis de Tocqueville was right in observing that the more authority and state power that is concentrated in the hands of one person, the more real the threat of tyranny becomes.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, as former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia Susan Elliott noted, “freedom and stability are not mutually exclusive. Conversely, those countries that give their citizens more freedom are ultimately more stable.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Stanislav Yepifantsev, “Kyrgyziya: vozmozhno li protsvetanie tretei respubliky? Komu dostanetsya “narodnoe schast’e,” *CentrAsia*, January 25, 2011, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1295948460>

¹⁰³ Eugene Rumer, “The real alternative dictators Central Asia could become chaos, not democracy,” *The National Interest*, July 18, 2005, available at <http://nationalinterest.org/article/chaos-not-democracy-may-be-real-alternative-to-dictators-in-central-asia-2744>.

¹⁰⁴ Bartold, *Kultura musuljmanstva*, Sochineniya.

¹⁰⁵ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*.

¹⁰⁶ “Svoboda i stabilnost ne isklyuchayut drug druga – Susan Elliott o politike USA v Central’noi Asii,” *CA – News*, March 24, 2011, available at <http://ca-news.org/news:638301/>.

Authorized struggle for power leads to a greater schism between the clans and to the destabilization of society as a whole. Parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan held in October 2010 have changed nothing in this regard. When a coalition bloc in the Jogorku Kenesh and the government are created, personal relations between the party leaders are a predominant factor, superseding public, ideological and even clan relations. Indeed, such personal relationships may eventually destroy not only coalitions and alliances in the parliament, but also parliamentary parties,¹⁰⁷ unless the elite realizes the necessity of a compromise. This has led to the instability of state power, constitutional changes, and constant reshuffles of the government.

The most unfortunate aspect is that these circumstances, combined with difficult socio-economic conditions, resulted in two violent changes of power in Kyrgyzstan. And violent changes of government are disastrous for society and the country; subsequently it motivates people to plan and attempt the next coercive seizure of power, leading to a vicious cycle of recurrent overthrows of government. Provincial leaders will just adopt this way of coming to the throne. "This principle of approach to power," said Temir Sariev, "will finally put a cross on our evolutionary path, will split and separate the nation, while regional thinking will gain the upper hand over the sense of belonging to a single nation. Every clan will start to demand that the supreme power be immediately given to their leader. And the worst of it will be an endless redistribution of property mainly carried out in compliance with the regional 'apprehensions' of what tribe and clan one belongs to."¹⁰⁸

Sariev uttered these words two years before the events of April 2010, so they proved prescient. But this brings up the question why power cannot be transferred legitimately, through general parliamentary or presidential elections, as is customary in democratic countries? Here several circumstances require attention.

First, one must recall that elections in Kyrgyzstan normally favor the ruling clan; therefore, the leaders of other clans do not rely upon this method of achieving power. Hence, the legal grounds for political struggle are actually

¹⁰⁷ Daniyar Karimov, "Parlament kg; tret'im budesh?" *CentrAsia*, November 14, 2010, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1289722740>.

¹⁰⁸ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 12.

not considered by politicians, but are only needed up to a certain time to serve as a decorative cover for the incumbent authorities.

Second, in the minds of local leaders, a particular logic is formed that conforms to the rules of the “game.” If you want get a hold of power, unseat the “old” Khan and power will be in your hands. If one clan takes power and is not willing to share or relinquish power, why should another clan not simply grab it? Thus, the leaders of the local clans are faced with great temptation to seize power instead of pursuing such through fair competition.

Third, in a country where people do not know what democracy is, have never lived in conditions of democracy nor enjoyed its mechanisms, where the growth of cynicism, corruption and the lies of state power is considerable, a social explosion or forcible change of power becomes practically inevitable.

In most Central Asian states, authoritarianism provokes the creation of a personality cult. Its various forms are easily seen in all of the Central Asian states. For example, Tajikistan decided to coincide its Day of Language with the birthday of the head of state, Emomali Rakhmon. The Day of Turkmenistan’s Flag was ordered to be celebrated simultaneously with the birthday of Saparmurat Turkmenbashi “the Great.” The birthday of the Kazakh president, Nursultan Nazarbayev, was called “The Day of Kazakhstan’s Capital City.” It is clear that such “love” for and “loyalty” to the leader gives rise to serious doubts about their sincerity. More often than not, after such a political “leader” leaves office, the feelings of the people immediately change to precisely the opposite – hatred and anger or, at best, indifference.

Thus, we can observe a certain succession in the development of power structures in Kyrgyzstan, and in Central Asia as a whole: first, a significant role of personality in the organization of the power system, then its personification and, ultimately, authoritarianism and the promotion of a personality cult. An appropriate example is Askar Akayev. He was elected as president at the most difficult historical time. As a highly intelligent and credible person with a well-deserved reputation as an intellectual, he was seen as the perfect political leader. However, corruption and mismanagement led to his overthrow in 2005.

Notwithstanding, it is perhaps encouraging that in modern Kyrgyzstan the function of the leader is changing to play more the role of inter-party moderator. Not every leader has enough self-control, wisdom and flexibility to check and organize his ambitious colleagues. This role includes the functions of a manager and conflict mediator. In transition periods, it is this type of leader that is most effective in managing the most “ambitious” people in the country. In any case, the parties of the “leadership type,” as Elmira Nogoibaeva rightly notes, “have no future.”¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ *Akipress*, September 29, 2010.

The System of Power and Its Organizational Principles in Kyrgyz Society

All leaders in Kyrgyzstan have always had the same goal – to gain power. In the opinion of Askar Kakeev, a similar motivation can be found in the Kyrgyz national game of “Ordo.” The rules of this game are as follows: a circle is drawn on the ground, and each of the players, one after the other, must get an *alchik* (a certain part of a livestock bone) into the center of this circle. The person whose *alchik* is closest to the center becomes the “boss” – the Khan – and acquires all the bones within the circle. The aim of the game’s participants is then to knock the bone of the Khan from the center of the circle with the remaining *alchiks* and so become the new Khan.

Each significant politician in Kyrgyzstan strives for power in the country. Former President Askar Akaev quite plainly answered a question from a Russian correspondent on the reason for the Osh tragedy: “... the reason is always the same – struggle for power, the desire to retain or regain the reins of power at any cost.”¹¹⁰ The opinion of Tolekan Ismailova, an NGO representative, is equally categorical: “Kyrgyz revolutionaries – those, who called themselves revolutionaries, did not contemplate any social changes. They came to take power.”¹¹¹

Power and the Aims of Power

Why are Kyrgyz politicians so eager for power? In any democratic country, such a question might seem surprising. As Aleksander Kojoev rightly states, power is inherently a human phenomenon, which means socially and

¹¹⁰ Askar Akayev, “V Kyrgyzstane mnogie esche tol’ko zhdu svoego chasa,” RBK (September, 2010), available at http://www.presskg.com/rec_art/akaev/002_ru.htm.

¹¹¹ Tolekan Ismailova, “Mezhdunarodnaya komissiya po rassledovaniyu iyun’skikh sobytij dolzhna poluchit mandat esche do vyborov,” *Ferghana.ru*, September 17, 2010, available at <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6730>.

historically speaking. Power presupposes the existence of a society or state in the broadest sense of the word.¹¹²

There are many definitions of the concept of power. According to the modern classicist of sociology, Anthony Giddens, power should be a primary concept in sociological analysis.¹¹³ Talcott Parsons has rather accurately articulated the goal of power in a democratic society as an opportunity to achieve social and public objectives.¹¹⁴ State power is used by the ruling party to implement its political program, which more or less reflects the interests of all strata of society. For example, a well-known political writer and theorist of liberalism, Scott Horton, when speaking about his understanding of power, admitted that he did not agree with the idea of complete renunciation of any form of government; nor did he agree that government regulation is inherently bad. He states that “I personally believe that government regulation of the economy is essential for protecting people against corporate power; and that the main purpose of the government is to protect the poor, the weak, the jobless and the sick from poverty.”¹¹⁵

Of course, in the struggle for power, there are personal motives as well, reflecting idiosyncrasies of the leader and his individual psychological constitution. This stands to reason. In a traditional society like Kyrgyzstan, it is more appropriate to use the definition of power formulated by Max Weber as “a probability that one actor within the social relations will be able to exercise his own will despite the resistance [of others].”¹¹⁶ Weber, and later Pierre Bourdieu, when speaking of power as a “symbolic supremacy,”¹¹⁷ showed that a person in power can change the behavior of other people, forcing them to do and act as he wishes, even when they do not want to do so. In general,

¹¹² Alexander Kozhev, *Ponyatie vlasti*, Moscow: Praksis, 2007, 77.

¹¹³ Anthony Giddens, *A Contemporary Critique of Historical Materialism*, Volume 2. The Nation State and Violence, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

¹¹⁴ Talcott Parsons, *Politics and Social Structure*, New York: Macmillan-The Free Press, 1969.

¹¹⁵ Scott Horton, “Private ownership arises on the basis of a certain civilization,” *Blog vineyardsaker*, October, 2007, available at <http://vineyardsaker.blogspot.com/2007/10/saker-interviews--scott-horton.html>.

¹¹⁶ Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, New York: Bedminster Press, 1968.

¹¹⁷ Pierre Bourdieu, “Rethinking the State: On the Genesis and Structure of the Bureaucratic Field,” *Sociological Theory*. Volume 12. No.1 (1994): 1 - 19.

an individual with power has an ability to change the behavior of other people and to regulate their actions in order to achieve the desired goal.

It is readily visible that power in Kyrgyzstan is first and foremost a means of implementing the leader's own interests, primarily to enrich himself and his "family," because it is extremely difficult or even impossible to do so in any other way.

Very often, public policy in Kyrgyzstan is implemented and developed in a way that presupposes an understanding of state power as a means of enrichment. Such an attitude leads to the desire of acquiring power in order to fill the pockets with as much unearned money as quickly as possible. This applies to all kinds of chiefs, from the local level to representatives of the highest echelons of state power, up to and including the head of the state. As long as this tendency remains, it makes no sense of talking and speculating about any growth in the prosperity of ordinary citizens.

By the present time, any differentiation of the concepts of service and business in the Kyrgyz community have become complete nonsense. In fact, the notions of a "successful businessman" and a "government official" have long become equivalent. Just like in the national game of "Ordo," where each participant seeks to get hold of the center of the circle, Kyrgyz politicians who have gained power from the very beginning try to satisfy their economic appetite by becoming masters of the circle, so to speak, and appropriate all important profitable economic assets – banks, enterprises, services, and so on. A Kyrgyz economist, Professor Jumakadyr Akineev, observes that

We had our Soviet heritage in the form of 18 large enterprises. We, the economists, suggested that they should be sold to Russia for US\$3.5 billion in installments. No one agreed."¹¹⁸ The enterprises were nationalized, the supply of components stopped, and specialists started leaving the country. All the plants were slowly broken down into pieces, everything that could be sold was sold, and machines were sold as scrap by the Chinese and Iranians. So we lost our industry. "Our pride, the Kumtor gold deposit, remained. It will go down in history as the scam of the century! In 1992, Kumtor was given to a Canadian company without a tender for US\$ 20. A contract was signed, under which

¹¹⁸ Daria Aslamova, "Kyrgyzy ustavshie ot svoei anarhii: Zhdem kogda russkie vernutsya i navedut u nas poryadok," *Komsomol'skay Pravda*, November 17, 2010, available at www.kp.ru/daily/24571/743263/.

the Canadians were to pay 66% of the profit, not of the gold produced. Of course, every year it turned out that the “poor” Canadians were supposedly working almost at a loss. By now, the topic of Kumtor has been closed. According to official statistics, 240 tons of gold were produced during the whole time (verification of the figures is impossible). With an average gold price of US\$ 20 per gram (US\$ 43 at the present time), US\$ 4.8 billion worth of gold was produced! Kyrgyzstan has received 250 million of this huge amount at the most.¹¹⁹

Equally simple arithmetic applies to the Ganci Air Base (transformed in 2009 into a Transit Carriage Center (TCC) located near Manas Airport in Bishkek). U.S. Congress as well as U.S. media, among them the *Washington Post*, have already investigated the activities of the companies supplying fuel to the base at Manas. However, even before it was publically revealed that these supplies were not made directly, but through an intermediary – a sure way to make money out of thin air – two companies, Mina Petroleum Corp. and Red Star Enterprises, acted as mediators. It is noteworthy that no data exists to confirm the production of fuel by these companies. In the course of correspondence, the companies have used P.O. boxes and not regular mailing addresses. The companies have no infrastructure in order to be involved in fuel supply performed in such significant volumes. It is obvious that the companies act through other bodies and themselves function only as mediators. One cannot but think that such activities could only be afforded by a company that enjoys a special relationship with the senior political leadership of Kyrgyzstan. According to the *Washington Post*, in October 2010 the management of Mina Petroleum held a meeting in Istanbul with the son of Roza Otunbaeva, Atai Sadybakasov. After the meeting, company executives acknowledged that the meeting was “absolutely useless.” Perhaps that was the case, but the U.S. Defense Department on November 2, 2010, reported that Mina Petroleum again won a tender for the supply of fuel to the TCC and received a one-year contract at a fixed price of US\$ 315 million. In the statement of the Congress Committee, it was diplomatically mentioned that the Commission “has not found any satisfactory evidence of corruption or fraud on the part of the CIA,”

¹¹⁹ *Komsomol`skay Pravda*, November 17, 2010.

but “a grave fault was revealed on the part of the Pentagon in making the contracts.”¹²⁰

This explains why during election periods Kyrgyz society is mostly concerned with the question whether the new leaders of the country entrusted with power will start “integrating” their numerous relatives into the government agencies, and whether they are going to begin the process of property redistribution all over again. A more appropriate situation would be for public interest to focus on the personalities of the future leaders, their qualities and whether such qualities will be shown in their deeds. Many Kyrgyz politicians regret that the first twenty years of independent Kyrgyzstan are associated with the “monopolization of power leading to the immediate monopolization of the economy, where gainful industries are grabbed by people close to the president.”¹²¹ Indeed, whatever politicians say, transfers of power in Kyrgyzstan do not directly correspond to political freedoms. The fight between various clans, factions and the like for ownership and control over financial flows is at the forefront.

In the struggle for ownership, common sense often gives way to the desire to generate profit at others' expense. A well-organized enterprise can be deprived of a good manager and intentionally brought to bankruptcy; it can be divided into different parts, which markedly decreases the product quality, and eventually causes production to cease.¹²²

¹²⁰ Andrew Higgins, “Kyrgyz contracts fly under the radar,” *Washington Post*, November 1, 2010, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/10/30/AR2010103002765.html?hpid=topnews&sid=ST2010110307704>

¹²¹ Aidar Kubatbekov, “Soblazn dlya kyrgyzskoi vlasty. Kto teper` poluchaet pribyl` ot postavok aviatopliva v “Manas,” *Bely Parus*, November 17, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/11/17/35443#more-35443>.

¹²² In 1991, the share of industry in gross production was 46.2 percent; in 2005, it was about 16 percent. According to experts, of the remaining operating businesses only every third company is cost-efficient. The decline of industrial capacity has led to the collapse of entire industries, increased migration flows and a brain drain. As a result, Kyrgyzstan has lost a part of its population necessary for industry as well as lacks qualified graduates from technical and engineering schools. It is clear that the country is no longer capable of reviving its industrial potential on its own. There is no great external interest either.

The Ruling Family

Kyrgyz politicians who succeed in coming to power are primarily concerned with concentrating power in their hands in order to maximize their personal benefits and those of their families. Power as a social institution, on the other hand, is a secondary task. Consequently, politicians are not concerned with the efficient and effective use of power to serve the interests of society. According to Omurbek Tekebayev, everyone in Kyrgyzstan has become accustomed to a “despotic authoritarian system of government, under which the country, the people, can be handed down like a legacy; and elections are not a formal procedure, but a ceremony for the prolongation of ruling.”¹²³

The “privatization” process of the state machine first of all begins with “resolving” personnel issues. All more or less significant government structures are filled with people close to those in power. Ministries and agencies headed by them should serve as a reliable home front, so that rivals cannot exact revenge. The most important are the so-called power ministries – defense, public security, and internal affairs (including the police and militia). In a traditional society, these are the most effective and significant government agencies simply because the force of the state lies in the strength of its army and a repressive apparatus. As the Scottish-American scholar Gordon A. Craig accurately stated, the kind of autonomy enjoyed by the army and other power ministries – “a state within a state” – creates highly unfavorable conditions for the development of democracy.¹²⁴

The head of the party that come to power determines who in his entourage will head the basic state institutions. He does so without taking into account the professional qualities of candidates: the decision is solely based on their kindred relations and personal devotion to him. In this author’s analysis, this is the main reason why many experts believe that the parties of Kyrgyzstan are “[dictatorships] of modern feudal lords,”¹²⁵ who have surrounded themselves only with time-tested people including personal friends and

¹²³ *Ferghana.ru*, September, 21, 2010.

¹²⁴ Gordon A. Craig, *Politics and Culture In Modern Germany: Essays from the New York Review of Books*, New York: Society for the Promotion of Science & Scholarship, 2000.

¹²⁵ Sadyrbek Cherykov, “Vlast` novaya. Grabli starye... Pochemu Kyrgyzstan ne zhdet peremen, *Bely Parus*, November 1, 2011, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2011/01/11/37960#more-37960>.

relatives, but not genuine supporters and professionals from various strata of society. This can be explained by a mistrust in “strangers” and a fear of real factional political struggle for the good of all and not only for their inner circle. The “autocratic” mechanism for creating the administrative apparatus without real competition and without taking into account the professional qualities of employees allows the head of state to do as he pleases without having to bear any responsibility. Any senior manager appointed in this way is not afraid of being punished for illegal acts they commit. Such persons can with confidence be assured that their actions will not be subject to public scrutiny. The only one they have to answer to is the Boss, like in the case of the assistant of the interior minister cited above.

The politician Temir Sariev has correctly observed that “nowadays, a perverted postulate is at the forefront of politics in Kyrgyzstan: if you have power, you should not serve your Motherland or your people; you are obliged to serve the Khan or Shah, who has deigned to appoint you to the post and who is absolutely sincere in believing that you are his subject.”¹²⁶ In this situation, not only policymakers but ordinary people are unequal citizens of the state, servants depending on their leader. It is no wonder that the manifestation of obedience-based psychology as a long-standing tradition is so strong in society. The whole of pre-Soviet history, imperial Russia, that of the Communist Party and its administrative system inculcated respect for hierarchy and engaged in the deification of authority wielders, while the Tsar was regarded as being anointed by God. It is in the genes of people to fear the authorities. Moreover, the genes of submission and the perceived obligation to execute the orders of the master will continue to be transferred from one future generation to the next. In essence, this is the continuation of intellectual servitude to and fear of the “master.”¹²⁷

¹²⁶ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 105.

¹²⁷ A Kazakh journalist, Almas Kuserbaev, has expressed in an interesting and frank manner his opinion of how deep this perception is in the minds of people wielding any kind of power. In his report, he described a public event (at which he was present) which had brought together representatives of civil society in Kazakhstan and several newly appointed officials of the interim government of Kyrgyzstan, among them a minister and various deputy ministers. A colleague from Kazakhstan sitting next to the journalist was surprised to see that the minister was present at the conference throughout and then stayed for the banquet. “Is this a real minister?” asked the colleague from Almaty. “A

According to the former Kyrgyz Secretary of State Osmonakun Ibraimov, some of the contemporary political processes can be explained by obedience-based psychology: "...Only now I understand how we, the Kyrgyz, quite voluntarily appeared in the wide embrace of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. Yes, all this was taking place just like it is now: every feudal princeling was eager to be the first to kiss the people of the 'white Tsar,' being tormented with jealousy and competing in obedience. And we did 'voluntarily' become a part of Russia. There was no violent seizure of territory or coercion."¹²⁸ Meanwhile, a circle of "loyal" officials formed in this way close to the head, constituting a "forefront" separating the party leader and his entourage from the rest of society and from other parties and clans aspiring for power. The concentration of state power and the paternalization thereof is taking place. A "ruling family" is formed in the literal and figurative sense, which is an analogue to what is called the "political elite" in developed countries.

For example, both former presidents of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev, favored their sons and close relatives. Kurmanbek Bakiyev appointed his son Maxim and his brother Zhanysh to top government posts. Subsequently, they became the most influential political figures in the country, or, as evidenced by prominent Kyrgyz politician Azimbek Beknazarov: "Maxim and Zhanysh actually ruled the country. Indeed, they roughly divided the country into possessions, as Radio Liberty noted. Maxim controlled key business areas, including banking and finance. Zhanysh headed

minister cannot and should not behave like this." To the representative of Kazakhstan, the minister could only really be "considered" a minister if he attended the event with an air of importance, read out his pre-prepared paper for 10 minutes, and then defiantly and pompously left the room with his entourage. "The fact that the Minister had stayed in the hall till the end," writes Kuserbaev, "and then talked with ordinary people, cannot be appropriately accepted by our people, because they cannot perceive the things that are to be welcomed. I saw sincere disbelief caused by the fact that their (Kyrgyz) official might be accessible to people. In the opinion of my colleague, such behavior undermines the symbol of the state power representatives, because their strength lies in their inaccessibility to ordinary people. See Almas Kuserbaev, "Demokraticheskoe razvitie v Tsentralnoi Asii, Kyrgyzstan porazhaet mir svoimi paradoxami," *Belyi Parus*, October 5, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/10/05/33483#more-33483>.

¹²⁸ Osmonakun Ibraimov, "Klevetnikam Kyrgyzstana: ne begite vpered paravoza, eto opasno," *Belyi Parus*, October 6, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/10/06/33559#more-33559> mentalitet.

the National Security Service. Two other brothers of the president were comfortably settled in Kyrgyz embassies abroad.”¹²⁹

The period of Askar Akayev’s government clearly showed that members of his family – his wife, son-in-law and daughter – actively took part in making the most important decisions in the country. Some experts estimate that about twenty percent of the country’s GDP found its way into the private pockets of the president’s family and closest associates. While Kyrgyzstan is a negative example, other Central Asian countries exhibit similar forms of nepotism: the children and other family members of the presidents tend to be extremely wealthy, control key sectors of the economy, and some engage in extortion, demanding a share in any profitable enterprise.

In an effort to retain power, members of the ruling “family” play fast and loose and do not hesitate to use any means. They can change laws, including the constitution, and do so more than once. The legal framework, as Ednan Karabaev ironically remarked, was replaced with “year-long constitutions.”¹³⁰ Indeed, since the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan was adopted in May 1993, it has been significantly amended four times (in February 2003, November 2006, December 2006, and October 2007). In July 2010, a new basic law of the country was adopted. “What have we been doing from the day of our independence?” asked Temir Sariiev. He answered his own question: “We were continuously changing the rules of the game, the rules of government institutions, and we are still doing it now.”¹³¹

Specialists can easily find here a similarity to the situation that once took place in many Latin American countries. The history of Latin America is a nearly 200-year chronicle of endless military coups, revolutions and constitutional rewritings. Over this period, Brazil, Argentina, Paraguay, Venezuela and other countries have adopted more than 150 basic laws. Every dictator used to

¹²⁹ Radio Free Europe, “Pyat postsovetskix stran Centralnoi Asii kharakterizuytsya yarkim proyavleniem nepotisma” 24 kg, December 16, 2010, available at <http://www.24kg.org/news-stall/88971-radio-free-europenbspnyat-postsovetskix-stran.html>. The RFERL story referred to appears to be Cholpon Orozobekova, “The Deep Roots of Nepotism in Central Asia,” RFERL, December 15, 2010, available at http://www.rferl.org/content/deep_roots_of_nepotism_in_central_asia/2249061.html

¹³⁰ 24.kg, January 14, 2011.

¹³¹ Sariiev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*.

reshape the constitution for his benefit, but nothing changed for the better in the life of the people. Deception continued. It took a lot of time and the learning of harsh lessons before a restless continent came to its senses and settled down – to the extent it did – in the manner of a civilized society.

In the absence of stability in state institutions, the difference between Kyrgyzstan and liberal-democratic communities becomes apparent. Take, for example, the experience of the United States. In the history of this country, there have been certain occasions when a certain political group or a special interest required a change or adjustment of the constitution for its own benefit. But for more than two hundred years, the basic theses of the United States' democracy, that is freedom of speech, freedom of choice and the rule of law for every citizen, remained unchanged. The main factor is that political culture, the key concept at issue here, was gradually brought about in America. American political parties tend to follow the established rules, and such widespread respect for the law guarantees the independence of each branch of power.

In Kyrgyzstan, there are no basic principles of such kind that would be invariant to any social change. Unfortunately, the political system in Kyrgyzstan has quite different historical roots. In describing the local government system of the Kyrgyz that existed in 1916, Grigory Broido wrote that “[the] representatives of the winning party and parish administration permanently take measures to preserve their position; representatives of the opposing factions are fighting in different ways to obtain this power in the scheduled elections. The arena of struggle is county government – from county authorities to the very last *jigit*.¹³² The actions of all “big bosses are aimed at winning the benevolence of the ‘authorities’ and turning them to their party.”¹³³

Indeed, if the authorities did not like something, they amended laws, including the constitution, instead of improving themselves. Thus, it has become possible to hold the highest office for indefinite periods of time, as has been seen through the multiple extensions of presidential terms, referenda, or

¹³² *Jigit*, also spelled *dzhigit* or *djigit*, is a word of Turkish origin which is used across Eurasia to describe a skillful and brave equestrian, or a brave person in general.

¹³³ Broydo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, 87.

simple abolition of term limits across the region.¹³⁴ To illustrate this point further, it can be asked why it was necessary to declare the events of March 24-25, 2005 as a revolution and the day on which the first President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, was deposed, as a national holiday. The aim is the same: to consolidate power in order to make it more legitimate and credible; otherwise it can be interpreted as unconstitutional, i.e. an illegal coup d'état, and any other political group may thus refuse to recognize the new government – or repeat the process, which actually happened in April 2010. As Ednan Karabaev has observed, “we have long lived with double standards and talked about democratic values, at the same time strengthening radicalism. Then the riots of the hungry masses were interpreted as the growth of public consciousness and the outcome of a popular movement.”¹³⁵ Thus, having gone through a definite period of stability, Kyrgyzstan is again at the same critical point as in March 2005 and April 2010, when an open confrontation between the authorities and the opposition twice turned into violent seizures of power.

In the other Central Asian countries, the situation is different. This presents another paradox: why are the family- and clan-based power relations so durable in some cases and fragile and unreliable in others? In this author's analysis, the answer lies in the fact that some experts seem to have forgotten the dialectic lessons of Hegel and Marx. In particular, Marx's thoughts regarding the emerging bourgeoisie giving rise to its counterpart, the proletariat (i.e. a force capable of destroying the bourgeois system), is instructive. Whether or not Marx was right regarding the bourgeoisie, the contradiction is inherent in the system of family rule in autocratic states. When this system takes root, it requires that only people loyal to the ruler can occupy posts at a decision-making level. Pushing out competitors, the system at the same time promotes the emergence of new enemies. The stronger the power of the sons, brothers, sons-in-law and other relatives of the president,

¹³⁴ It is clearly seen in all Central Asian States. President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev and the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov have been in power since 1989. The President of Tajikistan Emomoli Rahmon has been in power since 1992; the first President of Kyrgyzstan Askar Akayev, who was forced to leave his post as a result of the coup, was in power between 1990 and 2005; the first President of Turkmenistan Saparmurat Niyazov (1985-2006) was declared President-for-life, which he held until his death.

¹³⁵ 24.kg, January 14, 2011.

the greater the number of influential people expelled from this favored inner circle, and the larger the ranks of the dissatisfied.

The two first presidents of Kyrgyzstan surrounded themselves with family members and relatives, and by doing so they lost the support of their political allies, forcing them to become even more dependent on the network of influential relatives. The concentration of power thus accelerated the split of the ruling elite, and led to such consequences as palace coups, support for criminals, and the consolidation of oppositional groups against the president's family.

Leaders of many countries are trying to persuade their citizens that they should "wait" for democratic freedoms in exchange for stability. But the global experience and the recent developments in the Middle East in particular indicate that the crisis of authoritarianism is inevitable. The only question is in what form and when it may occur.

The Traditional State

Another important question is why the state's fight with the clan system and nepotism in the political and economic domains is often unsuccessful and ineffective? While a full answer to this question may prove elusive, an important element lies in understanding the nature of the state. In the Western world, the state is the result of a social contract between self-sufficient individuals, who are independent of each other and where the well-known principle of "life, liberty and property"¹³⁶ dominates, under which private property is an untouchable building block. This paper has already discussed the evolution of the relationship between society and the state; to traditional consciousness, an almighty state has never been the result of any "social contract" between people; more often, it was a "creation of the divine absolute," which is controlled by his "vicar on earth." A person should be in constant subjection to the state, not vice versa. The state represented by the ruler personifying the state – a shah, sultan, khan, secretary-general or president – is seen as the holder of social, political and economic power simultaneously. It is not mere chance that the prevailing trend in the

¹³⁶ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. Peter Laslett, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

development of political thought of the East was based on the idea of the absolute, even despotic role of the state bringing society and its individual components under control; either through direct violence or violence in the form of law. It seems more appropriate to compare the state with a strict guard, “a man with a gun.”

Proceeding from Weber’s classification of the existing types of legitimation of state power, the following three ideal types are relevant: first, the legal or rational ideal type, based on belief in the legitimacy of the existing orders and the legal right of the rulers to make orders; second, the traditional ideal type, based on belief in the sanctity of traditions and the right to rule provided to those who have gained power in accordance with this tradition; and third, the charismatic ideal type, based on belief in the supernatural sanctity, heroism, genius, or some other merit of the ruler and his power not subject to any precise definition or comprehensible explanation. It is quite clear that the formation process of the legal-rational ideal type of power has just begun in Kyrgyzstan, and it is far from completion. Instead we can clearly see the signs of the second and third types of state power.

In Europe, private property came into being on the basis of a particular civilization, which subsequently reached the United States. There, it serves as a guarantor of civil rights and liberties. Within the framework of the command and administrative structure of the traditional state, private property is a secondary element subordinated to and strictly controlled by the government. In this “power-property” phenomenon, the higher the position an individual holds in the power hierarchy, the larger the property the individual may possess. In this situation, an important role is played by the principles and morals of the individual rather than by his or her legal consciousness.

If only formal law exists in the country, and such is indeed the case in Kyrgyzstan, and the office holder is a person who has gained such a position through nepotism, then it is quite reasonable to assume that a person who suddenly becomes a minister does not give much thought to satisfying social needs. Rather, that person is concerned, first and foremost, with only one thing: how to get the best slice once he gains access to the “national cake.”

According to publicist Vladimir Farafonov, for the current elite the state is a money bag filled by means of an external force. The task of the elite is to “distract the attention of the opponent, to disturb the opponent’s vigilance and to dive into the bag, because power is a means of enrichment and wealth is a way to power.”¹³⁷

Thus, there is no need to prove that effective policy and efficiency in the economy and social life of a society cannot be achieved without dismantling the authoritarian and family-clan form of government and replacing it with a democratic system, because only in such a system is a true market economy with free competition really possible.

The Political Elite

A political elite as a managerial class having well-developed social attributes and the ability to consider universal values as a matter of top priority, has yet to emerge in Kyrgyzstan. It is still at the stage of formation. There is agreement that the Kyrgyz political elite is completely devoid of national interests and is stuck in short-term calculations of personal gain. According to Temir Sariiev, the Kyrgyz have an authoritarian regime, in which the enrichment of one person and his immediate environment is the purport of life and the main purpose of state activity.¹³⁸ This remark was made during the presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiev; however, since creating a new elite takes years, it is equally valid today.

For the time being, one can say with certainty that the formation of a national elite is spontaneous. In the first years of independence, many professionals holding positions of trust in the government, at factories and law enforcement agencies left the country. At that time, hardly anybody thought about the depletion of key professional personnel, because previously the ethnic Kyrgyz did not account for a significant share of people in these positions. Then the pendulum swung the other way and no one wanted to stop it. On the contrary, very little attention was paid to such important issues as filling the vacancies remaining after the departure or dismissal of specialists from positions of trust with other specialists having an equivalent qualification or education. A new

¹³⁷ *CentrAsia*, January 29, 2010.

¹³⁸ Sariiev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 105.

class of manager was created occupied by untrained people who, by and large, did not think about the state interest.

For these reasons, a major problem presently is the lack of human potential, of people having knowledge of and experience in guiding the state. “Could workers and peasants lead the State?” asked Mao Zedong. “Won’t they remain but workers and peasants until they have gray hair?”¹³⁹ The statement is simple, but true. With each new “revolution,” the situation in the country is getting worse; the country does not have the required number of competent professionals to restock each “revolutionary team” with personnel, while those that remain are separated on the basis of clans.¹⁴⁰

Democracy is not established by a group of revolutionaries, nor is it implanted from the outside. Democratic ideals cannot be developed over a 20-year period. Democracy is a long process of development of a certain political culture among all strata of society, and simulating Western political institutions does not guarantee success. In many respects, therefore, financial and other injections in Kyrgyzstan do not produce the desired effect, as has been repeatedly shown since independence.

The situation is complicated for one more reason: the so-called elite is not a homogenous group. It is extremely fragmented, and, as a rule, political players fail to reach an agreement on all types of political issues due to their own ambitions, which they value higher than the public, national or state interest. Therefore, the assistance provided by foreign consultants and experts is often ineffective. These consultants and experts are often at a loss, not knowing whom to listen to and what problems to solve, since each more or less meaningful “chief” has his own view of the problem, which sometimes does not coincide with the views of other leaders. Again and again, professional advice and consultations go unheeded because they do not match the current interests of the ruling elite – which is afraid of losing the levers of power and, by and large, does not want a competitive group to come into being in the country. It is quite clear that such an elite cannot be forced to act against its

¹³⁹ Cited by Vladimir Farafonov “Kyrgyzstan: prizraki ushedshego goda,” *CentrAsia*, January 12, 2011, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1294844040>.

¹⁴⁰ *CentrAsia*, January 25, 2011.

interests, even by means of international institutions, including the IMF, OSCE, or SCO.

In the opinion of the analyst Daniyar Karimov, “the citizens of Kyrgyzstan are the first who should be concerned about the formation of the real elite. But are they concerned?”¹⁴¹ The question is understandable to some extent because, as has already been mentioned, the emergence of a qualified, effective administrative elite takes time. Of primary importance is its social base, the so-called “middle class.” In the scientific literature, a civil society is very often identified with a community of small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs constituting the basis of the “middle class.” For example, Kyrgyz scholar Erkaim Mambetalieva has devoted an entire section of her thesis to the problem connected with the formation of a middle class in the Kyrgyz Republic. In her opinion, the middle class, apart from being the main productive force in society, is also a stronghold of democracy, a force preventing the repetition of totalitarianism. Critical in this context is the existence of private property rights, which the middle class will fight to preserve by all means.¹⁴² This is true, but the problem in Kyrgyzstan is that the majority of “property” is concentrated in the hands of large owners with very close access to government officials and politicians. Does it mean that these groups represent the “middle” class? Obviously not, since approximately 10-15 percent of the population in Kyrgyzstan can be classified as middle class.¹⁴³

One of the founders of the concept of “middle class,” Emile Durkheim believed that social solidarity, as a factor of civil society’s stability, is ensured by the differentiation of labor and the functional interdependence of individuals (organic solidarity) associated with such a differentiation. Thus, it is labor activity that is key to the formation of a civil society, while exploitation, social parasitism and the illegal appropriation of the results of others’ labor are the main obstacles to its development. In Kyrgyzstan, the

¹⁴¹ *Procella*, November 25, 2010.

¹⁴² Mambetalieva, “Vzaimootnosheniya grazhdanskogo obschestva i gosudarstva,” *Avtoreferat na soiskanie uchenoy stepeni kandidata politicheskikh nauk*, 44.

¹⁴³ According to Eugene Durkheim, in a developed civil society the middle class contributes up to 60 percent of the population.

disintegration of social bonds, including those related to the sphere of civil relations, is manifested above all in the diminishing value of labor.

Crime and Power

As a natural result, the above-mentioned features of the state structure, forms of power and “multi-party” system raise the following question: can representatives of other clans and kinship groups, or just independent politicians and businessmen, carry out their political and economic activities in such a state? Regarding political activities, the answer is immediate and unequivocal: No. Of course, authorities will publicly declare their commitment to “democratic foundations” and their desire to “protect and promote liberal values.” In real life, political opposition and the various economic and media structures that present a potential threat to the authorities are destined to come under severe pressure from the state machinery and are neutralized one way or the other – whether through bribery, blackmail, or threats.

Individuals can satisfy their economic interests by proving in various ways their commitment and willingness to “serve” the authorities, and to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with them – a process known as finding a “roof” or *krysha*. As a result, private business is a major source of the enrichment of public officials, and corruption has taken root at all levels of state power. Public positions, awards and titles, the ability to do business in the market – everything has a price and is actively sold. It should be no surprise that Transparency International regularly ranks Kyrgyzstan among the fifteen most corrupt countries in the world.

A former head of the country’s State Traffic Patrol Department, when asked by a journalist how corruption could be eradicated in his department, did not find any better answer than the following quip: “we have to take all inspectors to the square and shoot them.” Or take, for example, the appointment of a former aviation security officer as the head of Manas International Airport. Veterans of the airport confirm the existence of an official video recording of administrative offenses (in the customs area) committed by the person in question, which led to this person being fired. Yet this was not an obstacle for later appointing the former security guard, a person with no special education,

as head of the country's main airport. This seems to have been done mainly, if not solely, because he was a fellow countryman and friend of the leader of Ata-Meken Party, Omurbek Tekebayev.¹⁴⁴

Describing some of the back-door methods used in the election campaign to the Jogorku Kenesh in October 2010, journalists have mentioned techniques such as: “promises to solve various issues, including provision of ‘snug jobs’ in the executive power bodies ... and ‘auctions’ for the right to be in the first ten members of the party list, which provides a kind of a guarantee for obtaining a parliamentary seat, coveted parliamentary privileges and the opportunity to lobby for the interests of his clan. The price tag is US\$ 100-300,000.”¹⁴⁵

Obviously, this kind of “business” based on corruption and bribery cannot rely on legitimate power structures. However, the country must have at least a semblance of legality. This illusion can be created if the legal system of the state is headed by people loyal to the ruler, as discussed above. Whatever the authorities do, they will find a way to confirm the “legitimacy” of this activity. It is clear that under such a system, no one is going to expose dishonest leaders and their illegal activities, at least as long as these people are in power. This creates favorable conditions for merging the state machine and the judiciary with criminal circles. The latter undertake “mentoring” of the above mentioned “business along with illegal but highly profitable spheres of activity: drug trafficking, illicit arms trafficking, racketeering, and so on. Consequently, official power is united with criminal “authorities,” leading to the formation of a criminalized state.

Numerous experts testify to the growing strength of organized crime in Kyrgyzstan, particularly large-scale drug trafficking, and particularly its penetration into the power structures.¹⁴⁶ From the very beginning of the coup that overthrew President Askar Akaev, after which Kurmanbek Bakiev came to power, the Kyrgyz mass media openly spoke about the role of influential local crime bosses and drug lords. Five years later, the same exact accusations

¹⁴⁴ Nurbek Torogulov, “Predannaya revolyutsiya: mozhno li doveryat’ starym oppozitsionnym partiya Kyrgyzstana?” *Belyi Parus*, October 5, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/10/05/33468#more-33468>.

¹⁴⁵ Egor Lazutin, “K vyboram v Kyrgyzstant: golosui, ne golosui - vse ravno proigraesh,” September 5, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/09/26/33032#more-33032>.

¹⁴⁶ *Ferghana.Ru*, September 30, 2010.

were directed against those who participated in the overthrow of the Bakiev regime.

After the 2010 coup, President Roza Otunbaeva regularly addressed the heads of law enforcement structures and discussed the growing role of crime in public life. She sought to direct the attention of the agencies to the scope of activities carried out in the country by criminal groups, which try to establish control over lucrative sectors of the economy and financial flows and to promote their own people into positions of power. Of course, criminals do not flaunt their deeds and have no desire to disclose their channels to senior officials, but information of the “dividends” they receive for the services is occasionally confirmed. In particular, the situation in the south of the country has gained notoriety: there, criminal groups are even reported to influence local personnel appointments. While such reports may not always be correct, the critical crime situation in the country makes such allegations credible to the population. Criminals have become a serious force capable of dictating “the rules of the game” to local authorities. President Otunbaeva publicly stated that “if this state of affairs remains, tomorrow criminals will appoint provincial governors and heads of other levels. Today, representatives of criminal circles ... have gained such strength, enough to destabilize the situation and provoke ethnic clashes. Therefore, the fight against crime is a duty of not only law enforcement bodies, but of all public authorities and the whole society. The question is posed unambiguously: either we neutralize them today or they will dictate how we should live tomorrow.”¹⁴⁷

Two Systems of Government

In fact, two parallel systems of government have formed in the state. One of them is legal, but does not completely control the situation; the other is illegal, but has real power, especially in the regions. The structure of such bifurcation of social institutions in society was described by Robert K. Merton in the classical manner. In his functional analysis theory, he explained that a society can have explicit or visible, and hidden or latent functions; some of the latter can be investigated, while others cannot, yet they still occur in an indirect

¹⁴⁷ Asel Otorbaeva, “Chto i kogo ona imela v vidu?” *24kg.*, February 8, 2011, available at <http://www.24kg.org/glance/92585-chto-i-kogo-ona-imela-v-vidu.html>.

way.¹⁴⁸ In Kyrgyzstan, we are dealing with this kind of manifestation of covert and explicit social functions.

The explicit, or, in this case, legal, function of the system of government is related to the administrative bodies adopted worldwide – a president, a government, ministries, departments, and so on. But in reality, authority is carried out under the influence of hidden, shady structures, where the hierarchy is not determined by a person's nominal position, but rather by their proximity to the “first” person, while this proximity is based on the grounds of clan belonging, financial positions, or other factors. In the second, hidden or latent structure, criminal and semi-criminal elements are usually present. It is obvious that the structure is dysfunctional in essence, but it is in this structure that decisions are taken and then made public by legitimate ministers and other officials. Thus, one can hold the post of prime minister, and have only a decorative function rather than making any actual decisions. Some journalists describe this as follows: “Roza Otunbaeva is a *matryoshka*, who is showing herself off to international organizations, but cannot solve anything on her own. Amangeldy Muraliev (Prime Minister of the interim government) is a “figurine,” to whom no one pays attention.”¹⁴⁹

With such a system, virtually everything in the regions depends on the extent of the authority enjoyed by the local “feudal prince.” A striking example is the mayor of Osh, Melis Myrzakmatov. He became known across Kyrgyzstan for his nationalist statements and for publicly rejecting the interim government's authority on several occasions. A well-known statement of his is that he “... would not allow any candidates and their party activists to stir up the local population; they will be ousted from the city.” President Otunbayeva had to admit that she had neither the capacity nor the power to curb the mayor's arbitrary powers.

The social structure theory, advanced and elaborated by Merton, refers to the foundation of a society's life-sustaining activity, which ensures functional stability of social life. Diverse combinations of social functions keep the

¹⁴⁸ Robert K. Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*, New York: Free Press, 1968, 1-30.

¹⁴⁹ Elena Avdeeva, “Nyneshnyaya vlast` Kyrgyzstana ne imeet prava trebovat` ot Rossii postavok vooruzheniya,” *Belyi Parus*, September 16, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/09/16/32378#more-32378>.

existing groups, organizations and institutions of society afloat. Merton created the concept of a “function,” which he defined as those observable consequences which serve as self-regulation of the system or its adaptation to the environment. However, the function forms a complex alliance with its opposite, dysfunction, which can in the same methodical way destroy social facts (in Durkheim’s sense). Accordingly, dysfunction is the consequence that weakens self-control of the social system or its adaptability to the environment.¹⁵⁰ At a certain point, the consequences of dysfunction, if not under control, lead to the destruction of the social system. This has twice taken place in Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁵⁰ Merton, *Social Theory and Social Structure*. pp. 60 – 69.

Problems in Education and Religion within a Nascent Civil Society

One of the important reasons for the current situation in Kyrgyzstan is the sharp drop in the general level of education and culture. “All the negative features we observe in society today are the results of the low level of education,” asserts Kuluypa Konduchalova. Due to the emigration of professionals to other countries, Kyrgyzstan has a shortage of skilled workers in power generation, mining, services, and other sectors. Many educational establishments have lost a significant part of their qualified teachers. The level of education has dropped, representing one of the most serious problems in Kyrgyzstan at the moment. The emerging generation of citizens is characterized by a tunnel vision, low educational base and, as a consequence, a fairly low level of culture.

Available data demonstrates the scale of degradation in the sphere of culture and education more clearly. Over the past two decades, the number of libraries in Kyrgyzstan has decreased from 1,727 in 1990 to 1,055 in 2009. Bishkek has suffered most of all – from 82 to 31 libraries. Viktor Kadyrov, Vice President of the Association of Book Publishers and Distributors, said that, at present, there are only four bookstores operating in Kyrgyzstan, and all of them are located in Bishkek. There are also only ten book publishers, but all of them are struggling to survive.¹⁵¹

The same fate has befallen community centers which used to be, especially in rural areas, champions of culture and art. Their number has dropped from 1,188 to 697. At the same time, many cultural institutions, especially in the provinces, exist only on paper; in reality, they present a pitiful spectacle. The state allocates almost nothing for their maintenance. As a result, club buildings have become dilapidated as young people are unwilling to work there for

¹⁵¹ Quoted from Bakyt Beshimov, “Kultura, deti vne shkoly, moral’,” *Blog beshimovbakyt*, July 25, 2012, available at <http://beshimovbakyt.blogspot.com/>.

meager wages. Those that do continue to function are run by die-hard enthusiasts.

Level of Education

There are manifold difficulties in the sphere of education. Kanat Sadykov, Minister of Education and Science, noted the urgent deficit regarding school textbooks. According to him, only 62 percent of the country's schools are currently supplied with textbooks. The country lacks five million textbooks in various subjects and about 1,700 teachers. All schools in Kyrgyzstan experience a shortage of qualified personnel; during the academic year, teachers of a certain subject can change four or five times. Unskilled personnel are frequently involved to shore up the shortages. There are cases, for instance, when a teacher of mathematics conducts classes in such subjects as physics or chemistry.¹⁵²

As a result, according to the rating of PISA (Program for International Student Assessment), in evaluating the educational achievements of students in 2010, Kyrgyzstan proved to be at the very bottom of the list; the study involved 65 countries in total. It should be noted that according to the study conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) every three years, in 2006 Kyrgyzstan also came in last position, ranking in 57th place out of 57 participating countries.¹⁵³

It certainly is not so much the quantitative terms but primarily the qualitative content of the educational process that counts. Prior to gaining independence, twelve higher educational establishments operated in Kyrgyzstan; five of them were for teacher training. Today, the country has 52 higher educational establishments with not a single one devoted to the purpose of teacher training. However, the sharp increase in the number of educational establishments was

¹⁵² See, for example, Zulumbek Isakov, "Obrazovatel'naya sistema v Kyrgyzstane ostavlyayet zhelat' luchshego," *CentrAsia*, October 16, 2011, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1318709940>; Kanat Sadykov, "V Kyrgyzstane vopros povysheniya kvalifikatsii uchit' elei shkol' ostaetsya otkryтым," *24kg.*, June 27, 2012, available at <http://24.kg:8080/community/132322-kanat-sadykov-v-kyrgyzstane-vopros-povysheniya.html>.

¹⁵³ "Ministr obrazvaniya rasskazal o prichinakh togo, pochemu Kyrgyzstan zanyal poslednee mesto v issledovaniyakh PISA," *Akipress*, December 12, 2010, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:300901/?from=rss>.

not justified either in terms of material resources or the availability of professional staff. On the contrary, the scientific and educational environment concentrated in the country's higher educational institutions ended up being spread thinly among the newly formed universities. The result is a sharp decline in the quality of specialist training, and young specialists are unable to replace the older generation, given their lack of professional skills. The international educational institutions are partial exceptions, notably the American University of Central Asia (AUCA), the Manas Kyrgyz-Turkish University and the Kyrgyz-Russian (Slavonic) University. However, even these are unable to change the overall situation. Firstly, they are not involved in the process of training teachers. Secondly, the majority of competitive students prefer to leave Kyrgyzstan and work abroad.

In addition, there is another problem facing the education sector. Previously, the educational process in Kyrgyzstan included two components: professional skills training and moral education, though the latter was conducted in an ideologically hypertrophic form. The content of the curricula and programs which were used to conduct training, and the structure of the schools themselves, were focused not only on acquiring knowledge on various subjects, but also on the development of certain ideological principles and values. A considerable share of educational work was devoted to this aspect in educational establishments at all levels.

While this system had both advantages and drawbacks, it was dismantled. The number of staff was cut, and the number of hours devoted to the study of civics and humanities were reduced. Disciplines such as ethics, aesthetics, cultural studies, the history of world religions and logic were scaled back in the institutions of higher education in Kyrgyzstan, or even removed altogether. It is not difficult to see that these are the subjects that bore the brunt in the formation of moral and aesthetic values in the minds of students, and in forming a cultural mindset in general.

In fairness, we must recognize that this decision had some underlying grounds. The Soviet system of public administration rejected the very possibility of the existence of non-official viewpoints. The beliefs, values, and interests of

students were to be formed within a single ideological doctrine.¹⁵⁴ However, the decision to largely remove the dimension of upbringing from the sphere of education was a serious mistake. According to publicist Rustam Bukeev, the lack of funding, an aging workforce, and rash reforms distorted the Soviet system of education, which although not perfect still managed to carry out its primary task. Circles, societies, hobby groups were closed under the guise of getting rid of the Soviet legacy. As a result, children have been spending more and more of their free time out in the street,¹⁵⁵ where they are dragged into crime, drug addiction, and alcoholism.¹⁵⁶ To this can be added that the prestige of teachers and their profession has been in continuous decline. This should come as no surprise, bearing in mind that as of April 2011, the average salary of an ordinary teacher was only 1,980 Som (US\$42.50), while the minimum monthly expenditure was 3,500 Som (US\$75). The new government declared its intention to double or triple the salaries of school teachers in 2011.

The young generation does very little reading. If they thumb through books, these are primitive detective stories, and if they open newspapers, they do so in order to find some ads and anecdotes. In the capital, books and newspapers are replaced by the Internet, but only by social networking sites and the like. As a result, we are witnessing the intellectual degradation of the youth – a loss of moral values and orientations. Some interesting data on this subject was presented in an article by Bakyt Beshimov, a well-known expert and former member of the Jogorku Kenesh. Referring to a study conducted by the journalists of the local “24.kg” news agency, the author quotes the answers of some respondents, which characterize, in his opinion, the moral culture of the majority of citizens in modern Kyrgyzstan. The question of the news agency was: “What position would you help your children to achieve if you had such an opportunity?” Begaly Nargozuev, ex-Jogorku Kenesh deputy of the Ak Jol

¹⁵⁴ This was applied to social and humanitarian (political) disciplines, and even to natural sciences. “Ideological” indoctrination was applied to philosophy, history, sociology, linguistics, genetics, cybernetics and other sciences. However, the peculiar language of science, understandable to professionals, has allowed them to preserve their “autonomy and inner-directedness.”

¹⁵⁵ In 1997, 12,000 children did not attend school. According to independent international organizations, in 2009 their number increased to 80,000.

¹⁵⁶ See, for example, *Blog beshimovbakyt*, July 25, 2012.

(Bright Path) faction, noted that “if he chose a cushy and profitable place, he would, probably, help his sons to get a job at the customs office. It is said to earn very good money.” Kalicha Umuralieva, head of “Our Right” Public Foundation, also gave a straightforward answer: “I would help my son to become a judge. Is it a bad thing to sit quietly, decide people’s destinies, be accountable to nobody and, at the same time, make a lot of money?” And Zamira Boskunchieva, an employee in a gaming club, responded that “if she could get a good job for her boys, she would send them to work in the traffic police or customs. It is no secret that their employees earn much money. As for the girls, I would like them to work in the tax office or bank.” The motivation was the same. Asel Aitieva, a casino employee, said: “I have no children so far, but if had some, I would like them to work in the President’s Office. It is cool, isn’t it? And, surely, one can earn good money there.” Finally, Zhanysh Begmatov, a security officer: “I would send my son to work in the financial police or judiciary establishment: it is white collar work and it pays well. As for the girls, I would help them to get managerial positions in the health care system. They are respectable and pay well.” These are different people of different statuses, but they all have one common goal for their children: money and a respectable position. Moreover, it is desirable that they obtain both as quickly as possible.¹⁵⁷

Indirectly, President Roza Otunbaeva also confirmed the current situation in the country when speaking at the Diplomatic Academy in France in March 2011: “We have to make Kyrgyzstan a country where honor, conscience, justice, and kindness form the core of the spiritual world of every person, community or nation. We must return decency and honesty to our society – those moral rules that we used to have. To accomplish this, we, first of all, need an honest government, an honest and decent power.”¹⁵⁸ It is not only the young people who have suffered degradation of consciousness. The middle generation has also become increasingly locked in their narrow world revolving around family, friends, and work (if any). Many of them “enter sects to try and escape the brutal and gray reality. More and more people are exposed to superstitious

¹⁵⁷ *Blog beshimovbakyt*, July 25, 2012.

¹⁵⁸ “Rosa Otunbayeva, vystupaya v dipakademii France, otmetila, chto mnogie eksperty pri otsenke situatsii v KR ispol`zuyut ustarevshie stereotipy,” *Akipress*, March 4, 2011, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:339741>.

beliefs; turn to quacks and fortune tellers. The pitiful position in which science has found itself contributes to this.”¹⁵⁹

Today, Kyrgyz society is again starting to realize that the education of young people is inseparable from a moral education and inculcation of values that should form the basis of their worldview and act as the main motive of their conduct. Baktybek Abdrisaev and Scott Horton write that “we are firmly convinced that following the traditions of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, [the] great Swiss educator, reforms in social development should be implemented in the context of educational process. It is not only political activities that should move the masses to achieve a type of society that proclaims democratic values and rule of law. Schools and universities in Kyrgyzstan must also create in the minds of their students understanding of their rights and feeling of civic responsibility to society.”¹⁶⁰

This raises the question of how the process of education can be used as a means of moral upbringing, given the fact that in the previous system this component was “removed” from the educational process, and in the new one, family and civil society, which is still weak, have not yet been able to fill this gap. The cultural level of society, achieved in the past, still allows us to preserve some positive elements in education. But it is difficult to say for how long this will remain the situation. Currently, we are witnessing a negative tendency where the part of the educational process focused on mental, spiritual and aesthetic education of students is narrowing.

It appears that whatever educational technologies one may have in mind, educational training in Kyrgyzstan should imply three important things. First, the revival and development of moral and spiritual education through the creation of appropriate norms, values and beliefs in the minds of students during their professional education. Second, there is the necessity of a true civic education. Without such an education it is difficult to imagine the development of a truly democratic society. Third, social adjustment focused

¹⁵⁹ Rustam Bukeev, “Index schastya – ot hleba do solntsa. Zdorov`e natsii spaset Kyrgyzstan,” *Belyi Parus*, January 6, 2011, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2011/01/06/37813#more-37813>.

¹⁶⁰ Scott Horton and Baktybek Abdrisaev, “Kyrgyzstan: reform starts with education,” *OpenDemocracy*, October 18, 2010, available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/scott-horton-baktybek-abdrisaev/kyrgyzstan-reform-starts-with-education>.

on overcoming psychological discomfort associated with social and physical differentiation of society. Of course, such a paradigm should not exclude the role of the family in socializing an individual; however, it is also not productive to give up the established positive traditions in educational technologies. In the long term, a mutually acceptable balance between all the parties that make up the educational process should be established.

Concern also arises from the fact that while earlier the rivalry between generations resembled a conflict between fathers and sons, now it looks more like a rivalry of civilizations, where the older generation actually make up a more progressive group compared to their descendants. Because of the poor educational base, the new generation cannot count on getting a decent job and their future prospects are uncertain. An increasing number of young people are plunging into radicalism, often seeking ego-trips in the environment of extremist or criminal groups. Many young people are also increasingly turning to religion.

Religion in what is the present-day territory of Kyrgyzstan has long been noted for its complexity and unusual diversity. Here, at one time, prevailed such religious beliefs as Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, and different sects of Christianity (Nestorians, Jacobites, and Melchites). Today, the predominant religious denomination in Kyrgyzstan is Islam. More than 80 percent of the population profess this religion. A moderate unorthodox brand of Islam, Sufism, became widespread in Kyrgyzstan, which went a long way toward adapting to the nomadic lifestyle and world perception of the local population. But it would be wrong to assume that this is a country with deep Islamic traditions that have always played an important role in the life of society.

In theory, the Kyrgyz people are Muslims; in practice, they are a secular nation free of religious prejudice, of mixed religious and pagan traditions in their lives. When, at the beginning of perestroika, foreigners started to arrive in Kyrgyzstan, the first thing they asked was whether Kyrgyz were Sunni or Shiite, recalls Professor Alexander Katsev. "I answered them: the Kyrgyz have spoken Islam. Nobody wants to read the Koran. Everyone thinks that they already know it."

If Central Asia was first influenced by Islam at the turn of the eighth and ninth centuries, it came to the territory of modern Kyrgyzstan much later – in

the twelfth century. According to the legend, the first preacher of the new religion was an Arab, Abdullah, who, with his brother, led the first Muslims to *namaz* (prayer) in the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley. The locals still revere the tomb of this Muslim saint.

Over the ensuing centuries, Islam has gained traits that are specific to Kyrgyzstan. The fact is that the introduction of Islamic values was most successful in the cities and towns of Central Asia: Samarkand, Tashkent, Bukhara, Khiva, Mergen, and Kashgar served as centers of religious life. Mosques opened there, and religious schools (*Madrassas*) were established. There lived and worked such outstanding thinkers of the Middle Ages as Abu Nasr al-Farabi, Yusuf Balasagun, Mahmud Kashgari, the inventor of algebra Al-Khwarizmi, the recognized patriarch of modern medicine Ibn Sina (Avicenna), the great astronomers and philosophers Biruni and Ulugbek, the teacher of poetry Alisher Navoi, and the reputable theologians Khoja Ahmed Yasawi and Imam Al-Bukhari – all of whom are figures who remain revered far beyond Central Asia.

Nomadic mountaineers, meanwhile, remained only superficially affected by Islam, combining its elements with their traditional beliefs. Islamization, so successful with the sedentary Tajiks and Uzbeks, had “softer” forms as far as the Kyrgyz people were concerned. Islam was most widely spread among the Kyrgyz elite, while those who had been nomadic for centuries remained committed to their traditional faiths, or professed religious syncretism. The Kyrgyz people still worshiped the cult of the Sky, Tengri, which is, in particular, recorded in the Orkhon-Yenisei inscriptions: “In the beginning, the sky was on top and dark earth at the bottom, and, then, the sons of men appeared between them.”¹⁶¹

By the end of the eighth century, Islam took the position of an official religion throughout Central Asia. But it would be wrong to assume that the assertion of Islam in Kyrgyzstan occurred through the ousting of other beliefs, extrusion of manners and customs. It was, rather, the superimposition of a new religion on the local environment, the sublimation of all that underlay the spiritual life of the nomadic and sedentary peoples with the resulting trends of

¹⁶¹ Rasul Zumaly, “Islam v Tsentralnoy Azii,” February 3, 2011, available at http://www.neonomad.kz/history/h_kaz/index.php?ELEMENT_ID=4883.

interpenetration, and a slow assimilation of the existing forms of world views. Many customs and traditional religious ideas of the ancient Kyrgyz took Islamized forms in the process of Islamization (worship of ancestral spirits, sacred places, etc.).

Religious tolerance for peaceful coexistence of different religions also distinguished the local population. For example, for more than ten centuries there was a strong influence of Christianity in the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan: in medieval times there were whole cities with a predominantly Christian population, including Tarsakent – literally “the city of Christians,” located near modern-day Bishkek. On the shore of Issyk-Kul lay a Nestorian monastery, where, according to legend, the relics of Matthew, Holy Apostle and Evangelist, were kept. Grigory Broido states that “frequent changes of religious influences (Paganism, Buddhism, Christianity) in the guise of various conquerors, [as well as] the pastoral life of the Kyrgyz people, are the reasons for the lack of any strong religious movements embracing the mass.”¹⁶²

As was noted by Vasily V. Bartold, even in the second half of the sixteenth century, the Kyrgyz were not recognized Muslims to the same degree as the Kazakhs. The main preachers of Islam were not Muslim theologians but wandering dervishes, under whose influence the Kyrgyz became not so much Muslims, in the sense of adopting tenets of Islam, but rather personal admirers of the sheikhs, whom they believed to be men of faith and miracle workers. For example, in his work on Central Asia in 1582, the Ottoman traveler Seyfi said that the Kazakhs were Muslims of the Hanafi school, while the Kyrgyz were “neither Kafirs, nor Muslims.”¹⁶³

By the beginning of the twentieth century the Kyrgyz were regarded as Muslims, but they were not deeply religious. Most of them had only rather a vague idea about the Quran and the essence of Islamic teachings; instead they remained committed to their traditional rituals, seldom following the rules of Islam in their everyday life. No special religious education was required to join the ranks of the local mullahs; the activities of the mullahs were concentrated

¹⁶² Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu*, 73.

¹⁶³ Vasily V. Bartold, *Kyrgyzyze. Istorichesky ocher*, 50-58.

in the sphere of practicing common rituals associated with weddings, funerals, remembrance of the dead, and so on.

The degree of development of Islam among the Kyrgyz in this period of time, as is evidenced by Grigory Broido, can be judged from the fact that there were no Kyrgyz mosques. The Kyrgyz do not have common prayers or acts of worship. "They have almost no clergy – either local or alien. If one can say about the Uzbeks that there are only few people who have not visited or do not consider it necessary to go to Mecca, one has to assert that one can hardly find three Kyrgyz who have visited Mecca."¹⁶⁴

After the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 and the formation of the Soviet Union, the Kyrgyz people, like other Central Asian nations, experienced a radical change in ideological orientation. It was a period of forced introduction of communist ideas in the minds of people who were actually in the process of the formation of feudalism. In the USSR, of course, there were formal guarantees of freedom, including freedom of conscience. But in fact, the government categorically rejected any kind of religion, whether Christianity, Islam, or another.

Islam, as a basic component of the spiritual life of traditional Central Asian societies, came under sustained attack from the authorities. This was reflected in the widespread closure of mosques, repression of religious ministers, and more generally, the persecution of anything connected with religion. Any manifestation of religiosity, including religious rites, was clamped down on, seen as rudiments of the "dark past."

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of newly independent states, the situation changed radically. Islam, to a varying degree, has become an increasingly important factor in the life of all the Central Asian states. All of them have, from the 1990s onward, experienced an Islamic revival, which has contributed to the politicization of Islam and the Islamicization of various spheres of life. The number of mosques and Islamic educational centers has increased tenfold or hundredfold; further, many other religious organizations, publishing houses, and other institutions have also

¹⁶⁴ See Brojdo, *Pokazanie prokuroru Tashkentskoi sudebnoi palaty, dannoe 3-go sentyabrya 1916. Vostanie Kyrgyzov i Kazakhov v 1916 godu.*

appeared. The number of people attending Friday prayers has increased so much that ministers were forced to greatly increase the number of mosques and build additional floors in existing ones to accommodate all worshipers.

Currently, there are more than two thousand mosques operating in the country, twice as many as in the 1990s. And this number continues to grow. In 2010, over a hundred new mosques were registered. In addition, there are nine Islamic institutions of higher education, about sixty *madrassas*, and about as many different Islamic centers, public foundations, and associations in the country. Strolling through the streets of small towns and villages in Kyrgyzstan, especially in the South, one can see young people who listen to the sermons instead of pop music and students rushing to the mosque even during class hours to listen to speeches and sermons of their favorite *Imam-Khatibs* (senior clerics).

The role of religion in the regulation of social relations has been growing with every passing year. After gaining independence, people have increasingly turned to Sharia, a set of Muslim religious, criminal and civil laws based on the Quran and Hadith of the Prophet Muhammad. The clergy proclaim that in Islam there are many laws that ease people's lives, and that Sharia law does not run counter to the secular law of the state and can be applied to many aspects of social life, usually governed by secular law.

One of the main reasons for the growth of the religiosity of the population, according to Kyrgyz political scientist Nurgul Esenomanova, can be traced to the fact that Islam as a holistic religious system lays claim on comprehensively regulating all aspects of the lives of Muslims. The historically developed perceptions, entrenched in the public mind, about the integrity of religion and politics in Islam, spiritual and secular Islam and Muslim lifestyle, in general, support this approach.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁵ Nurgul Esenomanova, *Islam v Centralnoy Asii: istoriya I sovremennost*, Bishkek: MUK, 2003.

Religion and Power

It is often the authorities themselves who are the reason why people stop trusting them, turning to religion. In many ways, corruption in the government, particularly in the courts, contributes to such a situation. Since judges often demand bribes to deliver the required sentence, people, especially in rural areas, prefer to turn to religious leaders to avoid the red tape created by bureaucrats. Sometimes it is cheaper to turn to a mullah to solve a problem.

The authorities of almost all Central Asian states have been trying to curb the growing expansion of religious movements and keep the spread of Islam among the population under strict control. For example, in Tajikistan, it is prohibited to settle various domestic disputes and address personal problems by means of Sharia law. The Tajik Government has banned polygamy, wearing a hijab in public offices and universities, as well as conducting prayers outside of mosques. In Turkmenistan, it is forbidden for women to study theology. The Turkmen State University is the only university in the country where young people who plan to become imams are permitted to take a course of study. The number of students studying theology (ten people for each year of study) as well as their selection is controlled by the government.

In Uzbekistan a complicated situation has developed in the relations between the state and believers. President Islam Karimov has publicly stated that Uzbekistan, which has a rich culture and religious history, “is able to play a positive role in supporting the values of an enlightened and tolerant Islam.”¹⁶⁶ However, thousands of believers accused of belonging to extremist religious organizations such as Hizb-ut-Tahrir or the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)¹⁶⁷ are kept in custody.

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan have also begun to employ a tough line toward certain believers. An example is the sentence passed by Bakytbek Sarybaev,

¹⁶⁶ See more information Dil'bar Babadzhanova, “Tolerantnost' neischerpaemyi istochnik duhovnogo vozrozhdeniya,” *Uzbekistan Today*, July 25, 2012, available at http://www.ut.uz/rus/obshestvo/tolerantnost_neischerpaemiy_istochnik_duxovnogo_vozrojdeniya.mgr.

¹⁶⁷ The IMU, founded in 1996, is the largest Islamist political organization in Central Asia. It has been declared a terrorist organization by the U.S. State Department.

judge of the Nookat District Court in the Osh region, with regard to thirty-two district residents accused of “Islamic extremism” and “organizing mass disorder” in the district center. Thirty-one defendants (including two women) were sentenced to terms of 15 to 20 years in jail, while a minor was sentenced to nine years.

What reasons underlie such a harsh approach to religion? It can be assumed that governments are concerned about the rise of religious fundamentalism and extremism and a corresponding decline in the level of education and culture. Thus, they support “enlightened” Islam. But in many Central Asian countries, parties, movements, and groupings have appeared that give Islamic principles political importance. These forces seek to restructure society in accordance with Islamic ideals. Indeed, radical interpretations of Islam are increasingly attractive to these groups.

Religion has become a factor in the majority of local conflicts of our time. Since the 1990s, this effect has been directly felt in Central Asia, mainly through the permanent conflict in Afghanistan and the hotbeds of extremism in the Ferghana Valley. Since ancient times, those in power and various forces in society have resorted to religious rhetoric to promote their narrow and often sinister interests. With the growth of religious consciousness, the government tends to lose its control over the masses. Power risks being gradually transferred to the clergy, not only in the spiritual but also in the political sphere. Without doubt, this situation is not satisfactory for those to whom this power now belongs.

Western European and American societies are dealing with the issue of relating to Islamic societies, as well as to the growing number of Muslims within their own societies. In February 2011, the European public was alarmed by the open letter of Ralph Giordano, the famous German journalist and writer, to Christian Wulff, the German president. In this letter, Giordano accused Wulff of being naïve by indulging in wishful thinking and equating Islam to some kind of idealized Islam compatible with European values. According to the journalist, no one has yet provided an answer regarding the compatibility of Islam and freedom of conscience, women’s equality, pluralism and the principle of separation of religion and state – all of which constitute the basis of democracy.

Giordano mentions a clash of two cultural paradigms that are at very different stages of development. According to him, that of Judeo-Christianity was a basis for the emergence of the Renaissance, Enlightenment, bourgeois revolutions and liberal values, providing a huge leap in the development of society. By contrast, after a short period of prosperity in the Middle Ages, Islam fell into a long period of stagnation and archaism. Giordano sees it as characterized by total subordination, gender inequality, a patriarchal character and unconditional adherence to religious authority.

Islam and the bearers of Islamic culture, according to Giordano, are devoid of any critical thinking, and, as a consequence, Islam is actually not capable of self-reflection and change; Muslims perceive any criticism solely as an insult. Therefore, argues Giordano, the Muslim countries continually confer responsibility for their failures to “Europe,” the “great Satan” (the United States) and the “little Satan” (Israel).¹⁶⁸ It should be recognized that such a view is shared by a large number of Europeans and North Americans.

In Kyrgyzstan, the issue of the impact and spread of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism is not as acute as in neighboring Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The religious views of the Kyrgyz, as has been noted, have a peculiar, multi-layered history. When describing the current status and degree to which Islam is rooted in the public consciousness of the Kyrgyz people, researchers call it public or domestic Islam. Mars Sariev observes that “unfortunately, we have not become devout Muslims, we did not have an orthodox religion, we are superficial Muslims ... an additional role is played by our atheist Soviet past ...”¹⁶⁹ In addition, this state or characteristic of Islam may be explained by its syncretism – in Kyrgyz Islam, there is a co-existence between the provisions of orthodox Sunni Islam and certain organically intertwined elements, including pre-Islamic forms of beliefs, such as totemism, animism, fetishism, worship of nature and the deceased ancestors, Tengrism, shamanism, and so on. Nonetheless, the pre-Islamic forms of beliefs have gradually been pushed into the periphery or in the background in favor of the continual influence and impact of orthodox Islam. It is a natural process of gradual absorption of the

¹⁶⁸ Ralph Giordano, “Nicht die Zuwanderung, der Islam ist das Problem!” *Die Welt*, October 12, 2010.

¹⁶⁹ *Lenta.ru*, June 5, 2011.

old by the new. Pre-Islamic forms of belief have become adapted and synthesized with the new religious system.

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, Kyrgyzstan tried to replace the bygone communist ideology with the ideas of pan-Turkic ideology. There was a powerful pan-Turkic ideological movement in the early twentieth century. At one time, the pan-Turkic sentiments were very strong, because this ideology made it possible to unite countries which were not only characterized by common confessional mentality, but also by a shared hatred for the colonialists and the desire to build a new life without their interference.

Now, there is almost no Pan-Turkic ideology in its pure form, but there is a specific practice of modern Turkic-speaking states, which aims to return to the national traditions and customs in order to revive the national Turkic spirit. But the preconditions for creating a Union of Turkic States have not formed, and it is unlikely to happen in the near future, as the idea does not address the issues of cultural and national identity of the peoples of Central Asia – that is of creating an original national ideology.

Thus, today, in a situation where society experiences a certain ideological vacuum, and the ideas of democratic development have not yet become a dominant ideology, many people in Kyrgyzstan visualize only two possibilities for the future of the country's development: the criminal and the Islamic – and it is quite clear that the majority, who are far from being devout followers of Islam, nevertheless choose this latter path.

In order to visualize the extent of Islamic expansion, suffice it to say that the number of mosques and other religious institutions in the Republic, according to experts, has equaled, and will soon exceed the number of secondary schools operating in Kyrgyzstan today. According to the estimates of the State Commission on Affairs of Religion, mosques are regularly attended by more than 250,000 people.

Thus, many citizens are now under constant threat of being exposed to extremist, radical ideas brought into the Kyrgyz Republic from abroad, mostly from Arab countries where Islamic radicals dominate. The political sphere is not exempt. Lively debates have been going on for a long time about the issue of opening a special prayer room in the Parliament building, and proposals

have been made to introduce an additional break in all state agencies for Friday prayers. Yet opponents of such measures argue that it would destroy the principle of a secular state enshrined in the country's constitution.

This author's concern is that, in many cases, a resort to religious topics has been the only way to keep a tight rein on a population led by inadequate leaders. On the other hand, the population has been increasingly involved in advocating activities carried out by foreign and local religious organizations. And, in this environment of increasing Islamization, the radical Islamist organization of Hizb-ut-Tahrir is able to steadily continue its active work in Kyrgyzstan.

Moreover, analysts agree that at the moment, Kyrgyzstan is the only country in Central Asia where Islamic radicals are able to implement their plans. The south of the country, which includes part of the Ferghana Valley, has in fact become a paradise for Islamic radicals, especially for adherents of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. In Kyrgyzstan, this organization is outlawed, but that does not prevent it from actively spreading its ideology. Moreover, the leaders of Hizb-ut-Tahrir have been trying to influence the government through contact with influential representatives of government agencies on mutually beneficial terms, beginning with the 2005 parliamentary elections.

Hizb-ut-Tahrir appears to have resources at its disposal to support its preferred candidates, and has been lobbying for their promotion to government agencies. Kyrgyz observers openly admit that among the candidates who participated in the last parliamentary elections, one of those individuals most susceptible to the influence of Hizb-ut-Tahrir was Byrlashgan Eldik Karakaty (United People's Movement), led by Almazbek Beknazarov. Another party, Egemen Kyrgyzstan (Independent Kyrgyzstan), does not conceal its links with Hizb-ut-Tahrir. One of its leaders is Beketur Asanov, the governor of the Jalal-Abad region. In its political program, it states that "the party sees the way out of the crisis in the rejection of the current political and socio-economic policy and replacing it with another one meeting the interests of the country."¹⁷⁰ It is not specified what policy they have in mind.

¹⁷⁰ See more information "Raiskiy ugolok dlya islamskikh radikalov. Vlasti Kyrgyzstana nedootsenivayut opasnosti "Hizbut-Tahrir", Belyi Parus, March 2, 2011, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2011/03/02/40398>.

Meanwhile, Kyrgyzstan has witnessed a steady increase in the number of both members and sympathizers of the ideology of Hizb-ut-Tahrir. The growth in the number of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members in the country is evidenced by data included in the 2009 U.S. State Department report on terrorism, which reads that during the period from 2006 through 2008 the number of supporters of the organization in Kyrgyzstan had tripled to reach fifteen thousand.

A report from the U.S. Naval Postgraduate School in California presents facts showing that Hizb-ut-Tahrir materials are disseminated in the Kyrgyz language in the northern part of the country. In this regard, the report's authors conclude that "the leadership of Hizb-ut-Tahrir has switched from secret tactics to open mass propaganda by word and deed."¹⁷¹

It must be said that the ideologists of Hizb-ut-Tahrir have very cleverly adapted their advocacy activity to the local realities. Currently, they widely apply the principles of missionary work and concentrate their efforts on addressing domestic and social problems; in particular, public utilities, raising funds to purchase food and clothing, and microfinances for interest-free loans. Herewith, their change of tactics suggests a more sophisticated approach to enable them to circumvent the ban on their activities in Kyrgyzstan. The propagandists of Hizb-ut-Tahrir argue that "we have corruption everywhere, court trials are not just, but if we had a caliphate these problems would be resolved by themselves." Of particular concern is the social composition of this radical organization, largely dominated by the youth. According to the Jamestown Foundation, the Kyrgyz youth see not only traditions in Islam but an ideology, a way of life. The Kyrgyz members of Hizb-ut-Tahrir are mostly young people between the ages of 25 and 35. At the same time, poverty and high unemployment encourage young Kyrgyz to join Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Most experts on Central Asia state that the present administration in Bishkek tends to underestimate the threat posed by Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Unfortunately, the socio-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan provides favorable ground in all respects for the spread of radical Islamist beliefs, and the government risks losing the

¹⁷¹ *Kyrgyzstan Country Profile*, US Naval Postgraduate School, Central Asia Executive Summary Series, 2009, available at http://www.nps.edu/programs/ccs/Docs/Central_Asia/Kyrgyzstan_July09.pdf. See Kanybek Jekshenov, "Hizbut-Tahrir okkupiruet Kyrgyzstan" Part 2, *Centrasia*, November 14, 2010, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1289682180>.

remnants of its credibility by increasing the authority of the religious organizations of radical clerics.

Parliamentary or Presidential Republic: Pros and Cons

The ideological uncertainty reflected on the one hand in the increase in Islamic and traditional values, and on the other in the liberal-democratic doctrine, not yet fully developed in the minds of the people, has spurred debates over the content of the national ideology. On-going attempts to create a national ideology have made the situation in Kyrgyzstan even more controversial and uncertain. As a result, when estimating the vector of its development, different experts hold diametrically opposed views – from optimistic to very pessimistic. The issues of state structure and power are at the heart of the debates.

Parliamentarianism and Presidential Republic: Looking to the Future

A vibrant discussion has unfolded in Kyrgyzstan and abroad between the opponents and supporters of a parliamentary republic. Most Eurasian politicians and experts argue that a parliamentary form of government will be unable to ensure political and economic stability in Kyrgyzstan, and are skeptical about the political innovations in the country. Accordingly, there are too many irrepressible and irreconcilable contradictions between the political opponents, which by now have become “parties.” The most well-known statement was that made by then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev during his meeting with foreign political scientists at the international political forum in Yaroslavl on September 10, 2010: “Of course you can imagine a different political system, for example, parliamentary democracy ... our friends in Kyrgyzstan have taken this path, but believe me, that for Russia as well as for Kyrgyzstan it is a disaster, I am afraid.”¹⁷²

The first President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, believes that the matter is not only in the form of governance, but also in terms of the constitution as a

¹⁷² “Medvedev: parlamentskaya demokratiya byla by dlya Rossii katastrofoi”, *Pravda.ru*, September 10, 2010, available at <http://www.pravda.ru/news/politics/10-09-2010/1048917-medvedev-o/>

fundamental public document. Akaev thinks that the new constitution of 2010 will not work in present-day Kyrgyzstan. “People, especially after the tragic events in Osh, need a strong hand. I do not mean a dictator, but they must have a strong power. Parliamentarianism is good for countries where the political elite are able to listen to each other and the public, [and where they are able to] reach a compromise. And I do not know such an elite in our country. Parliamentarianism does not meet the requirements of today. Maybe in 50-100 years, Kyrgyzstan will be developed enough to have it, but not yet.”¹⁷³

Kamchibek Tashiev, leader of the Ata-Jurt Party, stated before the parliamentary elections that politicians have included everything European and American in the constitution, which cannot find roots in Kyrgyzstan. He believes that “in any society, democratic or authoritarian, there should be a strong government that will establish order and rule of law, which we now lack in our country.”¹⁷⁴

Omurbek Suvanaliev, leader of the Commonwealth Party, specifies what particular orientation Kyrgyzstan should adhere to. “Our state structure and constitution should be based on the Russian model; we want to have a strong presidential power. We are not mature enough to have a parliamentary form of government. That form of government does not meet the requirements of our time,” according to the politician.¹⁷⁵ We should note that the pro-Russian orientation of this statement was rather an election campaign ploy than the sincere belief of the author as such. Ednan Karabaev also claims that “Kyrgyzstan is not ready for parliamentarianism. The most important thing in a parliamentary form [of government] is not the number of parties but the level of their culture.”¹⁷⁶

Perhaps the most explicit in this sense, is the statement of another Kyrgyz politician, Adakhan Madumarov, who is currently the leader of Butun Kyrgyzstan (United Kyrgyzstan) Party: “Our party stands for great nationhood. I do not care a rap about democratic values. ... our party calls for

¹⁷³ RBK (September, 2010).

¹⁷⁴ *Ferghana.ru*, September 16, 2010.

¹⁷⁵ “Omurbek Suvanaliev: Nuzhno vernut sil’ nuyu prezidentskuyu vlast i dvukhpalatnyi parlament,” *Ferghana.ru*, September 21, 2010, available at [http:// www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6733](http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=6733).

¹⁷⁶ *24.kg*, January 14, 2011.

living according to the canons of our ancestors. That is, first and foremost, you must be a man ... so that a man would treat you the way a person should treat another person. This is the highest degree of democracy and the highest moral value, and everything else is nonsense.”¹⁷⁷

What do the above mentioned politicians strive for? First and foremost, they want to have a strong centralized government in the country, they want the political system of Kyrgyzstan to return to the principle of undivided authority, that, generally speaking, is in the spirit of the political traditions that have existed in Kyrgyzstan up until now. Until now, the political organization and political relations in contemporary Kyrgyzstan have repeated the structure of ancient Roman legions, like the armies of Genghis Khan, which in the historical literature is defined as military democracy – a rigid, vertical power based on undivided authority and unquestionable obedience of junior to senior in rank, position, and so on.

This desire stands in opposition to the new constitution, which stipulates that neither the speaker nor the prime minister can concentrate all the power in their hands. According to the supporters of this position it is a minus of the Basic Law. They foresee an ongoing struggle of different political forces, both inside Parliament and outside it, and in this situation such a property as “political stability” will no longer characterize Kyrgyzstan. Ednan Karabaev, for example, states that his opinion has not changed: “during the parliamentary election, and afterwards I kept saying that our political arena is that of personal ‘frays’ for a place in the sun. It is not only that a parliamentary form of governance, as such, has not changed anything, but it provides even more opportunities for ‘military action’: a family clan is gone, party clans have come.”¹⁷⁸

In these circumstances, some experts suggest, the question will soon be raised about centralized power in the country and a return of the political system to the principle of undivided authority. Neither the speaker nor the prime minister (notwithstanding the provisions of the new constitution) will be able to concentrate all the power in their hands, even if they try, because Parliament will fight around them. Thus, the most problematic and tense reality will push

¹⁷⁷ *Ferghana.ru*, October 7, 2010.

¹⁷⁸ *24.kg*, January 14, 2011.

the country to strengthening the institution of the presidency as the only possible guarantor of the existence of the state as such.

It would be wrong to say that this position does not have its opponents, prominent among them being former President Otunbaeva. In her first speech addressed to Parliament under the new constitution, she voiced the main reasons for her position on this issue – that the parliamentary system of governance requires a new political culture. She believes that by having a parliamentary democracy, Kyrgyzstan will manage to join the ranks of the world's developed countries. "We must work hard to establish a new political culture in Kyrgyzstan in line with the new political strategy, supported by the people. A return to the past will inevitably lead to totalitarianism and restoration of clan power."¹⁷⁹

Omurbek Tekebayev, one of the authors of the new parliamentary constitution, also admitted that from the very beginning, we have been advocating a parliamentary form of governance with a proportional electoral system: "We have always believed that it is a proportional system that will enable us to avoid such things [that have been] traditionally negative for our country, [such] as regionalism, tribalism, and the like."¹⁸⁰ It is parliamentarianism, based on the multiparty system, which will accelerate the formation of a party system in the country, when people will vote not only for a specific person, but also for the ideas and program of a party. This, in turn, will provide competition of ideas and programs.

According to political analyst Elmira Nogoibaeva, "no matter how much criticism we are going to face, the parliamentary system is a step forward towards democratic governance."¹⁸¹ It is possible to put an end to the usurpation of power by one person, family, clan, or corporation that is considered by the advocates of this view, as the main argument in favor of the new constitution. Baktybek Abdrisaev, Scott Horton, and Alexey Semenov consider a parliamentary form of government as an opportunity to

¹⁷⁹ "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Rosy Otunbaevoy na pervom zasedanii Jogorku Kenesha 5 – go sozyva," Akipress, November 10, 2010, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:289521/?from=rss>.

¹⁸⁰ *Ferghana.ru*, September, 21, 2010.

¹⁸¹ *Akipress*, September 29, 2010.

demonstrate to all Central Asian nations that there is a third way, which is not corrupt and authoritarian like the way of their immediate post-Soviet neighbors, and not a brutal theocracy, as preached by the Taliban and the followers of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan, experts say, will implement a model of a modern democracy which gives people an opportunity to change their government, as they see fit, and which offers economic, political and religious freedom. In this regard, the United States plays the role of beacon for the Kyrgyz people.¹⁸²

The discussion of whether or not it is possible to have a parliamentary form of government in Kyrgyzstan continues to rage. However, this debate, especially in the mass media, is often perfunctory – the warring parties do not touch upon the substance of the issue. The issue is not, in fact, whether this or that system is possible or not. The parliament itself will not automatically establish an expected order in the country. Parliament, as a social invention, is just a tool that is either capable or incapable of establishing a certain social order and regulating the ongoing processes in society through legislation. In other words, the parliament is a specific form of social culture which is a framework for the formation of generally valid elements of collective life.

Kyrgyz expert Iskandar Januzak appears to be right when he says that the choice of a parliamentary form of governance by the people of Kyrgyzstan, in this case, shows only that Kyrgyz society intuitively understands the negative potential of authoritarian models of administration. The inability of an authoritarian administration to have a dialogue with civil society and its complete lack of transparency and accountability to society are the fatal flaws of a “strong authority.” According to Januzak, “all this has been the case in our recent political history and does not need any proof. And the political reality of our neighbors is shouting it out at every turn. The possibility of a

¹⁸² See Baktybek Abdrisaev, Scott Horton and Alexey Semionov, “Kyrgyzstan’s referendum brings a flicker of hope,” *open Democracy*, July 14, 2010, available at <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/kyrgyzstan%E2%80%99s-referendum-brings-flicker-of-hope>.

parliamentary form of governance in Kyrgyzstan cannot be determined a priori, it may only be discovered in a living process.”¹⁸³

One can hardly argue with this valid statement. However, the problem (this is another paradox of modern Kyrgyzstan), is that, today, nearly all political forces in the country, for various reasons, are interested in changing the existing status quo. The problematic and tense reality along with the prevailing historical traditions characterized by a great deal of inertia, are pushing society towards strengthening the institution of the presidency as the only possible guarantor of the existence of the state.

In this regard, the statement made by Roza Otunbayeva herself was no surprise. She said that she was ready to dissolve Parliament if the situation required such a step on her part. She made this statement during the oath taking ceremony of the prime minister and government members in Parliament in January 2011: “If the members of parliament fail to fulfill their direct responsibilities of adopting laws, and will engage in political games, the people will demand the parliament be dissolved, and I, as a guarantor of the constitution and as the President of the country, will have to take drastic measures.”¹⁸⁴

It is difficult to say what further developments can be expected in Kyrgyzstan, where the configuration of the current administration is not yet fully determined. But, judging by the facts mentioned above, the nature of the relations between the political forces and structure of administration still remain without any major changes. Notwithstanding the provisions of the new constitution, which reads that Parliament must be the center of the political system, in fact, this place is still held by the president and his entourage.

¹⁸³ Iskender Januzak, “Plyaska asurov. Koe chto o parlamentskoy forme gosudarstvennogo upravleniya,” *Belyi Parus*, October 7, 2010, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2010/10/07/33598#more-33598>.

¹⁸⁴ “Text vystupleniya prezidenta Rosy Otunbaevoy na zasedanii Jogorku Kenesha po sluchayu prinyatiya prislyagi chlenami pravitel`stva,” *Kabar*, January 27, 2011, available at <http://www.kabar.kg/politics/full/99>.

Development Phases

The last five years of the development of Kyrgyzstan's political system have shown that this system has its own forms and phases of development. The first phase of the struggle for power was focused on identifying key players in the "game," determining their political and financial weight, clarifying positions in relation to the existing power, or "the center of the circle," their ability to conquer, seize power and become the "master" of the circle. At this phase, a leader and main supporting political forces are identified. A certain balance of forces is established at this phase, which results in one clan, family and its allies gaining power in society. Later, a coalition, having achieved power, takes a "civilized" political form – in other words, becomes a political party. Thus, in the time of Askar Akayev, it was "Alga Kyrgyzstan" (Go Ahead, Kyrgyzstan); in Kurmanbek Bakiyev's time it was "Ak Jol."

A redistribution of power within the ruling community and party is possible during the next phase, especially if it is a bloc of several parties or movements. The existing and potential opposition, in fact any political rivals, are eliminated and suppressed. Power becomes visibly personalized and authoritarian. The personal charisma of the head of a ruling family develops and strengthens, and the ruling family emerges within the party. For example, during Askar Akaev's time in power, it was his wife Mairam Akaeva, daughter Bermet Akaeva, and son-in-law Adil Toygonbaev that played important roles. In the case of Kurmanbek Bakiev, it was his brothers Akhmad and Zhanysh, and his son Maksim.

Subsequently, there is a relative stabilization of the status quo. At this phase, constitutional and other changes are possible measures adopted in order to consolidate the power of the party leader, the "family" head. Election and reelection take place when the regime has sufficient administrative resources to ensure its success. Typically, this is achieved through ballot rigging. The image of a leader – the "father" of the nation – is shaped. Judging by the term in office of the current presidents of the Central Asian states, it is a longer phase of development. However, judging by the practice of recent political upheavals in the Arab countries, such stability is actually very fragile.

The destabilization of society follows as the result of a variety of factors: internal social and economic hardships, discrimination and violation of individual rights, interference of external forces, or the incumbent leader's death. The result of growing instability is a change of power, often through unconstitutional means.

It would be fair to say that the political elite in Kyrgyzstan remains uncertain regarding what form of democracy – parliamentary or presidential – they would prefer, being unaware that democracy cannot be adjusted to clan rule. Therefore, with high probability, we can assume that Kyrgyzstan, where a new ruling clan is now actively formed, will again start moving in the familiar circle.

Features of Eurasian Civil Society

The beginning of the twenty-first century has been characterized by the transformation of society toward social, cultural and civilizational multipolarity, which, in this writer's view, complies with the logic of social development. At the same time, the increasing globalization of the entire spectrum of social relations is associated with a number of problems, or historical challenges, including some issues related to forming a new model of democratic society in the near and long-term future.

Thus far, the type of social order formed in Kyrgyzstan bears little resemblance to that already existing in industrialized and developing countries. The analysis of Kyrgyz society in transition from a totalitarian to a democratic system allows us only to draw conclusions regarding its condition in this transition. Its peculiarities include: the implementation of some elements of a new social organization from outside; uneven character of the process of formation of actors, institutions and organizational relations; and a faster pace of formation of civil society than government institutions.¹⁸⁵

However, it is still not clear what in particular civil society specialists have in mind when they speak about modern Kyrgyzstan. Judging by the content of publications, the vast majority of researchers recognize only one type of such

¹⁸⁵ Ulukbek Chinaliev, "Dolgaya doroga k grazhdanskomu obshestvu," *Rynok Kapitalov*, no. 3, 2001, 16.

a society – a liberal-democratic one, that is, of the American-European variant. With regard to Kyrgyzstan, it could be argued that a period of twenty to thirty years will be necessary for a democratic government to gain a foothold in the country. But, Western analysts argue, even thirty years will hardly suffice to develop a classical type of civil society. To the extent that it does happen, it will be incomplete, fragmentary and far from perfect.¹⁸⁶

On the contrary, there is a great danger that Kyrgyzstan will fall even further behind the developed countries within this period, and that local society will face existential problems. Historical experience shows that the simplest way of overcoming protracted and deepening crises such as the one in Kyrgyzstan is a transition to an authoritarian system, which if left in operation, produces totalitarianism that cannot coexist with civil society. That is exactly the process that has been taking place in a number of post-Soviet countries.

Due to the circumstances in Kyrgyzstan in particular, and Central Asia in general, local analysts and policymakers are increasingly talking about the possibility of an entirely different version of democratic society, namely, a Eurasian one, based on the communal-collectivist tradition, including that of the Soviet period. As a rule, this term is used to refer to the social and cultural space located on the territory of Russia, Central Asia, and several of the other neighboring countries. For example, Uzbek President Islam Karimov has determined “Uzbekistan’s own model” of development as a movement in the direction of the Eurasian community.¹⁸⁷ This model has been mentioned repeatedly by former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami¹⁸⁸ and Kazakhstani President Nursultan Nazarbayev.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ According to Mr. F. Motko, the OSCE Representative in Kyrgyzstan, exactly as much time is required for Kyrgyzstan to gain *understanding* of European civil society’s standards (Workshop on ethnic development strategies in Kyrgyzstan; Issyk-Kul, December 2004).

¹⁸⁷ *Uzbekistan Today*, July 25, 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Ex-Iranian President Mohammad Khatami was one of the first to voice thoughts regarding the Eurasian community. In 1998, in his address to the UNO, he proposed 2001 as the year of dialogue among civilizations; subsequently the offer was adopted by the UN General Assembly.

¹⁸⁹ Nursultan Nazarbayev, *Global’naya energoekologicheskaya strategiya ustoychivogo razvitiya v XXI veke*, Moscow: Ekonomika, 2011.

This raises the question of what is actually meant by a “Eurasian” civil society, and if such thing can be said to exist at all. Many experts consider this model to be hypothetical, drawing serious objections. First, despite the research papers available in this area, it is still difficult to answer the question of what exactly defines a “Eurasian type,” not only of civil society but of society in general. All the attempts to explain its essence have thus far been reduced to the analysis of the national and cultural peculiarities of the Eurasian peoples and their historical development. No one doubts these historical facts, but they do not explain the “Eurasian” specificity of civil society, if it exists at all.

Secondly, the absence of truly democratic principles in the life of Eurasian countries, or their functioning in a truncated form under strict administrative control, is often attributed to the specific “national and historical” way of the Eurasian peoples. Therefore, the appearance and use of the term of “Eurasian civil society” is most likely intended to give the authoritarian methods of governance academic legitimacy and thus to justify them in the eyes of the world community.

Clearly, the interpretation of the predicate “Eurasian” can have varied nature and varied purposes. Nevertheless, one can clearly see a number of specific features in its content which are peculiar to Eurasian culture and civilization. First, there is a special relationship between the state and society, which most often implies the role of the administrative machine in regulating social relations – including in spheres that from a Western standpoint refers exclusively to civil society, and should be outside the area of attention and influence of state institutions. This includes the activity of creative unions, sports federations, and the mass media, among others. On the contrary, whereas the relationships among citizens should be regulated by the rule of law, much of it (the right to vote, appointments to positions, distribution of functional responsibilities, performance pecking order, and so on) is regulated by traditions, customs, and so on.

Second, there is a direct involvement of public institutions in the formation of the basic structure of civil society. Civil society may appear to be independent, but exists with the help of administrative units concerned with maintaining social stability and creating their democratic image. Any weakening of the social and legal controls will contribute to the emergence in society of

destructive processes that will destroy its underlying institutions. The supporters of the Eurasian societal model believe that in both cases it is a function of social and legal state control, which is designed to help maintain the integrity and orderliness of civil society, resolve disputes and conflicts arising in the process of its functioning. For example, Uzbek President Islam Karimov openly states that the nature and content of the “Eurasian model” is “assigning the role of the chief reformer to the state, that is the function of reform initiator and coordinator who enforces the rule of law, pursues a strong social policy, and performs the gradual stage-by-stage implementation of reforms.”¹⁹⁰

For Kyrgyzstan, according to some experts, such a development also appears quite natural, because any weakening of administrative control may lead to destructive processes in society, and the destruction of its democratic institutions.

These circumstances provide a basis to speak about the third characteristic feature of the Eurasian type of statehood, which noticeably manifests itself in many post-Soviet countries, namely the building of a strong vertical power and a marked role in its functioning of power structures, without which the system of state government loses its effectiveness.¹⁹¹ For example, in the monograph of Ulukbek Chinaliev, one can discern the idea that the concentration of power in Kyrgyzstan in the hands of the president conforms with the thesis of improvement of the quality of governance in the transitional period.¹⁹² It should be noted that the concentration of power and its enhancement are not always the same. If the former has indeed taken place in Kyrgyzstan, the second has not. The new political elite of the country in fact

¹⁹⁰ *Uzbekistan Today*, July 25, 2012.

¹⁹¹ According to experts, this statement has an historical background. They believe that our ancestors' way of life in the vast expanses of Eurasia forced them to take care of their self-defense. Therefore, the first signs of civil relations gave rise to a particular type of social situation, that of the “people-army.” This was a far cry from the West-European ideal of civil society; rather it equated closely to state “military democracy.” The “arming of the people” led nonetheless to a development of truly civil qualities: the spirit of patriotism, preparedness to self-sacrifice, and so on. Recently, more “modern” terms have come to be used to describe such, including “sovereign democracy” or “managed democracy.”

¹⁹² Ulukbek Chinaliev, *Kyrgyzstan na puti k demokratii: transformatsiya politicheskoi systemy*, Moscow: Rossiyskiy gosudarstvennyi gumanitarnyi universitet, 2004.

sees its role in the functional and well-balanced distribution of state power, and also speaks of the need for its strengthening.

The perspective of Western specialists, who believe that such a paradigm of social organization is peculiar only to states that lack a tradition of parliamentary democracy, is understandable. The direction of social development in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia as a whole really does actualize issues of intercultural communication. For example, can the values that have emerged within European thinking be implemented in an environment with a different mentality and a different political culture? Views on this issue vary widely. French sociologist Jacques J. Maquet, when analyzing the course of political and economic reforms in Asia and Africa, came to the conclusion that the principles of liberal democracy fit the cultural and historical development of a European society and no other. Cut off from their socio-cultural environment, they cannot be implemented elsewhere. All that is unacceptable from the viewpoint of Western democracy, Maquet asserts, is considered quite normal in African public life, which, in turn, makes the implementation of European cultural values in an alien socio-cultural space impossible.¹⁹³ Some Eurasian specialists, for example Russian thinker Alexander Dugin, believe it is impossible to apply the “Western” model of social governance outside of Europe. Dugin considers all claims of Western liberal culture, with its claims of “universality,” to be one of the major negative features of globalization, which must be opposed by the mobilization of national identity.¹⁹⁴ In turn, this viewpoint is beginning to form the official doctrine of Russia as well as of its closest allies.

Yet this perspective is flawed. In fact, these authors propose to recognize ethnocentrism as the starting point of social actions and as a means of realization of collective interests, as had been the case earlier in the conceptions where nationalism or “social forces of national consciousness” were treated as a main driver of history.

¹⁹³ Jacques J. Maquet, *Power and Society in Africa*, London: World University Library, 1971, 122-123.

¹⁹⁴ See Alexander Dugin, *Geopolitika Postmoderna: vremena novykh imeriy: jcherki geopolitiki XXI veka*, Moscow: Amfora, 2007; Alexander Dugin, *Teoriya mnogopolyarnogo mira*, Moscow: Evrasiyskoe dvizhenie, 2012.

The Central Asian region, along with other distinctive ethnic features, is characterized by political passivity, a tendency toward aggrandizement, and the creation of a cult of personality. It is also an area where freedom is not associated with responsibility, but rather with unconstrained will bordering on anarchy and arbitrariness, and where discipline is achieved by force. It is assumed, following Foucault's reasoning, that social and legal control with its mechanisms of supervision, systematization, punishment and reward, where the position of the "parts of a whole" is fixed as a "universal and compulsory instruction," can indeed serve as a backbone element of a Eurasian type of civil society.¹⁹⁵ Provided, of course, that the degree of the use of such methods shall be determined by their usefulness for the normal functioning of the entire social system.

Fourth, the "Eurasian" type of world order also implies the existence of the personification of power. In the minds of most people in Kyrgyzstan, the authority of power rests on the authority of a personality. The authority of a leader of any rank tends to be evaluated on the basis of whether he possesses or lacks "charismatic" features. There is little to indicate that such a feature will not continue to be important in the future.

One way or another, the idea of civil society in the form in which it is being implemented in Kyrgyzstan corresponds more with the above features of the Eurasian model. Perhaps the concept of the "Eurasian civilization" based on the historical memory of the peoples living there and their traditional openness to both East and West, is really more in line with the realities faced by modern Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, the evaluation of the expected results in the formation of civic institutions should not only proceed from the classical dichotomy – democratic and undemocratic – but also from the "European" (Western) and "Eurasian" understanding of democracy as such.

¹⁹⁵ According to Foucault, it is difficult to find a person who, in one way or another, did not find himself (or herself) within "disciplinary" constraints and had not experienced the effects of such factors as strict ranking and classification, regulation of functional responsibilities, programming of the performed process, etc. See Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, London and New York: Routledge Classics edition, 2002.

Looking into the Future: Socio-Cultural Factors Contributing to Civil Society Development in Kyrgyzstan

Modern Kyrgyz society has not arrived at a clear idea about the future prospects of its development. Today, very much like when the country gained independence twenty years ago, Kyrgyzstan is faced with a choice concerning its future socio-political and economic development.

Development Scenarios

There appear to be three possible future scenarios for the country in the mid-term perspective. The first one is a positive scenario. Under the influence of market relations, a growing economy and socio-cultural globalization, the country will witness a gradual assimilation of paternalistic relations, a transformation of traditional society into civil society, and the formation of a democratic state model. But this requires a turning of the tide in the economic or political sphere. Unfortunately, there is very little time for this scenario to arise.

The second scenario is a pessimistic one. This scenario implies the conjoining of market relations with paternalistic ones, the strengthening of traditionalist views in the political and legal spheres, the creation of an authoritarian society, and the further criminalization of the state machinery under the pretext of preserving the country's cultural and ethnic identity. In this case, a third, or even a fourth, revolution is a possibility, which could have catastrophic consequences for Kyrgyzstan.

The third scenario is that of inertia, in which the country will face no radical changes. It is difficult to say how long this can continue. It is obvious that in the current situation, this period is unlikely to last a long time. Ultimately, the events will develop either in line with the first or the second scenarios.

This situation begs two interdependent questions: first, what can prevent the development of a pessimistic scenario in Kyrgyzstan? Second, what can serve as the basis for an optimistic view of the unfolding political and socio-economic situation in modern Kyrgyz society?

Currently, it is hard to find a politician in Kyrgyzstan who does *not* provide a “recipe” for the successful and effective development of the country. Their prescriptions are quite divergent. Zamir Osorov, for instance, is strictly pragmatic, proposing that Kyrgyzstan distance itself from its intrusive neighbors who do not have the resources, ideas, or desire to build democracy. Only then, Osorov argues, can the Kyrgyz “define for ourselves the most favorable direction and strategy that would not only enable us to develop our production, tourism, and power generation, but achieve it in the best and quickest way, like South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, or postwar West Germany.”¹⁹⁶

On the opposite end of the spectrum, author Karypbek Baybosunov sees no future for Kyrgyzstan without its integration with its neighbors into a single market: “This process should be completed with the creation of a single currency by 2014.” With this “correct choice of development targets, Kyrgyzstan could become a relatively developed country by the mid-century with a fairly strong position in the Central Asian space.”¹⁹⁷

There are also philosophical assumptions about the driving forces of Kyrgyz society. For example, Temir Sariev writes: “I am convinced that there is one force, and if it is in place, then we can speak of some changes which are inevitable and must help us to break through the deadlock and crisis. It is

¹⁹⁶ Zamir Osorov, “Vysokaya tsena dostoinstva i svobody,” *MSN – Moya stolitsa*, August 2, 2005, available at <http://www.msn.kg/ru/news/10896/>.

¹⁹⁷ Karypbek Baybosunov, “Tol’ko posle tyazheleishih ispytanyi lyudi vozmutsya za um,” *Vecherniy Bishkek*, August 2, 2005, available at <http://www.centrasia.ru/newsA.php?st=1123053660>. It is worth mentioning that currently the prospect is more than ever acquiring very real features. This is connected with a possible entry of Kyrgyzstan into the Customs Union (CU), whose members are Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus. President Almazbek Atambaev is an active proponent of joining the CU. “Entry into the Customs Union,” he said, “will enable Kyrgyzstan to expand its sales markets, increase industrial and agriculture output and will facilitate creation of new jobs and inflow of investments.” See “Almazbek Atambayev: vstuplenie v Tamozhennyi Soyuz prodiktovano natsional’nymi interesami Kyrgyzstana,” *Belyi Parus*, April 11, 2011, available at <http://www.paruskg.info/2011/04/11/42301>.

political will. The political will of the people, or the political will of an enlightened national leader in power.”¹⁹⁸ When such a will appears, positive changes in the public consciousness and some fundamental changes are possible, including also the creation of a new society without any significant spiritual and material losses. Kyrgyzstan, the politician believes, possesses a *driving faith*, which, by definition, has a metaphysical origin and does not require any supporting evidence.

In this author’s view, it is not so much the abstract or poorly reasoned character of these arguments (nor that such reflects a pluralism of opinions) that causes concern, but rather the fact that such multidirectional views testify to the degree of social and political disintegration of Kyrgyz society and the absence of founding national values in its conscience, which would determine the nature of the vital activity of the people and their desire for a shared future.

However, if one tries to see things in a more realistic light and avoid populist statements and political rhetoric, could it be that there is some common ground that may contribute to the modernization of Kyrgyzstan’s economic and socio-political relations? The answer to this question can only be positive. There are such grounds, but the problem is that many of them, for various reasons, have been excluded from the active political life of society. In modern parlance, they must be “installed,” that is, activated in relation to the current political situation.

Social and Cultural Factors

Rather than being preoccupied with the economy, the focus should be directed toward the socio-cultural factors that have an impact on the development of Kyrgyz society. The country’s economy, currently in poor shape, is the origin of society’s welfare. So, before talking about Kyrgyzstan’s prospects, it is necessary to answer an important question of principle – of whether it is possible to speak of the prospects for social development if they are based on the analysis of the spiritual priorities of society rather than a focus on the economic conditions of social development? It is difficult to speculate upon certain features of the future of a country characterized by rather poor living

¹⁹⁸ Sariev, *Shakh Kyrgyzskoi Demokratii*, 193.

conditions and an economy experiencing systemic crisis. As was noted by Arnold Toynbee, “there is a formidable and nearly impassable gap between an abstract ideal of democratic governance and reality, which is not ready for democracy.”¹⁹⁹

It is hard to disagree with this statement. At the same time, it should be noted that today, the concept of a materialistic (formational) understanding of society that exists in the domestic and foreign philosophical literature does not give a complete picture of the scope of the historical process and its prospects. The historical experience provides grounds to assert that the content of social relations and the dynamics of their development do not only depend upon the method of production, but also on its output. Often, when speaking about changes in society’s living conditions, both positive and negative, we refer to changes in political, legal, and moral aspects of the organization and distribution of production.²⁰⁰

Thus, it is important and relevant to analyze both economic and socio-cultural conditions of society’s development. According to Karl Jaspers, “A certain social order corresponds to a new spiritual world.”²⁰¹

The very beginning of this paper featured a case from the last century about an elderly Kyrgyz man who found it uncomfortable to live in a big stone house compared to his own yurt. Today, each Kyrgyz still treats a yurt with great respect and love, as an integral part of the national material culture. As before, *jailoo*²⁰² shepherds prefer to live in such temporary dwellings during summertime, grazing their cattle. They are also popular with eco-tourists. However, elderly and young Kyrgyz, in towns and villages, prefer to dwell permanently in large and more comfortable stone houses.

It is not the case that over time national and historical features have undergone significant changes or disappeared altogether. Some of them continue to

¹⁹⁹ Arnold Toynbee, *Postizhenie istorii*, Moscow: Progress, 1991, 581.

²⁰⁰ Economy and politics are closely interrelated. A good politician is able to understand the priority issues of society and find solutions to problems. The socio-economic reforms of Franklin D. Roosevelt in the 1930s are a good case in point. It can be supposed that without fundamental revision of some of the social norms in society, the New Deal of the president would not have been as successful.

²⁰¹ Karl Jaspers, *Smysl I naznachenie istorii*, Moscow: Politizdat, 1991, 35.

²⁰² *Jailoo* refers to summer pastureland generally located in the highlands.

determine the mentality of the masses. In other words, the problem is not whether it is possible or impossible to reform society in Kyrgyzstan, or anywhere else for that matter. The answer is obvious: it is possible and necessary. It is in this methodological vein that we should understand Toynbee's opinion – that the process of resistance to implanting the elements of a foreign culture into another social body is extremely painful and absolutely inevitable. However, just as inevitable, the author concludes, is the ultimate defeat of this resistance.²⁰³

The question is to what extent what factors – the national, historical, cultural, and socio-psychological features of Kyrgyzstan – will affect the formation of the country's new social and cultural reality.

Globalization

First and foremost is the movement of society to a new system of global social relations. A rapidly changing situation in the system of international relations, with the decline of the bipolar world, has seriously undermined the international system's stability. Therefore, the question of what constitutes the ultimate goal of a social movement, whether it is global harmony or global chaos, is one of the most pressing and debated ones, and forms a specific discourse that goes beyond pure philosophy. Debates are also caused by a number of other related issues: Is globalization consistent with cultural and civilizational multipolarity? What are the prospects for ethnic and cultural identity and political sovereignty? Finally, how can inter-civilizational and inter-cultural relations be shaped in a globalized community? The search for the answers to these and other questions is taking place within the framework of two methodologically opposite points of view: adherents of the dangers of globalization see it as a threat to social and cultural diversity, while its proponents see it as possessing new perspectives and consider it an integral part of social growth.

Most experts in Kyrgyzstan evaluate globalization extremely negatively, often as a disguised form of neo-colonization, leading not only to further deterioration of the social status, but decay of the “ethnos” and its cultural

²⁰³ Toynbee, *Postizhenie istorii*, 581.

assimilation. For example, Cholponbay Nusupov states explicitly that the “globalization process, initiated by the world’s capitalist powers, is not carried out in relation to their own people ... but is a totalitarian form of imposing essentially primitive political, moral, artistic and aesthetic stereotypes and doctrines of Western mass culture on underdeveloped countries and regions, including the post-Soviet ones.”²⁰⁴ Famous Kyrgyz sociologist Kusain Isaev also believes that “globalization leads to the destruction of traditional values.”²⁰⁵

Whatever aspect of the phenomenon we consider – international and regional security, cooperation and division of labor, national and cultural identity – everywhere globalization appears to be a means or condition of the destruction of mankind and nature. According to Anthony Giddens, the world has in no way become more “manageable” in the process of globalization; on the contrary, it has gotten out of control and “is slipping away from us.”²⁰⁶

What has caused such extreme and negative assessments of globalization? The key features of globalization include: the wide-scale implementation of new information technologies (such as the creation of a global computer and mass-media network), the domination of new business entities in the economic life of societies, increased interdependence, interconnection, and vulnerability of people, communities and countries. Mentioned in the literature are also such features of globalization as the “triumph of liberal democracy,” “versatility of civilization,” “multiculturalism,” and so on.²⁰⁷ Generally speaking, these judgments show an objective and adequate understanding of social reality. With regard to Kyrgyzstan, all of these factors can only be welcomed. The

²⁰⁴ Cholponbay Nusupov, *Filosofsko – kulturologicheskie aspekty nacionalnogo samosoznaniya*, Bishkek: Kyrgyz National University, 2005, 4.

²⁰⁵ See Kusein Isaev, “Obshestvo riska” v usloviyah globalizatsii”, *Sociologicheskie issledovaniya*, no 12, 2001, 15-22.

²⁰⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Runaway World: How Globalization is Reshaping Our Lives*, New York: Routledge, 2002.

²⁰⁷ See: Peter Rutland, “Globalizatsiya i postkommunizm,” *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya i Mezhdunarodnaya ekonomika*, no 4, 2002; Kiril Holodkovskiy, “Vyzovy globalizatsii vnutrypoliticheskii aspekt,” *Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya i Mezhdunarodnaya ekonomika*, no 9, 2002: 13-16; Adash Toktosunova, “Kulturnaya identichnost i dialog kultur v kontekste globalizatsii,” *Vyzovy sovremennosti I filosofiya. Materialy “kruglogo stola”, posvyaschennogo dnyu filosofii UNESCO*, Bishkek: KRSU, 2006, 17-18.

negative assessment of globalization becomes understandable when we refer to possible consequences of this process.

For example, the judgment of intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue as part of the globalization of social relations raises the following question among many Kyrgyz experts: Would not excessive “openness” in this interaction result in the loss of the ethnic identity of a nation or to the loss of national sovereignty? According to Samuel Huntington, the modernization of the economy, urbanization and globalization, have reduced the importance of national identity for many people by transforming it into “something more individual, more intimate.”²⁰⁸ This situation, according to anti-globalization activists, also limits the socio-cultural potential of national communities and puts in question the prospects of their national identity. The ethnic and cultural homogeneity of the vast majority of the developed countries, they argue, is rooted in the past, thereby exacerbating the problems of ethnic and confessional relations. This scares many people in small countries like Kyrgyzstan. Moreover, such a country faces an aggravation of its internal problems against the background of the ever-increasing gap in terms of wealth and inequality in the “distribution of costs and benefits” of globalization. While some have benefited, others – Kyrgyzstan being one of them – have actually found themselves excluded from the global system.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the attitude toward globalization in the country, situated far from global transportation lanes and lacking significant material resources, is not unequivocally negative. To suggest otherwise in the present conditions could only mean a movement toward self-isolation, and, ultimately, the stagnation of society. For example, 36 percent of the world investments belong to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Organization (APEC), 19 percent to the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and only 3 percent to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

In short, neither a clash of civilizations suggesting “difference” and “separation” nor an understanding of civilization as a homogeneous integral

²⁰⁸ Samuel Huntington, *Who Are We? The Challenges to America's National Identity*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004, 39.

unit matches the realities of the modern world with its universal interpenetration of cultures. It appears that the solution of the problem should be sought in the context of interaction of cultural identity and universality of the norms of civilized existence.

In equal measure, globalization, on the one hand, creates opportunities for economic, social, and cultural growth, investment inflow and gradual poverty reduction. On the other hand, it is fraught with the danger of losing national control over key economic and ideological values of society. Pope John Paul II wisely stated on the occasion of his speech to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences: “Globalization itself is a priori neither good nor bad. It will be such, when made by people.”²⁰⁹

Social transformation in the form of historical progress is, as is known, predicated upon the ability of society to establish an effective system of economic and political relations that correspond to its “cultural-historical type.” Experience shows that the types of social systems that are open to interdependence and interaction between cultures are, currently, demonstrating the greatest success in optimizing the processes of vital activity. Therefore, the prospects for the development of Kyrgyzstan should be based on the patterns of integration of social relations and rely on the ability of its citizens to scale down the perception of new ideas, theories and concepts through their comparison with those value orientations which are already present in their conscience.

Tolerance

Another important condition for the formation of qualitatively new social relations in Kyrgyzstan is the tolerance that has long been a characteristic of the Kyrgyz people. A democratic society is impossible to imagine without such human features as tolerance of non-conformity and the coexistence of different points of view. However, some local researchers, when speaking about the endurance and patience with which the Kyrgyz people tolerate the hardships and privations that have befallen them, perceive them as a

²⁰⁹ Address by Pope John Paul (II) at the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, April 27, 2001.

manifestation of tolerance, which, in their opinion, may bring about a complete degradation of the nation. It is impossible to agree with such a prediction. Such an assumption would make sense if the issue at hand was apathy, indecision, or infinite patience rather than tolerance. In this case, there is an explicit substitution of the concept of tolerance for patience. Despite the phonetic proximity of these categories,²¹⁰ it is clear that they have a completely different nature, and are denoted by different words.²¹¹

People can and should respect opposing opinions and positions which differ from their own customs and traditions, while abstaining from violating laws and refraining from any form of encroachment on basic human rights, for lawlessness and arbitrariness do not have anything to do with tolerance.

Many researchers associate the possibility of a society's democratization primarily with changes in economic relations. No doubt, they play an important role, but at the crucial moments of society's development, such features as tolerance are no less important for the success of the ongoing process. Without this condition, it is impossible to imagine any democratic transformation in societal life. Be it the transformation of medieval society from religious dogmas to New Age thinking, or the transformation of modern Kyrgyzstan from the totalitarianism and authoritarianism of the past to the philosophy of an open society, the effectiveness of radical changes in economy, politics, or other spheres of societal activity is largely determined by the ability and desire of the masses to generate and perceive new concepts, theories, and programs in their minds.

Otherwise, Kyrgyzstan will soon find itself in a situation similar to the one that is visible in some countries of the Middle East, where the vital activity of society – that is, socio-economic and political processes – is still determined by religious values, and the emergence of any other ideology aside from Islam is extremely difficult. Of course, even there one can currently notice some

²¹⁰ In Russian, the words “patience” and “tolerance” sound similar.

²¹¹ For example, in the English language there is a difference between such concepts as “tolerance” and “patience.” See *The Pocket Oxford Russian Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, 260. In the Kyrgyz language, two terms are also used. “Chydo” is used, when patience is meant and “chydanduuluk korsotuu” means tolerance. See *Russian-Kyrgyz Dictionary*, ed. Konstantin Yudahin, Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo Inostrannykh i Natsional'nykh slovarei, 1957, 855-856.

changes in the perception and evaluation of the outside world, which is only natural. However, a similar situation would be a step backward for Kyrgyzstan.

Multi-Ethnicity

Another feature characterizing Kyrgyz society is its multi-ethnic character, which will also be of great importance in shaping a model of future democratic Kyrgyzstan.

Kyrgyzstan's multi-ethnic nature has a long tradition. Alexander N. Bernshtam considered the penetration of "other ethnic and cultural elements" into the environment of the Kyrgyz people to be one of the "ethnic characteristics of the Kyrgyz people from Tien-Shan, explained by the peculiarity of their historical development."²¹² Many phenomena in the spiritual life of society will be difficult to understand and adequately evaluate without considering this fact.²¹³ The further development of Kyrgyzstan will also be most closely connected with the strengthening of this trend. Unless this condition is in place, further progress in Kyrgyzstan seems very problematic.

The tragedy in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 undoubtedly dealt a powerful and painful blow to ethnic harmony and tolerance in society. This is clearly recognized by the local community and foreign experts, represented primarily by the International Commission of Investigation into the events in the south of Kyrgyzstan, headed by Kimmo Kiljunen.²¹⁴ The Commission Report, published in the mass media in Kyrgyzstan, and the government's and non-governmental organizations' reaction provide some hope for a recovery of inter-ethnic peace and concord in the country, although it will require great efforts.

²¹² Alexander N. Bernshtam, "K voprosu o proishozhdenii Kyrgyzskogo naroda," *Sovetskaya Etnografiya*, vol. 19, no. 2, 1955, 16-26.

²¹³ For example, some outstanding examples of Kyrgyz art, music, and dramatic works, deeply national in their mental outlook and perception of the world, were created by representatives of different nations.

²¹⁴ Report of the International Commission for the study of events in southern Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 and comments by the Government, *Akipress*, May 3, 2011, available at <http://kg.akipress.org/news:364201>.

Two aspects of interethnic relations in modern Kyrgyzstan can be distinguished. The first is fairly traditional, according to which modern Kyrgyz society today can be described as a multinational one, based on the actual presence of representatives of various ethnic groups on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Despite considerable out-migration, Kyrgyzstan remains a multi-ethnic country. Despite the deterioration of relations between the members of different ethnic groups, there is still a possibility that in the future they will acquire a common vector of development in a new form.

A number of facts suggest that Kyrgyzstan will be increasingly multi-ethnic. First, in 2010, the population of Kyrgyzstan was 5.4 million, of which the representatives of the titular nation comprised approximately 66–70 percent.²¹⁵ Of late, the pace of migration in the country has, again, increased to approximately 30,000 people as a reaction to the recent events. Currently, labor migration prevails and, unlike in the 1990s, most of the migrants are ethnic Kyrgyz. Third, following a drop in the number of people of minority ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan, there has since been a steady upward trend.

The second aspect relates to the ethno-social processes taking place in the world community in recent years. If previously belonging to a nation was determined on the basis of a common territory, language, culture, psychology, and so on, now we have to deal with a reality in which this approach is losing its methodological significance. The presence or absence of one or more of the above features does not necessarily denote the national identity of an individual. A person may not use his or her native language for the purposes of work or communication, may rarely witness national customs and traditions, and yet continues to recognize himself or herself as a representative of a specific ethnic group, along with other compatriots. These and other reasons in the minds of many researchers create an apocalyptic vision of the future, especially regarding small nations. For instance, Karypbek Baybosunov believes that “in 150 years a largely technical symbiosis of Chinese, Japanese and English (languages) will reign on our earth. Linguo-archeologists will study the Kyrgyz language. They will create clubs of archaic language lovers.

²¹⁵ The data of 1989 and 1999 are based on the census data; those obtained in 2002 and 2010 are based on the annual statistical reports of the KR NSC and sociological studies carried out by independent experts.

Manas texts, songs, music of the Kyrgyz people will be preserved on digital carriers and will be treated as sacred relics of the past.”²¹⁶

Undoubtedly, the native languages and ceremonies, among other aspects, represent the most important forms of social memory, which makes it possible to preserve and develop one or another community as a nation. However, one can hardly accept such a pessimistic assumption. Many people, finding themselves in different circumstances, in a different socio-cultural environment, accept its standards and values, language, and customs while continuing to recognize themselves as representatives of the nation to which they belong ethnically. Thus, an urban Kyrgyz, who does not know his native language, customs and traditions well enough, is still a Kyrgyz, if he is aware of himself being one.

Or, by contrast, while being representatives of a specific nation, people identify themselves with those whose values and lifestyle they perceive as their own. For example, residents of the United States, France, Sweden or Germany who are of Asian or African descent consider themselves Americans, Frenchmen, Swedes, or Germans, like the natives of those countries. These facts suggest that in such a complex process as national identification, subjective factors such as the personal awareness of an individual of what nation or culture he or she belongs to will be added to objective conditions, such as the ethnic and linguistic identity of an individual.²¹⁷ It must be emphasized that a multi-ethnic society should not be confused with another phenomenon: its marginalization. The first implies the consolidation of society including representatives of different ethnic groups on the basis of common (in this sense, national) interests. The second implies the loss of national and historical roots by an ethnic group – in other words, the loss of their own socio-cultural environment.

²¹⁶ *Vecherniy Bishkek*, August 2, 2005.

²¹⁷ A Russian psychologist, D.N. Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskij, believed that nationality is essentially a rational phenomenon; therefore, “in the composition of the national psychology, intellectual peculiarities come to the foreground and national differences are mainly differences in psychology of thinking and mental creativity.” See Dmitriy Ovsyaniko-Kulikovskiy, *Psikhologiya natsional’nosti*, Petrograd: Vremya, 1902, 5, 6. In the opinion of this author, this reasoning makes sense even now.

Intercultural Communication

Both the former and current authorities of Kyrgyzstan have repeatedly declared that contact with the world order, relatively new for them, means that people have the opportunity to see the advantages and disadvantages of their socio-cultural and political system. Thus, society does not diminish the values of its national culture; on the contrary, it enriches its culture with new expressive means. There is a simple truth that goes that an individual sometimes needs to look at himself from the outside and not take offence at his reflection. Karl Marx once argued that “man first sees and recognizes himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind. And thereby Paul, just as he stands in his Pauline personality, becomes to Peter the type of the genus *homo*.”²¹⁸

There is concern on the parts of some that too much “openness” in intercultural exchanges results in a loss of national identity.²¹⁹ It is no secret that industrially developed countries, when providing all sorts of assistance to developing ones, first and foremost introduce elements of their “Western,” as we are accustomed to call it, model of civilization in the area of economic and political reforms. As Zbigniew Brzezinski writes, “America, which considers itself to be a historical advocate of democracy, subconsciously exports democratic values along the channels of globalization.”²²⁰ Modernization, as such, of the basic forms of society’s vital activity, does not necessarily entail a degradation of national culture; on the contrary, it rather supports its development.

The main task, according to the concept of a dialogue between civilizations, is creating a model of future society on the basis of interaction and mutual enrichment of national cultures. It is dialogue, being a paradigm of thinking, which enables us to imagine the world in its entirety and, at the same time, its

²¹⁸ Marx, *Kapital*, 62.

²¹⁹ For example, according to A. Tofler, rapid growth in consumption inevitably leads to the development of heartless mechanisms not only in consumption of substantive- in-rem environment, but also in the structure of human relationships. See Alvin Toffler, *Future Shock*, New York: Bantam Books, 1981, 102.

²²⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Choice: Global Domination or Global Leadership*, New York: Basic Books, 2004, 180.

cultural diversity. In this connection, several Kyrgyz specialists argue that this essentially dialogue-based method of understanding reality is characteristic of the specific Kyrgyz philosophy. The Kyrgyz philosophy, which traditionally deals with spiritual issues, considers one of its major tasks to be a search for a type of relations accepted by all people, a development of values that achieves rapprochement of the West and East.

The modern age, according to Foucault, is an epoch of space, simultaneity, juxtaposition and dispersion. So dialogue, as a paradigm of thinking and existence, reflects a degree of self-expression of culture systems and, at the same time, individual social properties of society.

Preserving cultural diversity as a possibility of self-expression, creativity and innovations must not be in opposition to intercultural communication. Mutual recognition and understanding of the civilizational basis of the life of various nations is a necessary condition for dialogue and the mutual respect of peoples. The solution of problems arising in such interaction is the major challenge to social development in the epoch of globalization.

According to the academic Vasily Bartold, “one may consider proven that the main factor of progress is *communication between peoples*, that specific peoples’ progress and degradation is not so much explained by their racial peculiarities and religious beliefs, not even by their environment, but rather by the place they occupied in different periods of their historical life in this communication...”²²¹ According to Bartold, whatever climatic, physical and geographical advantages Europe had compared to other parts of the world, they could only manifest themselves when Europe ranked first in terms of international communication. The same factor determines the development and degradation of Islamic culture to a much greater degree than the religious dogmas of Islam and cultural properties of specific Muslim peoples.

The Kyrgyz are a nomadic people formed in the process of contacts with numerous other peoples. The land inhabited by the Kyrgyz has always been the crossing place of various socio-cultural formations: from the South it was Zoroastrianism, later Islam and Arab language culture; from the East it was

²²¹ Bartold, *Kyrgyze. Istorichesky ocherk*, 31.

the influence of Indian and Chinese civilizations; and from the West it was Christianity and the European enlightenment.

For example, archeology and historical monuments give a clear idea of the development and spread of Buddhism (the image of Buddha in Arashan, several stone statues near Tokmok, and so on). Further, many graveyards of Christian-Nestorians have been discovered in Semirechye. They came there during the period of ostracism (in the fourteenth century from Syria). There are such graveyards in Lebedinovka village, on the western shore of Issyk-Kul Lake, and in the vicinity of Tokmok, among other places. Many Christian tombstones bear Turkic names which testify to the fact that Christianity was spread among the Kyrgyz. As Alexander N. Bershtam states, “the process of the formation of the Kyrgyz nation continued in the period which followed the Mongolian one, and still new ethnic masses joined the Kyrgyz tribes, bringing new elements of the future national culture of the Kyrgyz.”²²²

It possibly had little impact on the economic development of the Kyrgyz, but no doubt influenced their spiritual culture, world outlook and perception of the world. This type of multiethnic and multicultural context promoted a more tolerant perception of the surrounding reality by the ancient Kyrgyz and formation of the cross-cultural nature of their spiritual world. It is thus typical of the Kyrgyz to adopt new forms of spiritual and material life and it cannot but bring hope for Kyrgyzstan’s future.

²²² Bernshtam, “K voprosu o proishozhenii Kyrgyzskogo naroda,” *Sovetskaya Etnografiya* 19, no. 2, 1955, 16–26.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The experience of the development of many countries, both European and Asian, shows that the formation of an optimal model of socio-political structure of society through borrowing the most effective mechanisms from the functioning of other social systems is a workable objective. In all likelihood, Kyrgyzstan will also have to go this way. It is important for society to have a clear idea of whether the implication is replacing or destroying the basic values of its culture or creating and implementing new forms of vital activity.

Regarding the current government, it is still difficult to talk about its vision, the more so because it includes representatives of various social groups. It is possible that the concept of “Eurasian civilization,” based on people’s historical memory and its traditional openness towards both East and West, is really more in line with those realities that modern Kyrgyzstan faces.

Since it gained independence, Kyrgyzstan was also bequeathed a difficult legacy: a failed economy, lack of finances, and dilapidated social infrastructure. Most importantly, it had a lack of experience of independent political governance.

Nevertheless, despite the recent turmoil in the country, if we look at and analyze everything happening from the perspective of time and place, Kyrgyzstan has made some progress in its political development. The country has not become ossified in a semi-authoritarian pattern, but rather it is looking to find its own path of development. Society has thrown off “Gogol’s overcoat” and is trying to find freedom, which often exposes us to hardships, but that is the path Kyrgyzstan has chosen. Of course, the April events of 2010 have brought about some changes in the assessment of what has been achieved in this area. The results achieved are, so far, quite modest, but we no longer live in a closed society, and, albeit slowly, are moving from a traditional society toward a democratic one.

In a political context, modern Kyrgyzstan is one of the most interesting countries in Central Asia. It is a place where true intentions have been manifested and the myths of sovereign democracy, stable post-Soviet societies, friendly policies, and so on, have been discredited.

As the past decade has shown, the people of Kyrgyzstan have managed to change the regime in their country, and have, as a result, been infused with a spirit of confidence and faith in their own strength. And this is a path toward democratic civil society. "Clever hint, stupid blockhead," goes the Kyrgyz folk saying. Let us hope that the changes taking place in modern Kyrgyzstan will not prove to be another paradox, and that we shall really manage to take advantage of the chance we have of building a truly democratic society and state.

Kyrgyzstan should intensify the process of transition from a traditional society, with obvious hallmarks of being patriarchal, to a modern democratic civil society. In this regard, it would be a positive step on the part of the international institutions and the United States if they continued to provide assistance to Kyrgyzstan and particularly its central government in their efforts to implement the main provisions of the new constitution, in particular, and in the development and strengthening of the basic democratic rights and freedoms in society.

International organizations should track changes in the public and political life of the republic. For example, the state power of Kyrgyzstan cannot and should not be considered a means of satisfying personal economic interests. Such phenomena peculiar to the traditional society, such as tribalism and nepotism, should be excluded from the political life of the country, among other means, through a practical implementation of a parliamentary system of governance on a multiparty basis.

The dominance of leader-focused parties should be eradicated from the country's political system, as well as its negative consequences which result from political ambition: authoritarianism, cult of personality, and traditional psychology.

The international community could assist Kyrgyzstan in its efforts to develop the institution of law as an effective tool to protect the public from unjustified

repression and provide equal opportunities for all citizens to achieve social, political and economic goals. Public awareness of the rights and freedoms of human beings and citizens should become the key to the development of the county's political system.

International Financial Institutions and U.S. financial assistance could contribute to the development of the national economy through the preservation and development of the socio-economic infrastructure of large and especially small towns, creating conditions for more predictable and controllable internal and external population migration flows. Additional efforts should be focused on further urbanization of the population, improving its educational and cultural level.

The effectiveness of the country's government's solutions will be better if the political elite, regardless of its party affiliation, improves its awareness of priorities and defends the national interests of all citizens, regardless of clan belonging and ethnicity. To do this, it is necessary to eradicate manifestations of tribalism and national self-interest in shaping the country's political institutions – which include local and public administrations, political parties, movements, and so on.

To implement the tasks associated with the formation of civil society, possibly in its Eurasian form, the state government agencies, in partnership with non-governmental organizations, should pay more attention to such socio-cultural foundations of civilization development as: globalization of socio-economic relations, tolerance, multi-ethnicity, and intercultural communication.

Author Bio

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From 1980 to 1997 Anvar Bugazov served as Associate Professor and then Professor of Philosophy at the Kyrgyz State University. In 1997-2000 he was Head of the Department of Sociology and Culture, and also Dean of the Department on Philosophy and State and Municipal Service at Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn. Between 2004 and 2007 he served as Deputy Director for Education and Science of the Institute for Integration of International Education Programs of the Kyrgyz National University named after Jusup Balasagyn.

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Bugazov's research mainly focuses on the social and cultural foundations of civil society in Central Asia in the context of globalization, and the prospects for establishing liberal values in the Central Asian region. In particular, his research analyzes the combination of national-historic and cultural values in Central Asian societies and the process of forming civil society and its fundamental elements, such as economic and social freedom, decentralization of state power and political pluralism, easy access to information resources, tolerance, etc.