

Elections in Kyrgyzstan

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On 30 October, presidential elections were held in Kyrgyzstan in which the current prime minister Almazbek Atambayev won in the first round, with 63.1% of the votes; the turnout was 60%. His two biggest rivals, Adakhan Madumarov (14.8% of votes) and Kamchybek Tashiyev (14.3% of votes), have not organised any major protests, despite announcements to the contrary. Observer missions from the OSCE and the Council of Europe confirmed a number of violations during the elections, but have recognised the process as having essentially met democratic standards.

The elections end the phase of provisional government, which began after the overthrow of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April last year. Given the scale of the social, economic and political challenges facing Kyrgyzstan, this successful electoral process can be regarded as an important step towards stabilising the country.

Commentary

- The election result shows the strength of former Prime Minister Atambayev's position, as well as weaker than expected support for the main forces opposing him, which are associated with the south of the country (the rivalry between the northern and southern parts of the country and the groups representing these regions is regarded as the main axis of political conflict in Kyrgyzstan). Atambayev's election could allow the country to maintain its current political course and maintain a basic political stability over the next few months – despite the announcement that opposition protests would take place, they attracted little support.
- The election of Atambayev does not solve Kyrgyzstan's fundamental problems, such as the weakness and inefficiency of the state and its socio-economic crisis. However, it does allow the relative stabilisation of the political scene, at least in the immediate future. In the first stage, Atambayev will be forced to consolidate his power at the central level (in parliament, within the ruling coalition); it is quite likely that the president will attempt to change the constitution in order to increase his own powers. Also at the local level, there is a need to ensure the support of regional elites, who enjoy a great deal of autonomy; these include organised crime groups. The similar results for Tashiyev and Madumarov will force them to compete and struggle for leadership in the south, which may be accompanied by an increase in tension in this part of the country.

- The election of Atambayev means a continuation of the current foreign policy, especially towards the US, China and Russia. Before the election Atambayev courted Moscow's support, and in the end was given it. As Prime Minister, he repeatedly visited Moscow, where he met Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and took steps towards an at least superficial rapprochement with Russia (as seen in Kyrgyzstan's announcement that it would join the Customs Union of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus). But these pro-Russian statements and the support from Moscow, just like Atambayev's announcement that the lease of the Manas airbase to the US would not be renewed after 2014, do not mean that Kyrgyzstan is becoming increasingly dependent on Russia. We should expect Bishkek to maintain its continued balancing act between Russia (whose influence on the political situation remains the greatest), China and the USA – conditional on the benefits it can gain and the circumstances it finds itself in at any given time.