

# Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Democratic Alternative

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Recently, I met a prominent diplomat from a leading European country. Our conversation was friendly, open, and frank. Given this atmosphere, the diplomat told me what he would have never said in formal talks. "Mister president," he began, "we are very worried about the situation in Russia. The safety of our country, our future, and that of our children depends on Russia, on the direction its leadership takes. As for Kyrgyzstan, your problems are only yours. They are of no importance for us. They have no effect, either positive or negative, on our well-being." I answered him with the words of John Donne, an English poet of medieval times: "No man is an *island*, entire of it self; every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main . . . any man's *death* diminishes *me*, because I am involved in *Mankind*; And therefore never send to know for whom the *bell* tolls; It tolls for thee."

I do not know whether this diplomat grasped the meaning of my response, but I am sure that Americans will understand these words, you who belong to a nation which, by the words of Abraham Lincoln, was conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

I cannot but express my gratitude for the opportunity to present my views on the processes taking place in Kyrgyzstan. I consider it, above all, as evidence of respect for the Kyrgyz Republic, which has chosen the way of democratic reforms and is now taking its first-but-meaningful steps in this direction. I regard this opportunity as an example of the American people's desire to know more about the tendencies prevailing in the states of the former Soviet Union, and in particular, Kyrgyzstan, and what influence they may have on the interests of the United States and the world community.

## General Information About Kyrgyzstan

Because Kyrgyzstan is a newly independent state, it is not well known in the world. Few know about our resources and economic potential. Kyrgyzstan is a small country with an area of 198,000 sq. km and a population of 4.5 million, which is roughly equivalent to the population of Greater Boston.

The Kyrgyz nation is one of the oldest in Central Asia. In this region, only the Chinese equal us by historical age. Our forefathers lived in the prairies spread between the brown Gobi Desert and the green desert—the endless taiga. Since

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time immemorial our ancestors, the ancient Turks, lived here. They called their country the "Eternal El," just as the Romans called the fortress built on the seven hills on the banks of the Tiber the "Eternal City."

For many centuries the Kyrgyz have lived within the borders of their present country, between the Tien-Shan and Ala-Too mountains, known for the uniquely beautiful Issyk-Kul Lake, the fabulous ancient forests and the extremely mineral-rich subsoil. The subsoil in our country contains enormous natural resources: oil, gas, coal, gold, non-ferrous and rare metals, and many other riches. Kyrgyzstan enjoys vast hydropower potential and agricultural resources, both in terms of animal husbandry and plant-growing. Finally, the Kyrgyz are hard-working, talented and courageous people. In short, we have everything to live a prosperous life.

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From ancient times to the present all countries, big and small, have created at least one great and immortal masterpiece that reflects and glorifies the valor, wisdom, and beauty of man, as they were understood in that country. The Kyrgyz have such an immortal

cultural masterpiece. The heroic epos, Manas, the majestic epopee of the Kyrgyz people, is rightly regarded as one of the most prominent and unique monuments to the world of epic literature.

This epic is the summit and synthesis of all the rich poetic creativity of our people. With perfection and unique elegance of form, Manas combines complexity and variety, a richness of images, a colorful description of characters and their surroundings, all intertwined within the context of developments and events. I am proud to say that no other people enjoys such a poetic monument as Manas, an honor commonly recognized in the world. Manas is a valuable contribution made by the Kyrgyz people to the treasury of human culture.

The Kyrgyz have a long dramatic history, marked by great achievements and heavy losses, bitter misfortunes and glorious victories. The ancient origin of the Kyrgyz, their difficult and complicated historical development, their unique culture synthesized from many Central Asian civilizations should not be without interest for other nations, and, in particular, America.

I have already noted that the Kyrgyz people live in a very rich land. Nevertheless, today the country is very poor, largely because of certain events in our history and seventy years spent in the grip of a totalitarian system. This system deprived people of elementary incentives for an active life, physically and morally destroyed the business class, and plunged the economy in chaos.

Recently, I have noticed that people from certain Western countries grow irritated when I speak about our experience with a totalitarian regime. Their

reasoning runs something like this: you yourself created this regime, you quietly existed within it, now you must get out of it yourself—it is your problem. This view is far from true. Totalitarianism is the outcome of some irrational path in history. It was a tragedy, and like it or not the civilized world must also bear some guilt.

The subject of Soviet totalitarianism is inexhaustible, just like that of universal evil. It is important, however, to stress two points. First, socialism, as the system of life was defined in the former Soviet Union, proved to be a system without real owners. This made it impossible to have civilized economic and legal

relations and led to the negation of the economically and juridically free personality. It created a way of life based on dependence. This ultimately resulted in a deep economic crisis. But at the same time, I do not regard our past life only in dark colors. This would be objectively wrong and ideologically harmful. One Pharisaism and illusive social consciousness should not simply be replaced by another.

One should recognize the great living force of a truly socialist postulate: “. . . the free development of everyone is the precondition of the free development of all . . .” The ideals of collectivism and solidarity as the means to overcome alienation will certainly be preserved and expanded in all progressive countries. A socially oriented market economy, the democratization in all spheres of social life based on guaranteed human rights and liberties, the formation and development of a law-governed state and civil society, and the growing stability of one's private life, property and interests, are all fundamental components of the social system which we are creating in Kyrgyzstan.

### **Economic Reform: First Steps on the Way to the Market**

Today Kyrgyzstan is actively trying to overcome its economic crisis and build a market economy. In this effort we can learn much from the United States. Naturally, we will not follow its example mechanically, but use it in a creative manner by taking into account the specific features of our economic and political life.

The movement of Kyrgyzstan to a market economy is painful and sometimes contradictory. The republic faces growing inflation, economic recession, rising prices, and declining living standards. Fortunately, however, there are hopeful signs as well. Although invisible at first glance, various processes and phenomena are emerging and gaining force which should soon manifest themselves. For example, in May of 1993, we were the first in Central Asia to

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take the risky, but decisive, step of introducing our own national currency (the som). This will allow us to pursue an independent credit and monetary policy, and use the necessary techniques to curb inflation which is rampant in the ruble zone.

The economic mindset and psychology of our citizens have also undergone crucial changes. Fundamentally new relations based upon economic freedom are being established between manufacturers. Through privatization the private sector is rapidly developing. By early July 1993, 3,379 enterprises—or 22.3 percent of the country's total—had been privatized. Moreover, more than 12,000 new private enterprises have been registered in Kyrgyzstan. Recently, the number of joint ventures utilizing foreign capital has jumped to 112. The first six months of 1993 experienced almost a two-fold increase in the number of enterprises registering in Kyrgyzstan.

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As a result of the land reform, the formation of a multistructural economy in agriculture has become irreversible. The Parliament has adopted a number of laws designed to reform the agricultural sector. These laws open new opportunities for

independent economic activity by the rural population. Currently, the number of individual farms is over 16,700. These farms use about 300,000 hectares of agricultural land, including more than 128,000 hectares of arable land. Their total livestock exceeds 1.3 million sheep, 72,000 cattle, and 39,000 horses.

Another significant step in transforming Kyrgyzstan into a democratic state was the adoption of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic. In particular, the Constitution guarantees inviolability of private property and freedom of various forms of business activity. Businesses wishing to invest in other states naturally are interested in knowing the limits and forms of state economic regulation. Our Constitution provides for conditions in which all persons would be able to conduct business. I firmly believe that this is the only way to guarantee a comprehensive economic development of Kyrgyzstan. Meanwhile, recognition of every resident's right to free initiative does not diminish an active state role in economic matters. Under the Constitution, the state is responsible for taxation policies, for ensuring free competition, for preventing abuses and the emergence of monopolism. The modern economy requires the state to perform a regulatory function at the national level. However, I repeat that we have sufficient legal guarantees so that the state will not become an obstacle to private initiative.

As I have noted, Kyrgyz law guarantees legal protection to both public and private property. The Constitution stipulates that every resident of the republic is entitled to have property, to own, use and dispose of it at will, and to perform any economic activity on the basis of private property.

We understand very well that every country, as every man and woman, must be first of all self-reliant, even in a crisis. However, states, as people, cannot live long in isolation. After Kyrgyzstan obtained its independence in 1991, we, the people who came to leadership of the republic, encountered a very strong opposition, both from the Left and the Right. We were, and still are, reproached for looking both to the West and the East in searching for innovations that would bring new content to our politics, economy, work, and life. Some critics maintain that new ideas and new models must be taken only from our own life. Such opposition lacks common sense. A nation cannot consistently develop while ignoring achievements of world civilization. An excellent example of our course is the experience of America, which integrated the best traditions of various nations. This was one of most important contributing factors to the great progress of the United States.

Foreign experts, who have studied the state of the Kyrgyz economy and the ways to bring about an economic recovery have noted the need to obtain large financial resources from abroad. They concluded that even an overall mobilization of local resources for a period of fifty years would not

be enough to modernize basic sectors, restructure production, and create an industrial base. Taking into account the need to maintain a certain level of social welfare, the experts predicted that the lack of resources will become even more acute.

On the other hand, a necessary precondition for attracting foreign capital are laws on foreign investments. Such laws should guarantee safety of foreign investments, freedom of foreign business, repatriation of profits, and equal access for local and foreign businessmen to raw materials, labor, and land. We now have the Law on Foreign Investments, as well as the Law on Concessions and Foreign Concession Enterprises, and the Law on Mortgaging. In fact, in the opinion of prominent foreign experts, our republic has a rather developed legal framework for foreign investors.

Under the Law on Foreign Investments in the Kyrgyz Republic, the legal structure for foreign investments is preferential. This means that in no case may foreign investment be treated less favorably than that made by citizens of Kyrgyzstan. Foreign investors are guaranteed the right to repatriate capital. They can freely export profit in the form of foreign currency and products—either hand-made or purchased in the market. In addition, permission for foreign investments is not required. An investor need only meet the registration requirements. Moreover, tax benefits, including exemption from taxes, may be provided for up to ten years. Also, some exemptions from customs duties are

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provided.

Finally, foreign investors in Kyrgyzstan are given judicial protection, both through state and international arbitration. The republic guarantees unconditional implementation in its territory of decisions reached through international arbitration.

I would like to point out that our Law on Foreign Investments is the most attractive of all similar laws adopted in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union. In Kyrgyzstan, as a guarantee for meeting obligations under foreign investment we have provided for mortgaging of natural resources. This and other laws make me optimistic that American businesses which are interested in cooperating with our businesses and in engaging in economic activity in our republic will not have any legal problems.

### **Rights and Freedoms in Kyrgyzstan**

With great satisfaction and justified pride I can state that we in Kyrgyzstan have already achieved some results in building the basis of a democratic state. In its 1992 review, the prominent U.S.-based non-governmental organization Freedom House gave a very high rating to Kyrgyzstan in the area of civil rights and

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obligations. These rights consist of the inviolability of the person, including freedom from arbitrary arrest, detention or exile, non-interference with private life and property, freedom of speech and press, freedom of peaceful meetings and demonstrations, freedom of religion, the right of citizens to change the government, openness to international and non-governmental investigation of human rights violations, and labor relations. In other words, by the above criteria our republic is at par with Germany, Finland, Japan, and Greece.

### **The Kyrgyz and Democracy**

I will try to answer the question of how we could achieve some results in building the democratic way of life despite the economic crisis. First of all, I dare say that in Kyrgyzstan the seeds of democracy are sown in fertile soil, because many centuries ago we had already practiced democratic elections of statesmen. During this period a remarkable woman—Kurmanjan—was elected to the high post of governess (*datka*). Therefore, applying Professor Jackson Turner's explanation of the origin of democracy in the United States, which he said was not brought from Europe but shaped by the American frontier, I may declare that our democracy came down from the Ala-Too mountains.

Second, it becomes increasingly evident to us that a nation which has lived without any civil rights will experience crisis when it gets an opportunity to live

in freedom. This crisis is both dangerous and unavoidable. It can be said without exaggeration that living free can bring incredible possibilities. At the same time, however, there is nothing more difficult than learning to live free. Freedom, as our experience has already shown, is born under stormy conditions and can be consolidated only with great difficulty among civil discord. Accordingly, it is said, the charm of freedom can be felt only when it reaches a venerable age.

There are three factors hindering the development of democracy in the Newly Independent States: the former Party *nomenklatura*, our non-democratic folk traditions, and ethnic confrontation. I believe we have managed to weaken the influence of the former *nomenklatura* to a certain extent. Our policy has been based on the concept that now, more than ever before, Kyrgyzstan needs political centrism. Having gone through the 1991 after-putsch euphoria, our society has rapidly radicalized and split into opposing factions. The worsening economic situation provoked the rise of group and clan interests and social tensions leading to bitterness in the political struggle and moral climate.

We have tried, step by step, to avoid confrontation and reach political compromises—tactical compromises, I would add, not strategic ones. With some effort, it seems, we have obtained some results.

#### **Our Goal Is Inter-Ethnic Harmony**

Kyrgyzstan is a multi-ethnic country inhabited by Kyrgyz, Russians, Uzbeks, Ukrainians, Tajiks, Belarusians, Uigurs, Dungans, Koreans, Germans, and many other people belonging to scores of different ethnic groups. With this in mind, I must note that in the former Soviet republics the struggle against totalitarianism and the imperial center was first of all a national revolution. Hence, the priority of nations over human rights and interests was stated often as a basic principle. In some cases this resulted in the neglect of humanitarian ideals and norms of international law. We also witnessed examples when ambitious and power-seeking forces usurped the right to determine national interests and tried in a perverted way to impose them on the citizens of the respective republics. Therefore, one of our top priorities is to establish inter-ethnic peace and harmony. We have been doing and continue to do everything possible to solve all the problems related to our ethnic minorities.

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#### **The Kyrgyz and Islam**

Undoubtedly, Islam is an element of the Kyrgyz culture, history, and way of life. I personally have a deep respect for the moral values of Islam as well as those of other religions. I wholeheartedly agree with the postulate of America's Founding

Fathers, that “if God does not rule us, then tyrants will rule us.” However, I am and always have been a staunch and committed opponent of any religious extremism, including Islamic fundamentalism.

With all responsibility, I can state that Islamic fundamentalists advocating the priority of a religious leader over state structures will not rule Kyrgyzstan. Islam has never penetrated deeply into the life of the wide masses of the Kyrgyz people. It cannot influence their self-identification and has never been closely related to the search for their national identity. Although Islam is not the only religion in Kyrgyzstan and there is no Islamic fundamentalism in the country, at the same time we cannot ignore the significance of the Islamic factor in today's international relations. For Muslims in Kyrgyzstan and for all other citizens, irrespective of their religion, this is important because there are potential benefits from contacts with Islamic countries.

### **Freedom of the Press**

Alexis de Tocqueville, a shrewd observer of democracy in America, wrote in his book on the subject:

At the present time an oppressed member of the community has . . . only one method of self-defense: he may appeal to the whole nation . . . . The only means he has of making this appeal is by the press. Thus the liberty of the press is infinitely more valuable among democratic nations than among all others . . . . The press places a powerful weapon within every man's reach, which the weakest and loneliest of them all may use . . . . Printing has accelerated the progress of equality, and it is also one of its best correctives . . . the press is the chief democratic instrument of freedom.

Our understanding of democracy is based on the recognition that the freedom of the press is its priority principle, that is, its categorical imperative. Freedom of the press gives us confidence in the common sense of man, the encouragement of free thinking, and the right to question and change the existing order. Finally, freedom of the press harmonizes with the dignity of a free person, and no institution, be it government, parliament, courts and the president, has a monopoly on the truth.

The movement of the American colonialists against the colonial power gave a strong impulse for the development of democratic ideas. The spreading of these ideas was carried out by many public organizations, such as the Sons of Freedom, Daughters of Freedom, correspondent committees, and city councils. They later became the creators of the United States Constitution. The press played an important role during the American Revolution as well as during the creation of the Bill of Rights, whose ideas were later reflected in the Declaration of Independence.

I mention this moment of American history because the “velvet revolution” in Kyrgyzstan also started with glasnost. Freedom of the press was used by democrats to deal a crushing blow to the forces representing the totalitarian regime. Freedom of the press entered the life of Kyrgyzstan as a result of the general yearning for democratic development. It came out of the struggle for state independence and sovereignty, the rejection of the total ideological control of politics, culture, literature, and the desire to destroy the monopoly on public opinion. An important step in this direction was the Law on Mass Media, which banned censorship of the press.

The new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic gives wide and solid legal guarantees to the press. It proclaims that everyone in the country has a right to “free expression and dissemination of thoughts, ideas, and views, to the freedom of publishing, broadcasting and dissemination of information.” This

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freedom is one of our basic human rights which, under our Constitution, belongs to everyone from birth and is recognized as absolute and inalienable, and protected by law and courts from any violations.

Today, more than 90 newspapers and magazines are published in Kyrgyzstan. About half are issued in Kyrgyz, twenty in both Kyrgyz and Russian, ten in Russian only, four in Uzbek, five in German, one in Turkish, and one in Dungan. As this shows, the observance of rights and freedoms of ethnic minorities, including in the sphere of mass media, is an important aspect of the democratic course of Kyrgyzstan.

The spectrum of the national press is also very wide. There are parliamentary newspapers (*Erkin Too*—Free Mountains), governmental ones (*Kyrgyz Tuusu*—The Word of Kyrgyzstan), trade unionist (*El Zharchysy*—The People's Tribune), party (*Erk*—newspaper of the democratic party Erkin Kyrgyzstan), business circles (*Businessman, Panorama*), and independent (*Respublika, Asaba*).

Today, journalists, politicians, and officials in Kyrgyzstan are learning the difficult art of coexistence in an open society. In countries with long-established traditions, such relations are free from controversies, irreconcilable confrontations, and conflicts. For us, this has yet to be learned. However, it may surprise Americans that the press rigidly controls all our institutions of state power—first the president, then the government, and lastly the Parliament.

Opposing actions of the state and the criticism by the press are coming both from the Left and Right. The necessary level of culture is not always maintained; even elementary ethical norms are sometimes violated. However, we, as representatives of the state power, exercise restraint and avoid any limitations of

the freedom of press.

The opposition press sometimes carries much influence on the process of state decision-making. For example, during the final stage of consideration of the official draft Constitution, formulated by the Constitutional Commission, the press suddenly started a heated public debate over this draft. Moreover, the press published two alternative versions and demanded that the Parliament take them into account. The Parliament complied.

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But freedom must be balanced by responsibility. Kyrgyzstan has still a long way to go before this is achieved. What exists today is an immature freedom, which is an abyss that may devour the state and lead to arbitrary rule and populist practices. Such a gap between freedom and responsibility is one of the great social dangers for all our society,

including the press. Will democracy in Kyrgyzstan be able to limit itself? This is an important question which requires serious consideration by everyone, including the press.

In this respect I would like, somewhat tongue-in-cheek (although every joke contains elements of truth), to recall the words of Jefferson: “The man who never looks into a newspaper is better informed than he who reads them: inasmuch as he who knows nothing is nearer to truth than he whose mind is filled with falsehoods and errors.” How irritated must Jefferson have been to say such words! However, after each “whipping” of the government in the press, I tend to agree with him.

### **The New Constitution of Kyrgyzstan**

On 5 May 1993, the first Constitution of a free and independent Kyrgyz state in the long history of our people was adopted. The central aspect in it is the human personality. A fundamental idea is that man, by nature and destiny, is superior to the state. He is primary, while the state is secondary. Many rights and freedoms of man originate in his nature, are of natural character and are provided to him from Heaven. Under our Constitution, the state must recognize these rights and freedoms. It can regulate their enjoyment, but in no case deprive them.

The work on the drafting and adoption of the Constitution was difficult. The administration and opposition had long and tough confrontations. Passions ran high, the debate grew intense, opinions clashed, and, finally, we reached a political compromise on the day the Supreme Soviet voted for the Constitution. This method of adopting the Constitution, quite normal for a democratic society, stands as a credit to our Republic.

I view a political compromise as an optimum in politics. Indeed, it is not always the only alternative, but certainly the best in our particular condition. And examples from American history support this view. The historic compromise which led to the formation of the United States of America and the adoption of the United States Constitution reflected a similar process. At the time the political culture was infused with the progressive ideas of the 18th century. In turn, these ideas were balanced by a need to maintain continuity in the political process. This compromise did not and could not solve all the current problems, but it did serve to lay a solid basis for stability and future prosperity.

In the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic we managed quite comprehensively and clearly to enshrine such noble democratic ideas as the priority of human rights and freedoms over all other values; solid guarantees of private interests, private property and private life; the national revival of the Kyrgyz; and the protection and development of all ethnic minorities co-existing in Kyrgyzstan, following our forefathers' behests to live in unity, peace, and harmony. We proclaimed our commitment to common moral principles and moral values of national traditions, and also our wish to live among other peoples as a free and democratic civil society.

Under the Constitution, the state structure is based on the following principles: division of powers, nation-wide election for the head of state—the president—and the division of powers between the central administration and local authorities. The office of the president does not belong to any branch of power but presides over the state as a whole. Despite this important beginning, it is clear that the adoption of the Constitution is only the first step in establishing a state governing structure.

In connection with this, I recall the following historical fact. Right after the closing of the United States Constitutional Convention, Benjamin Franklin, one of its most able members, was asked the question: “Well doctor what have we got, a republic or a monarchy?” He answered: “A republic if you can keep it.” I believe that if our contemporaries or our descendants should ask us, “What did you give us with your Constitution?,” we would be able to answer with a clear conscience and without blushing, “We gave you a real opportunity to live in conditions of democracy and freedom. Your task is to preserve it, make this opportunity real and a priority in your life.”

Few today can maintain that the modern political climate is mild and stable; rather, it is the opposite. The complete military, political, economic, and moral hegemony of the free world cannot conceal from us the new threats to the tranquility of civilization. The world is divided like never before. The demon of chauvinism, somewhat forgotten in the course of the past decades, is gaining strength in the vast areas of Eurasia. The national revival of peoples, the fierce group clashes, the overall frustration of values are all intertwined in the territory of the former USSR in a tangle of hatred, destruction, self-delusion, and mutual

alienation. Similar processes are gaining momentum (having never subsided) in Southeast Asia, Africa, and the Islamic Orient.

Many ideas dealing with external and internal affairs were formulated for other times and other problems. At present, these ideas and political concepts, which were of interest at the moment of their proclamation and were in accordance with the needs at that time, have become worn-out clichés and empty slogans.

### **What We hope to Gain from the CIS**

The realization of the idea of the Commonwealth of Independent States requires an in-depth scientific analysis and comprehensive framework. The CIS may help to avoid an uncontrolled disintegration of the Union, or else it may serve as a means of escaping reality. It can be a way toward economic, military and cultural integration, or a means of self-deception for politicians wishing (sincerely or not) to preserve in some form the community of peoples living in the former Union. The creation of the CIS can be presented to the public as a tactical subterfuge on the part of the forces seeking to recreate the Union on a qualitatively new basis. It could also be an unrealized opportunity of a historical compromise which could be an alternative to the social and political cataclysm observed now in vast areas of the former USSR.

As a result of a prevailing irrationality in the political actions which founded the CIS, its legal status still remains vague. Some aspects of the legal basis of the CIS are so specific that at times it is necessary to analyze it as a phenomenon which cannot be put into the general framework and forms of international cooperation. First of all, those wishing to celebrate the anniversary of the CIS will find it difficult. The CIS has, in fact, two anniversaries: 8 December and 21 December 1991, as well as two places of birth: Miensk and Almati, and two reasons to be born: the Agreement of 3 in Miensk and Agreement of 11 in Almati.

Obvious discrepancies exist in both the structure and functions of the CIS. On the one hand, it has some elements of confederation, and on the other there are no elementary ties necessary for any association. All the former Union republics have established their own national citizenship, but not all of them have exchanged the uniform Soviet passports of their citizens for new ones. They all have concluded treaties with foreign states outside the CIS, but not all of them have organized protection of their borders where state border posts of the defunct USSR still remain. The Commonwealth functions on the basis of the rather unusual principle of the possibility for selective, partial participation. In conditions of the growing polarization in positions of CIS members, this principle contributes to destabilization and could result in ambiguous situations. For example, the Agreement on Powers of CIS Higher Defense Bodies of 20

March 1992 was signed by seven countries, and the Agreement on the Use of Air Space of 15 May 1992 was signed by six. Yet, all are considered to be CIS members!

Arguments in favor of strengthening the CIS are not supported by the Commonwealth's structure, which is comprised of the Interparliamentary Assembly, which was set up at the meeting of Chairmen of Supreme Soviets in Almati on 27 March 1992 by seven states of the former Union. This is because the Assembly is characterized by a significant political irrationality. Its objectives go beyond the normal international practice of relations between parliaments. It lays claim not only to consideration of questions of interparliamentary cooperation, but also to dealing with political and socio-economic problems related to the competence of heads of CIS member countries.

In brief, the prospects of maintaining a geostrategic unity in the territory of the former Union are not bright. At the same time, maintaining some kind of unity is very important to the most essential measurement of all political processes and developments: the human

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measurement. The breakdown of the USSR dealt a heavy blow to human ties, and to the destinies of people having common families, a common culture, common history, and a common native land. For this reason, I would like to believe that the integration processes in the former Union will prevail over the processes of disintegration and decay.

In any case, the CIS member countries should clearly formulate on a scientific basis the areas of joint interstate activity, i.e., specific functions which would merit the establishment of various international and even supranational structures. It would probably be possible to form a common position on key international problems and take common political initiatives. Efforts should begin with issues where a community of interests is certain (e.g., the non-proliferation of weapons of mass-destruction and the means of their delivery, the protection of the environment, the struggle against terrorism, and illegal drug trafficking).

I fully associate myself with those who maintain that to live up to its name, the CIS must ensure strict observance of human rights in all member countries, establish quickly a commission for human rights, and remain committed to its efficient work. Furthermore, I have repeatedly stated that CIS member countries must resolutely promote mutually beneficial cooperation in non-public sectors. For example, at the level of private business structures, manufacturing enterprises and their customers must enjoy free and direct relations. We all must support efforts to organize businesses into industry-specific unions, and to

establish various transnational corporations and associations in industry, agriculture, energy, transportation, and services. Participation in such corporations and associations of business circles from the United States, Japan, and Europe would have very positive results for all parties.

### **The Major Problems of Kyrgyzstan**

The transition from a totalitarian regime to democracy in Kyrgyzstan, as in Russia and some other states of the former Soviet Union, has occurred somewhat illogically. First we are trying to establish freedom of information, a free press, and freedom of association, but all in the absence of a political culture. Then we will strive to establish political freedom, but in the absence of political parties, a middle class, and a social strata of proprietors. Only after that will we enact economic freedom, while lacking developed property relations, primarily private property.

This sequence of major political processes and events could not but create a complex of difficult-to-surmount social obstacles on our way to social progress. In my opinion, an in-depth theoretical study is needed for such practical and very realistic problems as the separation of powers, and the checks and balances between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches. In relation to this problem, canonization of works by Charles Montesquieu and John Locke sometimes acquires a truly grotesque character (as any thoughtless canonization of a person).

It can hardly be accepted as a gospel truth that the parliamentary regime is the most democratic form of power, even in the absence of the ruling and opposition parties, and that a parliament is the incarnation of democracy. Historical examples such as the rule of demagogues in Athens, the degradation of the Senate in Rome, and the National Convent during the French Revolution, among others, clearly show that even representative institutions can be extinguished or transformed from democratic entities when they abandon their main function of law-making, law-supervising and budgeting, and become the principal political regulator of public opinion and the collective representative of the national idea.

I am coming increasingly to the conclusion that the idealization of representative bodies is no less dangerous than a cult of personality. I remind you of the words of one of democracy's staunchest advocates—Thomas Jefferson: “The executive in our government is not the sole, it is scarcely the principal object of my jealousy. The tyranny of the legislatures is the most formidable dread at present and will be for long years.” These words were supported by James Madison, John Jay, and Alexander Hamilton.

We believe that our decision to include in the Constitution that the president of the Republic cannot belong to any of the state branches has helped to establish a harmony of state power and overcome internal confrontations. He must be the guarantor of their unity and interaction. I am thinking more and more about the

problem of political centrism. There are still many pending questions, to which science has not yet given any answers. In my opinion, this is one of the major problems for all post-totalitarian societies, and is especially acute for the CIS countries, which have just recently embarked on the way towards democracy. The collapse of the totalitarian system resulted in the rapid proliferation of political parties, public movements, and organizations which lack any social base. This mix of parties is not yet capable of ensuring a solid configuration of political systems. In most cases, the parties do not represent any real political forces and do not enjoy mass support. They still face, meanwhile, the complicated problem of making political coalitions that reflect the opinions and the will of a majority of the population.

The emergence and growth of a middle class in Kyrgyzstan will be possible only as a result of a consistently centrist policy. It should be based on the realization of common interests, such as socio-political stability, social buffering of the severe consequences

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of economic reforms, the ideology of accord and compromise, and a balance of interests.

According to philosophers, the victory of democracy in Kyrgyzstan over the Communist Party forces in October 1990, when the Soviet Union and its imperial center with the army and secret police still existed, was a violation of "the natural course of things." As experience shows, the natural course ferociously seeks its revenge after every violation. Speaking in the language of asceticism, after every gust of benefaction, there comes theomachism and the kingdom of demons.

The spirit which led our people to the victory in October 1990 has not disappeared and, moreover, cannot disappear. We only need to unite it with strong and deep political thinking to verify it, in the words of a poet, with the "algebra of harmony." We believe that we have enough force, will, and intellect to overcome the present economic situation and successfully solve our current problems. I do not know when this will take place, but I am confident we will not perish among the wreckage of the Soviet empire. We will survive in this cruel and often unwise world.

I will finish my article with a question: Are we living in the past or have we already entered the future, the day of tomorrow? It seems we have already started on a new path. Suffering goes hand in hand with hope, and sorrow with the awakened energy of free people. We are stepping over the closed past years, and out into the world which is open to all the winds of life, into the world which fights with the same problems as we do.