

A new government in Kyrgyzstan

On 20 December, two and a half months after the parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan, the interim technical government, which had been ruling the country since July, relinquished its powers to a coalition cabinet supported by three of the five parliamentary groupings. The establishment of the government brings to an end the process of the democratic formation of the new government, which began with the overthrow of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in April this year. At the same time, the disjointed nature of the new government coalition (which includes both close associates of the overthrown president and those who insist that he should be held strictly accountable for his actions) may give rise to strong tensions inside the government, and in effect cause its rapid disintegration.

The new head of the government is Almazbek Atambayev, the leader of the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), one of the key politicians in the broad opposition front which took over power after Bakiyev's overthrow. Apart from the SDPK, the government has also been supported by the Ata-Jurt party consisting of Bakiyev's former associates (it uses nationalist slogans and has strong support in the south of the country) and the Respublika party led by the young pro-Russian politician and businessman Omurbek Babanov. One of the new government's first moves was the prime minister's visit to Moscow (27–28 December). According to Atambayev's statement, assurances were made during the visit that the customs duty on petroleum-derived products, which is harmful for Kyrgyzstan, would be lifted. Russia will remain the main reference point for the government in Bishkek.

According to the new constitution, adopted after Bakiyev's overthrow, Kyrgyzstan has a parliamentary and cabinet political system. In theory, this offers the new cabinet a strong mandate and extensive powers to make the changes necessary to bring the country out of the crisis into which it plunged as a consequence of the past year's events (the coup in April and the bloody clashes in the south of the country in May and June). However, in practice, the likelihood that the government will cope with these challenges – the deep drop in respect for the state, the inefficiency of state institutions and continuing strong ethnic tensions in the south – is quite low. <MMat>