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KYRGYZSTAN: POLITICAL INSTABILITY – THE MAIN THREAT OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE COUNTRY¹

The article focuses on such an acute problem for us, as the impact of political stability on the socio-economic development.

The fact is that, in today's Kyrgyzstan there is a number of different threats, both external and internal ones, which represent an immediate danger to the national interests. From this number of threats, we believe, political instability is the most pressing problem for Kyrgyzstan. According to a recent survey 68.3 percent representatives of small medium businesses believe the main obstacle to economic development is political instability.²

As is known, there are different models of political stability improvement. One of them is the establishment of a rigid vertical of power with the subordinate center of decision making. Another model is maintaining stability through total control of mood and behavior of citizens. The third model of political stability is based on public consensus and democratic principles. In this understanding, political stability is the state of the political system, characterized by the availability of the necessary conditions and factors that maintain the social identity, civil peace and reconciliation on the basis of balancing the interests of different social actors and political forces, timely legitimate resolution of arising problems and contradictions in politics by statutory mechanisms and funds.

Different countries choose different models. For example, availability of diverse models for providing political stability is well observed in our Central Asian region.

Kyrgyzstan is searching for its model of political stability for more than twenty years. Central to this model is the question of the organization of the government-

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² www.24.kg.org

tal authorities. In the first years of independence everyone seemed to agree that the best model is a parliamentary-presidential republic, which is able to balance the interests of the public and the elite. But the political leader in power at that time and his environment, decided that in the situation of complete imbalance of the social system, caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union, only a strong single leader will be able to implement drastic systemic reforms in the country and bring it to the road of democracy and prosperity. A course was targeted to the establishment of a rigid vertical of power.

Thus, there was a gap between the ideals and the values approved by the ruling elite, and social expectations that dominated in consciousness of masses; the so called conflict of interests occurred. But the authorities did not pay any attention to this disparity, and it was only concerned with strengthening their positions in the state Olymp (series of referendums on constitutional amendments, parliamentary and presidential elections). Of course, the authorities had no time to deal with the socio-economic problems.

Gradually, the gap has become a chasm, there was a power alienation from society, which resulted in the serious deterioration of the social situation of the population. And as expected, in March 2005, there have been mass protests that led to the downfall of the regime.

New group which came to power on a wave of popular protests, unfortunately, has not learned lessons from the events of March 2005. The people demanded real participation in governmental processes, ending the use of power for personal, clan and tribal interests, the removal of members of the family and people close to the state leader from making important political and economic decisions.

However, the ruling group acted exactly the opposite. Presidential power was expanded in the country, the unconstitutional government bodies were created, which were entrusted with prominent state power, parliament became an available tool of institutionalization taken in the narrow “family” circle of decision-making. In essence, there is a “privatization” of the state and the country by members of the President’s family.

And the opposition was also adequate. In April 2010 there was a social explosion that led to the downfall of the government. Unfortunately, it hadn’t gone without human casualties.

Thus, almost twenty years long the country was of a “fever”. Annual statistics show that more than 1,000 rallies and other protest actions took place in the country (the biggest was in 2005, when more than 2, 500 rallies were registered).³

In such cases, of course, we cannot speak of any serious socio-economic development. Here are a few indicators. The average value of economic growth in 2001–2011 amounted to less than 4.3 percent. Economic growth performance of Kyrgyzstan in this period was the lowest among the CIS countries.

Kyrgyzstan was strongly dependent on external assistance (national debt amounted to 3.1 billion USD), due to which the country produces more than 25

³ I. Shestakov, *Rallies in Kyrgyzstan are the main way to get power*, www.akipress.org

percent of revenues. External migration by various estimates reached from 500 to 800 thousand people.

According to international studies in 2009, Kyrgyzstan was the poorest state of the CIS. Below the poverty line was about 32 per cent of the total population, or more than 1.7 million people, of which 76.0 per cent lived in rural areas. Average life expectancy is only 63.5 years.⁴

These are disappointing results. By the way, some of the leaders of neighboring states in the region often use them as a shining negative example, making an accent that political instability will inevitably lead to such deplorable socio-economic outcomes, thus justifying the existing political regimes in their countries.

In this case, we can only agree with the first part of these statements. Indeed, the constant companions of the political instability in the economic sphere is a sharp decline in investment activity, capital out-flow, corruption, shadow economy and the state budget deficit, etc. And this all together exacerbates the social situation of the population, life of people becomes more and more difficult.

But one can hardly agree with the fact that the citizens for the sake of peace and material prosperity can permanently waive their rights and freedom, and suffer the dictates of power over them.

Despite the dramatic and sometimes tragic political events, Kyrgyzstan without any doubt, has chosen the right way. The vast majority of Kyrgyz citizens firmly believe that political stability and sustainable development in the long term is possible only on the principles of social consensus, accountability, eligibility and changeability of power based on the independent will of the citizens, and guarantee of civil rights and liberties.

These fundamental principles have been legislatively recognized in the new Constitution of Kyrgyz Republic, adopted in June 27, 2010.

However, it is premature to state that Kyrgyzstan reached its long-awaited stability. For example, there were 1,390 rallies and other protest actions in 2012.⁵ However, they were mainly localized and small-scale. Although, admittedly, had a negative impact on the investment climate in the economy.

But more important is that with the adoption of the Constitution the most problematic factor, which led large masses of people to street protests, was eliminated. Today, there is no concentration of the power in the hands of one leader, as well as no family and clan governance with all its consequences.

In addition, the current President A. Atambayev made it clear that at the end of his powers he will, according to Constitution, hand over his position to the next leader of the state.

This has had a calming effect on the political situation and the positive impact on the economy. In the coming years, according to forecasts of international financial institutions, the economic growth rate is expected to be ranged as 7.0 – 8.0 percent.

⁴ *Strategy of sustainable development of Kyrgyzstan in 2013–2017*, www.kabar.kg

⁵ www.akipress.org

However, there are still factors, which can provoke political instability. The main of them is lack of trust to the government.

Unfortunately, judiciary and law enforcement agencies completely discredited themselves (attempts to reform them so far have no positive results), Parliament, the government and local executive bodies cause extremely weak confidence. Leader of the State is perceived more tolerant by the society.

Again, the problem lies in the gap between the slogans proclaimed by those who are now in power, and their actual deeds. Society is waiting for an uncompromising struggle against corruption, the rule of law in the country, creating a mobile and efficient system of governance.

While, the result is something different in fact. For example, in 2012, 171 senior officials (ministers, deputy ministers, judges, etc.) were prosecuted in corruption cases, but only 3 of them were convicted by the court. At the end of 2012 Kyrgyzstan was at the 154th position in the index of “Perception of corruption”.⁶

Recently published research study of Swedish political scientist I. Engvall, which proposes a hard-hitting, but the objective conclusion that the public service in Kyrgyzstan has become a unique and attractive investment market to recover illegal profits.

It is difficult to call the citizens to the legislature, regarding that even at the highest echelons of power show basic disrespect for the law. Parliament often interferes with the executive and administrative competence of the government, and the government, in its turn, ignores the parliament’s decisions. Incidentally, surveys confirm that the rule of law is one of the main expectations of all sectors of population.

The process of monopolization of the most important government positions by political parties with a majority in the parliament is still having place. And here the priority is not the professionalism and competence, but party affiliation, family ties and friendly relations. In this regard, we cannot speak about the effective state management.

Thus, the most important factor that will ensure political stability in Kyrgyzstan today is the trust of the society to authorities. Credibility is not lost completely yet. There is still time to meet the expectations of the people. What the authorities need is to show strong political will. In this case, Kyrgyzstan will be developing steadily, in a democratic way.

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⁶ “Delo №” 2013, April 4.