



SADYR JAPAROV'S ERA IN KYRGYZSTAN: AN EVALUATION ON FOREIGN POLICY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENTS

The constitutional amendment referendum and local council elections (kenesh) were held together in Kyrgyzstan on April 11th 2021. According to the Kyrgyzstan Central Election Commission (CEC), while 1.295.096 people (39.09%) voted in the local council elections, 1.338.717 people (37.12%) voted for the referendum in 2.483 ballot boxes throughout the country. While 79.37% of voters supported the new constitutional draft, 13.67% opposed it in the referendum. By looking at these numbers we can state that the rule of voting at least 30% of the total 3.606.201 voters in the country, which is necessary for the referendum to be considered valid, is fulfilled.

Constitutional amendments brought to the agenda by President Sadyr Japarov are among the reasons for holding a referendum in the country. Among the most important issues of these changes are the transitions of the country from a parliamentary structure to a presidential model. On March 11th 2021, the deputies of the Kyrgyz Parliament (Jogorku Kenesh) approved the draft law to hold a referendum on the "Law on the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic" and set the referendum date as April 11th 2021. Within the political system of Kyrgyzstan, there are also articles such as the establishment of a new institution called "People's Congress" and reducing the number of deputies in the parliament from 120 to 90.

There have been criticisms from the opposition stating that return to the presidential system and the reductions of the number of deputies in the parliament were moves to increase the political power of the presidency. This is the 11th and the second referendum in the 2021 in the political history of Kyrgyzstan. It has been observed that the country has experienced a turbulent period in its political life in recent years, and the protests that took place after the October 4th 2020 parliamentary elections led to the cancellation of the election results and the resignation of the incumbent President Sooronbay Jeenbekov. In order to overcome the political crisis in the country, early presidential elections were held on January 10th 2021 where Sadyr Japarov won the elections by receiving 1.110.412 (79.20%) votes.

President Japarov advocates for the transition to the presidential system through referendum on ending the political turmoil in

the country, ensuring stability and proposing solutions to the social, economic and other problems of the country. On this point the issue of having additional powers that will allow to increase the political power of the presidential office and the possibility of amending the provisions regarding the term of office of the president are also discussed. In addition to these, it is expected that the new advisory body People's Congress would be established.

Issues such as improving the state of the country's economy and increasing the welfare of the people are among the leading issues on the agenda of President Japarov in the economic field. In terms of ensuring this, Japarov argued that savings measures should be increased by reducing financially inefficient work. As an example for this, in his Presidential oath ceremony, he stated that they would fulfil only the mandatory procedures required by law and funds from the state budget should be allocated to the needs of the people. Administrative reforms in this regard are expected to enable economic growth and stability, and will enable the country to attract more foreign investment and create wider opportunities for realization of long-term investments.

President Japarov aims to strengthen relations with important actors in the region such as neighboring countries and Russia in the international arena. Therefore he made his first official visit to Russia on February 24th 2021 and met with his counterpart, Vladimir Putin. After the meeting, the information that took place in the press included that in the near future Russian investors would invest in various areas of Kyrgyzstan. At this point, Russian-Kyrgyz Development Fund announced that as of May 1st 2021, approximately 3.000 projects worth 434 million dollars were approved in all regions of the country. When we look at the sectoral distribution of these investments, manufacturing takes the lead with 30%, followed by the agricultural sector with 23%. Moreover, it is planned to invest around 12% in the fields of transport and logistics, tourism and infrastructure development.

President Japarov made his second official visit to Kazakhstan. During the visit, approximately 180 documents were signed between Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in the fields of political, economic, humanitarian

aid and investment. Considering that Kazakhstan has invested more than 1 billion dollars in the economy of Kyrgyzstan in the past 15 years, it is stated that investment issues between the two countries are among the important topics of the meetings. The parties also signed an agreement to increase relations between young people and discussed the possibility of increasing the number of Kyrgyz students in Kazakhstan universities by 10 times, increasing the number of scholarships to 50 and opening a branch of one of the leading universities. In addition, further development of the consultation meeting format of Central Asian leaders, joint action against the COVID-19 pandemic, and medical assistance were also considered.

President Japarov made his third official visit to Uzbekistan on March 11th 2021. During the visit, the Presidents of the two countries discussed the issues of cooperation in political, trade, economy, transportation and communication, and other fields. During the meeting the importance of development of commercial and economic cooperation was pointed out and it was also noted that commercial and economic relations are key areas for strategic cooperation between the two countries. During the negotiations, the goal was set to double the bilateral trade volume in the next few years by diversifying and expanding trade between the two countries and reducing trade barriers. Moreover, views were exchanged on the idea of establishing the Kyrgyz-Uzbek Investment Fund.

As a result, President Japarov has made significant gains in the international arena with his visits to countries that are important in line with the foreign policy of his country, both in the development of bilateral relations and in providing support in many areas from foreign investment to education, health and humanitarian aid. While increasing the powers of the presidency on the one hand, on the other hand with the establishment of People's Congress shows that he will govern the country in a new political system and understanding. We will see in the future what kinds of gains and experiences this change will bring to Kyrgyzstan and whether President Japarov will achieve his promised goals.

Politics, Foreign Affairs, and Security

- The President of Kazakhstan Kassym-Jomart Tokayev made an official visit to Tajikistan, where he had a meeting with his Tajik counterpart Emomali Rakhmon. The Presidents discussed a wide range of issues, including the strategic partnership, strengthening the political dialogue, trade, economic investment, cultural, and humanitarian cooperation. They paid special attention to issues of ensuring security and stability in Central Asia. President Tokayev expressed heartfelt gratitude to the President of Tajikistan for exceptional hospitality and mentioned the importance of strengthening bilateral cooperation (Kazinform, 20.05.2021).
- Within the framework of the regular meeting of the Collective Security Treaty Organization's Ministerial Council in Dushanbe, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan and Russia Ruslan Kazakbaev and Sergei Lavrov held bilateral talks. The Ministers discussed the implementation of the previously reached agreements and exchanged views on topical issues of Kyrgyz-Russian cooperation. Sergei Lavrov noted the need to continue the negotiation process on the delimitation and demarcation of the Kyrgyz-Tajik state border (Kabar, 19.05.2021).
- The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova signed a memorandum in Kyiv that formalizes their cooperation on a joint path towards membership in the EU. The three former Soviet states agreed to develop joint initiatives in dialogue with EU institutions and coordinate their positions within the Eastern Partnership. By doing so, the three countries confirmed their European aspirations and committed themselves to coordinate their actions in implementing reforms and modernization plans (Balkaninsight, 18.05.2021).
- The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan Sirojiddin Mukhriddin received the EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian. The parties exchanged views on cooperation within frameworks of the EU and Central Asia, the EU's New Strategy for the region and the EU's program in Tajikistan. The sides also discussed issues of regional security and stability, the situation in Afghanistan, threats of terrorism and extremism. The importance of cooperation between the EU and Central Asia and dialogues on political, security and human rights issues were emphasized during the meeting (Centralasia.media, 22.05.2021).
- The Supreme Eurasian Economic Council meeting was held online under the chairmanship of Kazakhstan with the participation of the heads of all five member-states. The Presidents of Uzbekistan and Cuba were also invited to the meeting as heads of observer states to the Eurasian Economic Union. The agenda of the event included current issues of practical cooperation in various sectors of the economy such as further reducing barriers to trade, industrial cooperation, facilitation of transit and transportation and other topics. The participants adopted a number of documents at the end of the meeting (Centralasia.media, 19.05.2021).
- Minister of Defense of Kyrgyzstan Taalaibek Omuraliev received the newly appointed Ambassador of Turkey to Kyrgyzstan, Ahmet Sadik Dogan. The sides exchanged views on the current state and further prospects of bilateral cooperation in the military sphere. The sides also noted the need to build up the existing potential in the field of military and military-technical cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey. Minister Omuraliev congratulated Ambassador Dogan on his appointment to a high and responsible position (Kabar.kg, 20.05.2021).

Economy, Finance, and Energy

- To ensure food security, the Government of Kazakhstan developed a new set of measures. It plans to implement 285 investment projects, which aim to substitute imports of food and agricultural products. In 2021, four dairy farms, two poultry farms and one fruit storage were constructed in Kazakhstan. Currently, the authorities and business community are creating seven large ecosystems for the production and processing of food products. The Government plans to achieve self-sufficiency in many food products up to 80% (Qazaq TV, 20.05.2021).
- According to the Association of Kazakhstan Automobile Business, during the four months of 2021, the sales of Uzbek Chevrolet cars in Kazakhstan surged by almost 5000% compared to the same period last year. In particular, citizens of Kazakhstan purchased 8923 Uzbek cars, while in the previous year sales amounted to 186 units. As a result, the brand topped the list of the best-selling car models in Kazakhstan (UzReport, 19.05.2021).
- According to the board of director of the Kumtor Gold Company Tengiz Bolturuk, the National Bank of Kyrgyzstan will purchase all gold from the Kumtor gold mine. Currently, all accounts of Kumtor company are frozen and are located outside Kyrgyzstan. In this regard a trilateral agreement between the National Bank, Kumtor Gold Company and Kyrgyz Altyn is being prepared for purchasing gold from the Kumtor. In February 2021, the Parliament of Kyrgyzstan established a State Commission to inspect Kumtor's operations. Kumtor Gold Company is a subsidiary of the Canadian gold mining company Centerra Gold Inc (Kabar, 20.05.2021).
- Minister of Finance and Economy of Turkmenistan Mukhammetgeldy Serdarov had a working meeting with the head of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) office in Turkmenistan Fatih Turkmenoglu. The parties discussed prospects for the participation of the bank in municipal projects in Turkmenistan and assistance in the development of financial markets in the country. They also considered issues of financing small business projects. Turkmenistan's cooperation with the bank in the non-state sector improved and the EBRD started to finance a number of projects (Orient, 19.05.2021).
- The Deputy Prime Minister of Ukraine for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration Olha Stefanishyna announced that the EU might decide to allocate the second tranche of macro-financial assistance to Ukraine in the amount of €600 million in September. In order to receive the tranche, Ukraine needs to fulfill the necessary conditions. In April of 2020, the European Commission decided to provide Ukraine with €1.2 billion financial assistance, half of which Ukraine received in December 2020 (Ukrinform, 21.05.2021).
- Bilateral cooperation between Azerbaijan and the UK is deepening. Recently, the two countries signed a memorandum of understanding on clean energy transition during the fourth session of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission on economic cooperation held in Baku on May 20. The memorandum aims to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the fields of renewable energy, energy efficiency, low-carbon technologies, transition to the liberal energy market, and explore opportunities for solving the climate change problem (AzerNews, 21.05.2021).

Society and Culture

- The Kazakhstan handed over to Kyrgyzstan 4,500 tons of flour as humanitarian aid. The cargo loaded in 75 wagons was delivered by rail to Bishkek. The Ambassador of Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan Rapol Zhoshybayev and Deputy Minister of Agriculture, Water and Forestry of Kyrgyzstan Azamat Mukashev attended the ceremony of handing over. The Kyrgyz side expressed deep gratitude for the assistance provided by Kazakhstan (Astanatimes, 19.05.2021).
- The Secretary-General of the Turkic Council Baghdad Amreyev had a telephone conversation with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan Jeyhun Bayramov. The sides discussed the current state of cooperation between the Turkic Council and Azerbaijan and reiterated their determination for further strengthening of coordination in the realization of the current Agenda of the Turkic Council. The parties also discussed in detail the preparations for the upcoming Summit of the Turkic Council scheduled for fall 2021 in Istanbul (Turkkon.org, 18.05.2021).
- The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) provided equipment aid to the Irpin Sanatorium and Rehabilitation Medical Center at the Irpin Hospital operating under the Ukrainian Ministry of Defense. The aid included different medical equipment for the clinic such as folding beds, cubicle curtains for ergotherapy and psychological rehabilitation, continuous passive motion devices for knee joints and other materials. The Presidential Commissioner for Rehabilitation of the Participants of Military Action of Ukraine, Vadim Sviridenko, expressed his gratitude towards TIKA and underlined that they had carried out an important project in the shortest time (Reliefweb.int, 21.05.2021).
- Ashgabat hosted a meeting of the mayors of friendly and sister cities. The event was held in honor of the 140th anniversary of Ashgabat and was organized in a hybrid format. The event was attended online by mayors and deputy mayors of many cities around the world and local representatives of international organizations. The participants were shown a video about the achievements of the white marble capital (Centralasia.news, 21.05.2021).
- An Uzbek delegation of famous cinema artists organized Uzbek Cinema Days in Tajikistan. The opening ceremony of the Days of Uzbek Cinema in Tajikistan took place at the Vatan cinema in Dushanbe. Three feature films and three documentaries were shown at the event. The heads of the film industries of the two countries spoke about the role of joint cultural events and shared information about the planned projects for the development of Uzbek and Tajik cinema (Uzdaily, 20.05.2021).
- The President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev proposed an initiative to declare the Aral Sea region a zone of ecological innovations and technologies aimed to recover and improve the environment, preserve natural resources and enhance the quality of life in the region. Recently, the United Nations General Assembly within its 75th plenary session unanimously adopted this resolution. The General Assembly called for country-level, regional and multilateral cooperation to develop and implement environmentally sound technologies in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (UzReport, 19.05.2021).