

PARTY DEVELOPMENT

**DEVELOPMENT OF
A MULTIPARTY SYSTEM
IN CENTRAL ASIA****Mira KARYBAEVA**

*Ph.D. (Philos.),
program coordinator of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation
for the Republic of Kyrgyzia
(Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan)*

Appraising the development of political parties, which are an effective tool for spreading democracy, as well as expressing the interests of various social groups, in the post-Soviet Central Asian countries is a rather difficult task. This is because each country in the region has its own special legislative and practical traits in this sphere. Nevertheless, some common trends in party development have already appeared.

The absence of a single information source also hinders this analysis. For example, when preparing this article, the author had to rely on the Internet and information obtained from local experts and representatives of several international organizations working in the region. What is more, due to the specifics of the legislative base, it is not possible to find out the size of party membership in every county. (The tables present information on the officially registered parties, as well as information on parties functioning as of the beginning of 2005, but still not registered.)

The Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan Party headed by oppositionist Galimzhan Zhakianov submitted its registration documents (with 80,000 signatures) and was registered in May 2004. Then on 11 December of the same year, its congress called on society to engage in civilian insubordination campaigns against “the current anti-popular authorities,” for which the public prosecutor’s office accused the party of breaking the laws on national security. After this, the court made a decision to abolish this organization. The opposition declared that the authorities were guided by political motives in this respect. Nevertheless, on 18 January, 2005, the court confirmed its previous decision. We will note that there are three more parties in the country, but they are still not registered: the Democratic Party of Kazakhstan, Abyroi (Honor and Conscience) and a second communist party, the Communist People’s Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK).

Table 1

Political Parties of Kazakhstan

No.	Name	Membership ¹	Leader
1	Republican Party Otan (Homeland)	135,000	Amangeldy Ermegiaev ²
2	Republican Party Asar (All Together)	177,000	Dariga Nazarbaeva
3	Civilian Party	160,000	Azat Peruashev
4	Democratic Party Ak zhol (Clear Path)	147,000	Cochairman system ³
5	Patriot Party of Kazakhstan	132,000	Gani Kasymov
6	Social-Democratic Party Auyl	125,000	Gani Kaliev
7	Agrarian Party	102,000	Romin Madinov
8	Rukhaniat (Spirituality)	75,000	Altynshash Djaganova
9	Communist Party of Kazakhstan	70,000	Serikbolsyn Abdildin

Sources: Kazakhstan Representative Agency of IRI—International Republican Institute; Internet resources.

Table 2

Political Parties of Tajikistan

No.	Name	Membership	Leader
1	People's Democratic Party	95,000	Emomali Rakhmonov
2	Communist Party	No data	Shodi Shabdolov
3	Democratic Party	No data	Makhmadruzi Iskandarov
4	Social-Democratic Party	No data	Rakhmatillo Zoirov
5	Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan	20,000	Said Abdullo Nuri
6	Socialist Party	No data	Mirkhusein Nazriev

Sources: Zerkalo Sociological Research Center; Internet resources.

¹ According to the Law on Political Parties in effect in the country, which was adopted in July 2002, a party must have no less than 50,000 members to register.

² Despite the fact that A. Ermegiaev is mentioned in its registration documents, the party's leader is considered Kazakhstan President Nursultan Nazarbaev.

³ Bolat Abilov, Alikhan Baymenov, Oraz Djandosov, Altynbek Sarsenbaev, and Liudmila Zhulanova.

The Tarrakiet Party has been trying to submit its registration documents in Tajikistan for the third year now, but to no avail. What is more, there may be a change in the number of these political organizations due to a split which is beginning to show in the Socialist Party.

Today, all six parties have been registered and have presented lists to the country's Central Commission on Elections and Referendums.

Table 3

Political Parties of Uzbekistan

No.	Name	Membership ⁴	Leader
1	Social-Democratic Party Adolat (Justice)	40,000	Turgunpulat Daminov
2	Democratic Party Milliy tiklanish (National Renaissance)	30,000	Ibrakhim Gafurov
3	National-Democratic Party Fidokorlar (Self-Sacrificers)	30,000	Akhtam Tursunov
4	People's Democratic Party	575,000	Asliddin Rustamov
5	Liberal-Democratic Party	40,000	Kabilzhan Iusupov

Source: Political Parties and Democracy Project of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Uzbekistan; Internet resources.

A few more political organizations function in Uzbekistan, but they are not registered: Democratic Party Erk (formal leader Mukhamad Salikh, but there is a trend toward its split into three factions headed by Atanazar Arifov, Murat Samat, and Oigul Mamatova); former national movement Birlik, now a political party (leader—Vasila Inoiatova); Party of Agrarians and Businessmen of Uzbekistan (Marat Zakhidov); and Party of Free Peasants of Uzbekistan (Ozod dehqonlar partiiasy), leader Nigora Khidoiatova. On 9 May, 2004 in Tashkent, they announced the creation of a single bloc of opposition forces. But later, Ozod dehqonlar, Erk, and Birlik decided to boycott the parliamentary elections (which were held on 26 December, 2004), since their candidates were not registered.

By the way, 489 candidates for deputy nominated by political parties and initiative electorate groups participated in the elections. One hundred and twenty deputies of the republic's legislative house of the Oliy Majlis were elected in a total of 62 electoral districts, during two rounds of voting (the second was held on 9 January, 2005). The seats in the lower house of parliament are distributed among five parties and independent candidates of initiative citizen groups. In so doing, the Liberal-Democratic Party leads with 21 deputies (34.2%) and the People's Democratic Party with 18 (23.3%). Enjoying immense popularity at the 1999 elections, the National-Democratic Party Fidokorlar obtained 18 seats, the Democratic Party Milliy tiklanish, 11, and the Social-Democratic Party Adolat, 10. Independent candidates who made it into parliament obtained 14% of the seats.

At the elections held in 2000 to the Kyrgyzstan Legislative Assembly, 15 seats were set aside for parties. Fifteen parties participated in the struggle for deputy mandates (according to the proportional system), five of them joined into two election blocs, whereby five parties and one election bloc gathered

⁴ The data are very approximate since these parties do not have a procedure for registering membership.

Table 4

Political Parties of Kyrgyzstan⁵

No.	Name	Membership ⁶	Leader
1	Progressive Democratic Party Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Erk) ⁷	12,000	Bektur Asanov
2	National Revival Party (Asaba)	No data	Azimbek Beknazarov
3	Kyrgyzstan Party of Communists	20,000	Absamat Masaliev
4	Republican People's Party	2,500	Djumabek Tentiev
5	Agrarian Party	1,000	Esengul Aliev
6	Unity Party of Kyrgyzstan	30,000	Amangeldy Muraliev
7	Democratic Women's Party of Kyrgyzstan	5,000	Tokon Shailieva
8	Political Party of War Veterans in Afghanistan and Participants in Other Local Conflicts	No data	Akbokon Tashtanbekov
9	New Kyrgyzstan	13,000	Nur uulu Dosbol
10	Social-Democratic Party	5,000	Almazbek Atambaev
11	Party of the People (Impoverished)	No data	Melis Eshimkanov
12	Party for Protecting the Interests of Industry and Agricultural Workers and Low-Income Families of Kyrgyzstan	No data	Akbaraly Aitiev
13	Agrarian-Labor Party	No data	
14	Party of Economic Revival	No data	Valery Khon
15	Party of Bishkek Residents	No data	Bolot Otunbaev
16	Party of National Unity and Accord	No data	Azamzhan Akbarov
17	Republican Party	2,000	Giiaz Tokombaev
18	Socialist Party Ata-Meken (Homeland)	2,000	Omurbek Tekebaev

⁵ While carrying out the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Political Parties and Democracy Project in Kyrgyzstan in 2002-2004, only about twenty of the forty registered parties could be found and invited to the corresponding undertakings. It is most difficult to obtain information about the membership, etc. of "lost" parties.

⁶ According to the law in effect On Political Parties of Kyrgyzstan, a party need only have ten people to register. Strict registration of members is not stipulated. Data on party membership is presented according to the results of an interview with their leaders held in 2003 within the framework of the Political Research Foundation Project of the Future.

⁷ Fifteen parties were singled out which participated in the parliamentary elections in 2000.

Table 4 (continued)

No.	Name	Membership	Leader
19	Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan Party (DMK)	1,500	Edilbek Sarybaev
20	My Country Party of Action	4,500	Djoomart Otorbaev
21	Ar-Namys Party (Virtue)	12,000	Felix Kulov
22	Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan	8,000	Klara Azhibekova
23	Sociopolitical Peasant (Farmers) Party	No data	Esengul Isakov
24	Republican Party Adilet	66,058	Marat Sultanov
25	Kairan el Party (Unhappy People)	5,000	Dooronbek Sadyrbaev
26	Pensioners Party	No data	Tursunbek Dauletgeldiev
27	Erkindik Party (Freedom)	No data	Adylbek Kasymaliev
28	Kyrgyzstan zhashtar partiiasy (Kyrgyzstan Youth Party)	No data	Aidarali Bakiev
29	Ecological Party of Greens, Archa	No data	Cazykbai Turdaliev
30	Elmuras Party	No data	Toktokan Borombaeva
31	Voice of the People Party	200	Bolotbek Maripov
32	Businessmen's Party	No data	Akmataliev
33	Accord	No data	Shatkul Kadabaeva
34	Future of Kyrgyzstan	No data	Balbak Tulebaev
35	Kyrgyzstan Party of the Regions, Elet	4,000	Tashpolot Baltabaev
36	Builders' Party	No data	Abysh Nurgaziev
37	Party of Justice and Progress	No data	Muratbek Imanaliev
38	Party of the Peoples of Kyrgyzstan, Elnuru	No data	
39	Alga, Kyrgyzstan! Party (created from a merge among four parties)	No data	Bolotbek Begaliev
40	Party of Democratic Development	No data	Mambetzhunus Abylov

S o u r c e s: Ministry of Justice of Kyrgyzstan; Data from the *Present-Day State of Political Parties in Kyrgyzstan* study; Political Research Foundation Project of the Future.

more than 5% of the votes and obtained seats in the Legislative Assembly. Thanks to the existence of party lists during the last elections, the country's parliament was replenished by several strong and vibrant deputies. What is more, of the six women who became members of the Legislative Assembly, three obtained seats according to the party lists. But after the referendum (2003), these party seats in parliament were abolished.

The election of deputies to the local keneshes (grass roots level) held on 10 October, 2004, identified new criteria for analysis. This was because the political parties had an opportunity to participate in the formation of district election commissions and nominate their own candidates. The following parties were the most active in nominating their representatives to the election commissions: Alga, Kyrgyzstan! (47%), Adilet (28%), My Country (11%), New Force (former Democratic Women's Party of Kyrgyzstan—10%), Elet, and the Communist Party—5% each.⁸ And on the whole, out of the 6,737 people elected as deputies to the local keneshes, 3,003 (44.57%) were nominated by political parties. Adilet—1,386 deputies (46.15%), Alga, Kyrgyzstan!—1,231 (40.9%), New Force—202 (6.7%), Elet—111 (3.6%), and My Country—51 (1.6%) were the most active. As for the Communist Party, Ar-Namys, Ata-Meken, the Party of Justice and Progress, Future of Kyrgyzstan Party, and Accord Party, each obtained less than 1% of the deputy seats.⁹

The forecasts of experts were confirmed during the nomination of candidates to the new one-house parliament of Kyrgyzstan (the elections were held on 27 February, 2005)—most candidates were registered as self-nominees. According to the data of 7 February, only 43 of the 425 candidates registered were nominated from political parties. In so doing, the largest number of candidates were representatives of the parties of power: Alga, Kyrgyzstan!—15, Adilet—11, three candidates were nominated from the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan (CPK), and two each from the Kyrgyzstan Party of Communists (KPC), Accord, and the Social-Democratic Party; one candidate each from My Country, New Kyrgyzstan, Ar-Namys, the Party of Economic Revival, and New Force.¹⁰ It should be noted that this list differs significantly from the preliminary lists of candidates for deputy to the Zhogorku Kenesh nominated by the political parties and published in the government newspaper.¹¹

So an analysis of the situation regarding development of the multiparty system in the region is complicated by the fact that the illusion of a multiparty system is created. However, real plurality means the possibility of these structures having legitimate ways to participate in a competitive struggle for political ideas. So it can be said that a pluralistic system has still not developed. The leaders of the political parties also mention this.¹²

In Central Asia, there is frequently a hypertrophied opinion that parties only form to engage in a power struggle. But when taking a closer look at these processes, we should note that parties are primarily a vital tool of the political competition of ideas and exist in order to find the most effective ways for the country to develop (and not to put into practice the ideas offered by the powers-that-be), that is, to improve the quality of the country's administration. In the final analysis, real improvement of the life of the ordinary people, and not of politicians, depends on the quality of political parties' work.

The pro-governmental or, to be more precise, the pro-presidential parties are the strongest in the region's countries. For example, according to the IRI, in Kazakhstan, Otan, Asar, the Civilian Party, Auyl, the Agrarian Party, and Rukhaniyat (6 of the 9 registered) can be considered such parties. This is an authentic evaluation. In Tajikistan, the country's president, Emomali Rakhmonov, heads the largest party (People's Democratic). Today, there are 63 deputies in the Majlisi namoiandagon (one of the parliamentary houses), 42 of them are members of the PDPT, eight are from the Communist Party faction, and two are representatives of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, the formation of pro-government party blocs always becomes more dynamic before elections (now

⁸ See: *Demokrat*, 19 October, 2004.

⁹ According to the data of the department of organizational and legal support of the Kyrgyzstan Central Election Commission.

¹⁰ According to the data of the AKI-Press Information Agency [<http://vybory.akipress.org>].

¹¹ See: *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 6 January, 2005 [<http://www.shailoo.kg>].

¹² See, for example: *Varorud*, No. 42 (78), 22 October, 2003.

these are Alga, Kyrgyzstan! and Adilet), as a result of which most deputies loyal to the government get into parliament.

It is obvious that within the current legislative and political framework, real competition of corresponding ideas is impossible, so it is difficult to expect the parties of the region's countries to be active in magnifying the political interests of society, creating a competent majority in the parliaments (on the basis of a civilized competitive struggle), or having an influence on the decision-making process in other branches of power.

Another tool in favor of the fact that political parties in Central Asia are sooner playing a "decorative" role at present is that, in reality, legislative and institutional conditions have not yet been formed for their real involvement in governance and for their influence on the decision-making process. And we are not talking about the executive bodies, where advancement up the career ladder is not related to an official's party affiliation. And advancement into the representative power bodies is not made easier for politicians who ballot from political parties. For example, in Kazakhstan only ten deputies to the Majilis (out of 77) are elected according to party lists, and there are no seats for parties in the Senate at all. In Tajikistan, according to the country's legislation, 41 deputies of the Majlisi namoiandagon are elected according to one-mandate districts, and only 22 according to party lists.

The principle noted above for nominating candidates for deputy to the new one-house parliament of Kyrgyzstan also shows that affiliation to a party (particularly an opposition one) does not facilitate a candidate's political advancement, on the contrary, it (affiliation) becomes an obstacle. The matter not only concerns the use of the notorious administrative resource against candidates from opposition structures, but also the lack of funds for holding expensive party congresses and conferences, which is necessary for the promotion of candidates. Under these conditions, the party leaders have to abandon the idea of holding congresses and go the route of candidate self-nomination.

The existence and development of a multiparty system is also theoretically viewed as a tool for overcoming localistic and regionalistic principles of forming the political elite. Unfortunately, from this point of view, parties in Central Asia have still not become an effective tool for magnifying the political interests of various social groups and shifting the accent (in political recruiting) from the place of origin, that is, in keeping with the community principle, to professional qualities and political ideas. The opinion of Chairman of the Social-Democratic Party of Tajikistan Rakhmatillo Zoirov is interesting from this viewpoint.¹³ He noted that a trend is beginning toward different parties predominating in different regions of the country. For example, the PDPT and CPT predominate in the Kulob group of regions, while the Social-Democratic Party has the largest number of supporters in the Sogd Region and Gorny Badakhshan. Similar trends are also manifested in Kyrgyzstan. For example, most supporters of the Ata-Meken Party are representatives of the Zhalalabad Region.

Such localistic motives do not allow political parties to develop properly. Of course, time and certain objective conditions are needed to overcome these problems. For the moment though, it is difficult for strong parties with a liberal-democratic ideology to develop where there are no traditions for the existence of private property and a middle class. As a result, parties are obviously suffering from a shortage of staff, similar charters, programs, and slogans, and financial problems, which all result in a low level of political activity. These difficulties can sometimes be explained not only by the fact that democracy is still young in the region, but also by the meager set of values on which the programs of these organizations are based. They have not established systematic interaction with the grass roots structures in the regions, and work to form a democratic culture within the parties has essentially not been organized.

It is obvious that under these circumstances a support system of political parties should be created. This system can appear only if there is a coordinated strategy among the governments, international organizations and a civil society in each of the region's countries. What is more, a system for monitoring the development of legislation and real practice should be organized in this sphere, and special studies of the situation conducted, both in each Central Asian state and in the comparative respect. Special attention

¹³ See: *Varorud*, No. 42 (78), 22 October, 2003.

should be focused on expert examination of legislation and lobbying of changes capable of involving parties more in real political life, as well as on the creation of a government financing system of political parties. The new draft Law on Political Parties, which is being discussed today in Kyrgyzstan, is attempting to create a basis for this system. In so doing, the state is giving parties the leading role in the functioning of the political system.

Party systems are reacting sensitively to the tiniest factor capable of expanding the possibilities for their development. For example, a norm has been introduced into the Kyrgyzstan Code on Elections, which envisages proportional participation of the representatives of political parties and of nominees from electorate assemblies and public organizations in the work of election commissions of different levels. As a result of this, the number of members of these commissions, who were representatives of political parties at the elections of deputies to local self-administration bodies held on 10 October, 2004, sharply increased compared with the elections of heads of local self-administration held in December 2001 (see Table 5).¹⁴

Table 5

Regional Commissions (Bishkek and Osh)		District Commissions		Local Election Commissions	
Total	from political parties	Total	from political parties	Total	from political parties
<i>Elections of deputies of village, settlement, and city keneshes (10 October, 2004)</i>					
83 (100%)	23 (27.7%)	493 (100%)	135 (27.58%)	17,553 (100%)	2,450 (13.96%)
<i>Elections of the heads of local self-administration of villages, settlements, and towns of regional significance (16 December, 2001)</i>					
67 (100%)	4 (5.97%)	460 (100%)	16 (3.47%)	15,192 (100%)	127 (0.83%)

In the case of Uzbekistan, Art 22 of the Law on Elections (adopted in August 2003) envisages that when candidates are nominated from political parties to elections of all levels, no less than 30% of their number should comprise women. This is obviously a kickback to the Soviet system of political quotas, nevertheless, a certain result is obvious: in the country's current parliament, women comprise 18% of the Legislative Assembly and 15% of the Senate. (In the parliament of the previous convocation, they only comprised 8%.)

Taking into account the actual problems of political party development in the region, information-educational programs should be created, and projects should be initiated which will help to raise the role of the parties in democratizing society and the state on the basis of training and consultations for party leaders, party members, and parliamentary deputies. There is also an urgent need to hold discussions on several topics. We will note the following: the legislative foundations of a democratic party system, analysis of the practice of foreign countries, party programs, local organizations, party financing, party participation in elections, political parties and human rights, development of special work strategies with young people, women, other social groups, and so on. It is worth noting that today not one party in the region's countries has any youth or women's factions, just as there are no specific programs for working with different social groups. What is more, seminars should be organized for the regional representatives

¹⁴ Data of electoral statistics of the Kyrgyzstan Central Election Commission.

of political parties, an open discussion created on the problems of the development of political parties, and public discussion expanded for discussing their role in developing democracy. These are necessary conditions for enhancing the multiparty system in the region's countries.