

The first stage of the presidential campaign in Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan on 16 August, the first stage of registering candidates before the presidential elections scheduled for October 30 was concluded. The very large number of candidates reflects the weakness and fragmentation of the political scene, and means that a hot election campaign lies ahead.

As many as 83 candidates have announced their participation in the elections. The two major candidates in the race for president are the current prime minister, Almazbek Atambayev; and Kamchybek Tashiyev, leader of the Ata-Jurt party and a former minister for emergencies under President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Atambayev, who announced his candidacy on 15 August, is seeking the support of Russia. Tashiyev is characterised as the candidate of nationalist opinions, and enjoys the support of the clans from the south of the country, which lost power after President Bakiyev's overthrow in April 2010. The current President, Roza Otunbayeva, who in accordance with the law cannot run for the office, has not given her unequivocal support to any of the candidates, but unofficially she supports Atambayev.

The fragmentation of the political scene, the weakness of the party system and the large role played by informal social structures (tribal and clan ties; the country's territorial divisions into north and south; the role of special interest groups, including organised crime), promise an intense battle for votes, especially before the expected second round.

Both the electoral campaign and the course and outcome of the elections themselves will be important for the stability of the state. The presidential elections are intended *de jure* to bring to an end the difficult period of transition which Kyrgyzstan has undergone since President Bakiyev's overthrow, and is intended to lay the foundations for addressing a number of the political, social and economic problems facing Kyrgyzstan. <JLan>