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FOREVER (UN)STABLE REGIMES?
THE COMPARISON OF KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

INTRODUCTION

The countries of Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) have experienced four changes of their leaders since regaining independence in 1991. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the only countries in the region without such experience. In Turkmenistan, unlike the other cases, the transfer of power was fast and non-violent. An unsuccessful transfer of power led to several years of civil war in Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, this process resulted in mass riots, political turmoil and revolutions in 2005 and 2010.

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan stand on the opposite end of the analysis, in many ways. The Kazakh Republic is a relatively rich and developed country with a good international image. The head of the country is President Nursultan Nazarbayev, the longest serving president in the region. Its economic growth and stable leadership are accompanied by a certain degree of prosperity for the majority of the population. Therefore, it is not a surprise that Isaacs¹ called Kazakhstan an island of stability, mostly in comparison with

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The article was supported within the research project VEGA no. 1/0362/12: “Stabilita autoritárskych režimov islamských krajín v kontexte politických kríz: vnútorné a vonkajšie aspekty”. This contribution is a modified version of the book chapter: *Ostrov stability a nestability v Strednej Ázii: Komparácia Kazachstanu a Kirgizska*, “Pretrvanie a zmeny režimov v Severnej Afrike, na Blízkom východe a v Strednej Ázii”, Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo UK 2014.

¹ R. ISAACS, ‘Papa’ – Nursultan Nazarbayev and the Discourse of Charismatic Leadership and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan, “Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism”, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2010, p. 446.

other post-Soviet states. Similarly, Frigeiro and Kassenova² write about Kazakhstan as a “success story” because it is richer, more developed and has a higher level of security than its neighbours. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan is an example of a country that has changed from the “island of democracy” as it was called in the 1990s, to the “island of instability”, with frequent protests and revolutions in 2005 and 2010 that overthrew the ruling presidents.

The comparison of the countries and their regimes should not be limited to the differences on the economic level, although it plays an important role. President Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan used several tools and policies to secure the stability of his regime, which are also used in Kazakhstan. Hence, the fall of the regime in Kyrgyzstan in 2010, within 24 hours, was a surprise for many. At first glance, the regime seemed stronger than during the era of the previous President Akayev. For these reasons, several authors considered Kyrgyzstan a specific case, different from other states in the region. According to Dzhuraev,³ the political system in Kyrgyzstan is very dynamic, visibly differing from the notoriously “stable” regimes in the region. In line with this opinion, Gurbuz⁴ highlighted that “the revolt of 2010 once again confirmed that Kyrgyzstan is different than other Central Asian republics. Neither «hard» nor «soft» authoritarian regimes seem to be durable in Kyrgyzstan.”

The aim of the article is to look at two different examples of regimes in Central Asia – Kazakhstan as an “island of stability” and Kyrgyzstan as an “island of instability”. In order to explain (in)stability it is important to focus on three dimensions – institutional; economic; and security performance. To support our arguments we have also used information gathered during research stays in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in 2012 and 2013. Although economic performance is important in the long term, it is necessary to focus also on institutional and security performance, for a better understanding of

² A. FRIGEIRO, N. KASSENOVA, *Central Asia: Contemporary Security Challenges and Sources of State Resilience*, “Security and Human Rights”, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2013, p. 128.

³ S. DZURAEV, *Governance Challenges in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan: The Externalization and parochialization of Political Legitimacy*, 2012, Accessed October 21, 2014, <http://www.google.sk/url?sa=t&trct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.nupi.no%2Fcontent%2Fdownload%2F284218%2F992494%2Ffile%2FGovernance%2520Challenges%2520in%2520Post-Soviet%2520Kyrgyzstan%2C%2520Dzhuraev%2520S.pdf&ei=KGXHU87jMIWs0QWTYoCAA&usq=AFQjCNGqOYLA6mqEoaRdzvBDNe1cHMP_TQ&sig2=WXL8mOFyoSU7uXKf5PO-Pw&bvm=bv.71198958,d.bGQ&cad=rja>.

⁴ Y.E. GÜRBÜZ, *Kyrgyzstan: In Search for Stability*, “Insight Turkey”, Vol. 15, No. 4, Fall 2013, p. 196.

why the Kazakh regime has survived without serious problems and why Bakiyev's regime collapsed within 24 hours. It is significant due to the fact that the president learned from some mistakes of the previous leader. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, I returned also to the regime of the former President Akayev, given that several factors affecting the (in)stability of Bakiyev's regime had their roots in the era of his predecessor.

INSTITUTIONAL PERFORMANCE

In terms of typology of regimes, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan had authoritarian character in 2010. There are formal democratic institutions like parliaments, elections and political parties, separation of powers and the Constitution which guarantees citizens' rights. However, it is only a facade hiding the real nature of the regimes. The formal and especially informal powers were concentrated in the hands of the presidents and their families. The president Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan has been in office since the independence, Kurmanbek Bakiyev came to power in 2005. Unlike the leaders in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or Tajikistan, who face various forms of domestic opposition, president Nazarbayev has almost unquestioned power. The Kazakh regime, despite some problems in recent years, can be described as the most stable and most successful in the region.

We can talk about three basic sources of regime stability in Kazakhstan. "1. Kazakhstan is going better economically than the neighbouring countries; 2. President Nazarbayev personally is politically skilful and as a person as well as a political leader has a share in the political stability; 3. Passive political culture, people are not politically active and a civil society is not developed, which in this case contributes to stability."⁵ The stability is guaranteed by the president and in this context it is possible to see several initiatives during the last several years, for example an effort to extend the mandate of the President till 2020. It can also be viewed as a fear of the possibility of losing positions on the part of the elite. "If something happens to the President, then no one can predict how the country would develop in the

⁵ Interview, ALM-2013-12-11a, political scientist, anonymously, 11.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

following days and weeks. It indicates that the so-called stability has not deep roots.”⁶

At the beginning of the 1990s, it was generally believed that Kazakhstan could become one of the countries with a high risk of instability due to the heterogeneous society, the economic decline, conflict among the elite and a possible rise of radical forms of Islam. For these reasons, President Nazarbayev focused more on the development of state institutions than on the building of his regime in the first years of independence. The situation is perceived similarly by Cummings⁷: “Of all the Central Asian regimes, Nazarbaevs featured the most emphasis on state-building at its beginning. This policy made Kazakhstan the most stable of the five states, from an institutional point of view.” This could be one of the fundamental causes of the instability of regimes in Kyrgyzstan, which did not focus on the building of state institutions. Later efforts of Kyrgyz presidents to apply some of the instruments used in Kazakhstan therefore could not succeed in the long term, due to the lack of elementary preconditions such as functional and efficient institutions.

One of the differences is President Nazarbayev’s ability to maintain a relatively stable circle of elites and potential opponents either co-opted or effectively excluded from the political struggle. Co-optation has been achieved by two principal methods: employment and policies. Pretenders have been co-opted or effectively banished as ambassadors.⁸ Nazarbayev has created a system where the positions of elites fully depend on him and the implementation of an independent policy at a higher level is impossible. The President is perceived as a broker balancing between the rising and falling power of different politico-economic groups.⁹ It is a fact that the elite circle has been abandoned by important persons such as the former Prime Minister, one of the most prominent bankers or the President’s former son-in-law. Even though the tribal factor played a role in Nazarbayev’s personnel policy, the

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ S.N. CUMMINGS, *Power and Change in Central Asia*, London–New York: Routledge 2002, p. 62.

⁸ S.N. CUMMINGS, *Kazakhstan Power and the Elite*, London–New York: I.B. Tauris 2005, p. 108.

⁹ A. RAHMETOV, *Kazakhstan’s Presidential Elections 2011: Nazarbayev Postpones Succession*, “ISPI Analysis”, No. 51, May 2011, Accessed October 21, 2014, <[http:// www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_51_2011.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_51_2011.pdf)>.

most important criteria for appointment to key government positions were loyalty toward the President and expertise.¹⁰

Another aspect that distinguishes the regime of President Nazarbayev from the regimes in Kyrgyzstan was the absence of stronger anti-government and anti-presidential demonstrations practically during the whole period of his reign. “The Kazakhs, in general, are not politically active, especially if they should take the initiative. The idea of stability and prosperity is relatively strong and there is a fear that we might lose it. This prevents people from social mobilization. Most of the protests are based on economic, not political issues. Only for political reasons or ideology people will not be mobilized.”¹¹ The protests against presidents usually have weak support and they are short-lived. However, this does not mean that Kazakhstan is immune against demonstrations, but these were mostly concentrated on non-political demands. For example, the events in Zhanaozen were strong expressions of social discontent, but they did not have anti-presidential character. “The decision of the administration of the city of Zhanaozen to hold a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the independence day on the main square, where oil workers had been holding daily strike demonstrations for months, ended in bloody clashes between the police and protestors: 16 people died and more than 100 were injured.”¹² Experts refuse to associate these events with the Arab Spring. “Many say that Zhanaozen was a continuation of the Arab Spring. It was not. These events occurred on the basis of economic discontent of workers, discriminated by foreign investors.”¹³

Bakiyev won the presidential election with a huge lead in 2005. Nevertheless, no power group, including the one around the president, was able to consolidate its power. Therefore, “actors with a primary background in politics, business, or crime formed several alliances. There was little cooperation among these groups, and their inability to neutralize one another was the source of some power balance.”¹⁴ Most leaders of the Tulip revolution aban-

¹⁰ A. HEINRICH, *The Formal Political System in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. A Background Study*, March 2010, Accessed October 21, 2014, <<http://www.forschungsstelle.uni-bremen.de/UserFiles/file/06-Publikationen/Arbeitspapiere/fsoap107.pdf>>.

¹¹ Interview, ALM-2013-12-11b, political scientist, anonymously, 11.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

¹² A. FRIGEIRO, N. KASSENOVA, *Central Asia: Contemporary Security Challenges and Sources of State Resilience*, p. 128.

¹³ Interview, AST-2013-11-29, political scientist, anonymously, 29.11.2013, Astana, Kazakhstan.

¹⁴ J. ENGVALL, *Kyrgyzstan's Revolt: Prospects for Stability in a Failing State*, CACI Analyst, 14.4.2010, Accessed October 23, 2014, <<http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5307>>.

doned Bakiyev and joined the opposition during the first year of his mandate. In November 2006, a group of opposition leaders organized protests in the capital, attended by 20,000 people. The protesters demanded constitutional reforms, but also the resignation of the President. At this point, the opposition was close to overthrowing Bakiyev. However, the president withstood this attempt and since then he has worked on the neutralization of the opposition. “The ease with which Bakiyev was removed demonstrates that despite his efforts to consolidate power, he was not able to do so in a proper way.”¹⁵

According to Collins¹⁶ “by the standards of the post-Soviet world, the Kyrgyz regimes that fell in 2005 and 2010 were both fairly feeble. But focusing on regime weakness or other structural factors yields an incomplete explanation of regime collapse.” In 2010, protests in Bishkek began as a gathering of hundreds of people, which was nothing exceptional. The use of violence against demonstrators, including snipers, caused a more or less spontaneous mobilization in Bishkek. One of the motivations was to punish the people who were responsible for the deaths of protesters. However, an outraged crowd does not explain why Bakiyev was not able to deal with this situation. On the surface, his regime seemed stronger than the regime of his predecessor, and he was also willing to use force. Bakiyev tried to strengthen the force apparatus in particular, to be able to suppress such kind of actions. An explanation of this paradox is offered by Collins¹⁷ – “Bakiyev’s regime appeared stronger than Akayev’s. But there had been no change in the underlying reality of a clannish ruling circle that subverted state institutions, state efficacy, and the rule of law. On this level, indeed, Bakiyev weakened his position by excluding rival clans and other powerful interests in order to favour his own family.”

In the opinion of Way¹⁸ “Kyrgyzstan demonstrates the impact of state weakness on regime collapse. Askar Akayev’s Kyrgyzstan was characterized

¹⁵ A. FRIGEIRO, N. KASSENOVA, *Central Asia: Contemporary Security Challenges and Sources of State Resilience*, pp. 126-127.

¹⁶ K. COLLINS, *Kyrgyzstan’s Latest Revolution*, “Journal of Democracy”, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 2011, pp. 151-152.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 154.

¹⁸ L. WAY, *Resistance to Contagion: Sources of Authoritarian Stability in the Former Soviet Union*, [in:] V. BUNCE, M. MCFAY, K. STONER-WEISS (eds.), *Democracy and Authoritarianism in the Postcommunist World*, Cambridge, NY: Cambridge University Press 2010, p. 244.

by a weak party, weak state economic control, and a weak coercive apparatus.” The new President had learned from the mistakes of his predecessor, he built the ruling party and his family took control of the economy as well as the coercive apparatus. Bakiyev consolidated his power via constitutional amendments, creating his own party, which won a majority in parliament and by using economic resources to strengthen the security structures. Clan structures are still playing a key role in Kyrgyz politics. However, Akayev and Bakiyev added new elements to these traditional relations such as a concentration of power in the hands of the presidential family. Beside the positions in state apparatus, the families controlled a large share of government revenue, but also the income from illegal sources and foreign aid. “It is widely believed that Bakiyev’s seven brothers and two sons all got large shares in the state’s wealth through political appointments or insider business deals. State institutions were vehicles of corruption rather than used for effective governance.”¹⁹ On the other hand, Bakiyev did not pay attention to state-building and state institutions remained weak. Although each of the presidents adopted a new set of rules and laws, there were no effective state institutions regulating the system. “We were all sure that Bakiyev was too strong to be possible to just remove. But still he fell. In fact, the President was very weak institutionally.”²⁰

The existence of a strong presidential party is one of the factors which should help a regime’s survival. “Recent developments in the region have seen a somewhat new model of party politics emerging, one in which a strong president is complemented by a dominant «super party» in the national legislature as the result of «competitive» though well-managed elections.”²¹ Opposition parties are not prohibited, but their activity is restricted in many ways. The ruling party in Kazakhstan, NurOtan, can be classified as “middle-strong”, due to a dominant position in the political system and the institutionalized system of patronage. Nevertheless, the party is without official ideology and it was established primarily to support the President. On the other hand, many experts view NurOtan party as weak, mainly due to poor links with the society. “It must be said that the NurOtan party is very weak, Na-

¹⁹ K. COLLINS, *Kyrgyzstan’s Latest Revolution*, p. 154.

²⁰ Interview, BIS-2012-11-19, political scientist, anonymously, 19.11.2012, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

²¹ A.C. BOWYER, *Parliament and Political Parties in Kazakhstan*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2008, Accessed October 22, 2014, <<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/Silkroadpapers/0804Bowyer.pdf>>.

zarbayev has created it in his own way, and with out him, the party does not exist.”²² The role of the party in supporting the president is often emphasized. “NurOtan was created by the President and cannot exist without him. It is a formal system to legitimize the regime and a mechanism to formalize his decisions.”²³ However, the party has several other tasks in the political system of Kazakhstan. As it was claimed by Isaacs,²⁴ the main role of the party is to be a “cheerleader” of Nazarbayev’s leadership, which gives the President a wider legitimacy on the public and serves as a tool for the President’s greater control of formal political institutions and public authorities. Another mentioned feature is that it allows people to get into better functions. Many people joined the party not because they wanted to support the regime, but because they wanted to make a career.²⁵

Furthermore, the party operates on the basis of patron-client relations. “It is a formal organization, but there are patrons, people in power who have created their own clientele. They provide political support, positions and work in exchange for support.”²⁶ The political opposition in Kazakhstan was gradually weakened and with each parliamentary election lost more and more seats in the parliament. Most real political opposition is thus active abroad. Currently there is no stronger political opposition or opposition on the civil society level or in traditional structures. On the contrary, the President Nazarbayev has the support of the majority of the population, or at least, most of the inhabitants tolerate him.

The process of forming political parties and their relations with other political institutions and the society in Kyrgyzstan is extremely complicated. “Rather than being organized at national level and having a widespread membership structure, political parties in Kyrgyzstan are structures that are shaped by personal-regional allegiances and have weak organizational capacity.”²⁷

²² Interview, ALM-2013-12-11a, political scientist, anonymously, 11.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

²³ Interview, ALM-2013-12-11b, political scientist, anonymously, 11.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

²⁴ R. ISAACS, *Party System Formation in Kazakhstan. Between Formal and Informal Politics*, London–New York: Routledge 2011, p. 131, 132.

²⁵ Interview, AST-2013-11-29, political scientist, anonymously, 29.11.2013, Astana, Kazakhstan.

²⁶ Interview, ALM-2013-12-13, political scientist, anonymously, 13.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

²⁷ H. ALKAN, *Post-Soviet Politics in Kyrgyzstan: Between Centralism and Localism?*, “Contemporary Politics”, Vol. 15, No. 3, September 2009, p. 363.

From a theoretical point of view, a strong presidential party could help the regime to survive, especially in such an environment. The first President Akayev had long resisted efforts to establish a presidential political party. It was only in 2003, when he merged several pro-presidential parties and Alga party was created. However, this party did not obtain a dominant position in the parliamentary elections in 2005, it received only 19 seats. Also, President Bakiyev did not create his own political party immediately. It happened only in 2007, as part of other measures to eliminate political opposition. He succeeded when his party Ak-Jol won an absolute majority of mandates in the parliamentary elections. This party had similar functions as NurOtan, it was used for presidential control of the parliament. In addition, it was based on patron-client relations, although this feature was not fully developed because of the short period of its existence.

At the end of 2006, the civil society, opposition parties and the majority of the members of parliament formed a coalition against Bakiyev's proposals for changes of the Constitution and electoral laws. In this period, Bakiyev was exposed to the opposition pressure and there was a serious possibility of his removal from office. Finally, he was forced to sign a new version of the Constitution, significantly limiting presidential powers. This was the first major event demonstrating Bakiyev's weakness, unusual for a president in Central Asia, but it was also the last one.²⁸ The Constitutional Court annulled these changes in 2007. In the same year, the President changed the Constitution through a referendum and announced early parliamentary elections, won by a new presidential party. "The period since the parliamentary elections could be called a phase of Bakiyev's aggressive consolidation of power. In addition to fully controlling the parliament through AkJol, Bakiyev has begun to strengthen his family's power base in the country."²⁹ "Both Akaev and Bakiyev came to power with promises of democracy and justice, yet became authoritarian leaders whose rule was characterized by nepotism and disrespect for the rule of law. In Bakiyev's case, this slide was faster, his attempts to suppress NGOs and the media were stronger, and the corruption was more rampant."³⁰ However, Bakiyev failed to control the broadcast

²⁸ S. JURAEV, *Back on Track? Kyrgyz Authoritarianism after the Tulip Revolution*, PONARS Eurasia Policy Memo, No. 95, March 2010, Accessed October 23, 2014, <http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/pepm_095.pdf>.

²⁹ *Ibidem*.

³⁰ A. FRIGEIRO, N. KASSENOVA, *Central Asia: Contemporary Security Challenges and Sources of State Resilience*, pp. 125-126.

of Russian stations which are still the most reliable source of information for a part of the Kyrgyz population. A few weeks before the revolution in 2010, Russia completely attacked Bakiyev, which had never happened before.³¹ Russian media began to report about the corruption associated with Bakiyev and his family. This, together with economic sanctions, caused an increase in discontent among inhabitants.

ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

The disintegration of the Soviet Union meant that the economies of the new Central Asian states had entered into a period of economic downturn, which led to a sharp decline in living standards. At the height of the crisis in 1993-95, consumer prices rose astronomically in the region, with Turkmenistan registering a 3102% jump in 1993, followed by Kazakhstan with 1892% in 1994.³² Kazakhstan has successfully dealt with these problems, mainly due to mineral resources. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. These differences are expressed by the GNI index, in which Kazakhstan amounted to 16,710\$ per capita in 2010, while Kyrgyzstan only to 2540\$.³³

In Central Asia, political and economic processes are widely determined by clan structures, family ties and the presence of a strong president, leading to the consolidation of authoritarian rule rather than democratic governance.³⁴ More importantly, the state control over the economy and mineral resources gives political leaders an opportunity to monopolize the distribution of resources in their hands. Thanks to these resources, leaders can buy the opposition and maintain the loyalty of supporters. The economic prosperity in Kazakhstan can be a key to the explanation of the stability of the regime. If there is any tendency to instability, it will be caused by economic reasons, especially in poor regions.³⁵ The successes in economic development and

³¹ Interview, BIS-2012-11-21, political scientist, anonymously, 21.11.2012, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

³² S. AKBARZADEH, *Keeping Central Asia Stable*, "Third World Quarterly", Vol. 25, No. 4, 2004, p. 694.

³³ World Bank, *GNI per capita*, 2014, Accessed October 21, 2014, <<http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.PCAP.PP.CD>>.

³⁴ E. AKERMAN, *Democratisation in Central Asia: Communism to Clanism*, "Conflict, Security & Development", Vol. 2, No. 1, 2002, p. 134.

³⁵ Interview, AST-2013-11-29, political scientist, anonymously, 29.11.2013, Astana, Kazakhstan.

in providing benefits to the population help the president to consolidate his personal power. The president's mantra of the "economy first and politics second" is often repeated by his key supporters who conflate Nazarbayev's nation-building achievements as fundamental to the success and prosperity of Kazakhstan.³⁶

Almost all analyzes link the stability of Kazakhstan to the economic level of the country and the living standards of its inhabitants. Many authors have emphasized some form of social contract between the government and the people, when, in exchange for the promise of increasing their living standards, the people accept the power of the president and the ruling elites. Franke and Gawrich³⁷ refer to this strategy as cooptation instead of participation, which means that social support is not designed to increase participation, but just to gain support in exchange for rather nontransparent social support. During my interviews it was mentioned that many inhabitants have exchanged material values for non-material values, but the basic question is: where is the point when they will also demand non-material values?³⁸ The regime has many tools to commit the population. After his re-election in 2005, Nazarbayev pledged to double the salaries and pensions during his next term and to raise the per capita income to the level of East European countries.³⁹ "According to the presidential address to the Kazakhstani people in February 2008, budgetary allocations for education, health care and social security have grown more than five-fold since 2000. This rapidly growing expenditure is only possible because of oil revenues in the state budget."⁴⁰ From this point of view, the income from oil and gas plays the key role in

³⁶ R. ISAACS, 'Papa' – Nursultan Nazarbayev and the Discourse of Charismatic Leadership and Nation-Building in Post-Soviet Kazakhstan, p. 440.

³⁷ A. FRANKE, A. GAWRICH, *Autocratic Stability and Post-Soviet Rentierism: The Cases of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan*, 2011, Accessed October 20, 2014, <https://www.academia.edu/1965766/Autocratic_Stability_and_Post-Soviet_Rentierism_the_Cases_of_Azerbaijan_and_Kazakhstan>.

³⁸ Interview, AST-2013-11-29, political scientist, anonymously, 29.11.2013, Astana, Kazakhstan.

³⁹ A. COHEN, *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence. Energy Policy and the Birth of Nation*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2008, Accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2008_cohen_kazakhstan_the_road_to_independence.pdf>.

⁴⁰ A. FRANKE, A. GAWRICH, *Autocratic Stability and Post-Soviet Rentierism: The Cases of Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan*, 2011, Accessed October 20, 2014, <https://www.academia.edu/1965766/Autocratic_Stability_and_Post-Soviet_Rentierism_the_Cases_of_Azerbaijan_and_Kazakhstan>.

increasing living standards. “Without natural resources, Kazakhstan could not implement many projects that are used to increase the popularity and to maintain the economic stability. It is an important aspect of the regime’s survival.”⁴¹

Kyrgyzstan does not have significant mineral resources. The country attempted radical economic reforms that should help it to succeed on global markets after the independence. As the first post-Soviet country, Kyrgyzstan has joined the World Trade Organization. However, the GDP growth rate between 1991 and 1995 was –55.7%; industrial production was especially effected by the collapse and the share of the industry decreased annually by 20%; the inflation rate was 920% in 1992 and 1,211.5% in 1993.⁴² Despite some progress in recent years, the country remains one of the poorest in the world, with 40% of the population living below the poverty line. In addition, the underground economy is high and corresponds to 53% of the GDP.⁴³ Because of limited mineral resources, Kyrgyzstan could not use such revenue for social programs like in the case of Kazakhstan. Moreover, the income of the state budget was often redistributed among the ruling elite.

Nondemocratic regimes are politically stable not only because of the rent and “strong hand” of their presidents, but also because of systematic clientelism, which is particularly widespread in rentier states. Vitally Khlupin and Andrey Grosin argue that in Kazakhstan, for example, the relatives of the head of state have taken such extended positions that soon one will be able to speak of almost complete “familisation” of the government apparatus.⁴⁴ A similar situation occurred in Kyrgyzstan under Bakiyev, when the President nominated his relatives to the most important functions in the state. The Bakiyev family stamped its authority over the three major sources of rents – gold, hydroelectricity and international flows.⁴⁵ “The Bakiyev regime, simply put, defeated organized crime by taking control over it. Sources in the law enforcement agencies of Kyrgyzstan allege that the lucrative drug trade

⁴¹ Interview, ALM-2013-12-11b, political scientist, anonymously, 11.12.2013, Almaty, Kazakhstan.

⁴² Y.E. GÜRBÜZ, *Kyrgyzstan: In Search for Stability*, p. 194.

⁴³ A. KUPATADZE, *Organized Crime before and after the Tulip Revolution: The Changing Dynamics of Upperworld-Underworld Networks*, “Central Asian Survey”, Vol. 27, No. 3-4, 2008, p. 281.

⁴⁴ E. AKERMAN, *Democratisation in Central Asia: Communism to Clanism*, p. 138.

⁴⁵ J. ENGVALL, *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2011, Accessed October 21, 2014, <<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1107Engvall.pdf>>.

emanating from Afghanistan has been controlled by law enforcement agencies under the supervision of the President's closest relatives."⁴⁶ Bakiyev family created a kleptocracy based on the control of major financial flows and the main positions were distributed among presidential family members. Contrary to the Civil Service Act, which prohibits the President to appoint relatives to positions under his direct control, his son Maxim was appointed as the head of the Central Agency for Development, Investment and Innovation. "If Maksim was in charge of the economic pillar of the state, his uncle, the President's younger brother Janysh, was in command of the security pillar. The president's elder son held the position as deputy head of the most effective state instrument for manipulation, the National Security Service."⁴⁷

SECURITY PERFORMANCE

There is no difference between the threats to the stability of the state and to the stability of the regime in Central Asia. As emphasized by Gleason,⁴⁸ "any challenge to the government is interpreted as a challenge to the state. All proponents of change, from reformists urging incremental reorientation of administrative practices to violent extremists urging destruction of the society, are grouped together in the category of opposition." The regimes in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan did not use political violence as a standard method, although it had partially changed with the consolidation of Bakiyev's government in Kyrgyzstan. There had been several cases of murder, disappearance or beating of opposition politicians, activists and journalists.

The information about severe repressions in Kazakhstan reached the public mainly in the cases publicised by a former member of the President's circle. This happened when the President's former son-in-law, Rakhat Aliyev, blamed the President for massive corruption and for involvement in the assassination of opposition leader. At the same time, "the Kazakh Prosecutor Of-

⁴⁶ J. ENGVALL, *Kyrgyzstan's Revolt: Prospects for Stability in a Failing State*, CACI Analyst, 14.4.2010, Accessed October 23, 2014, <<http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5307>>.

⁴⁷ J. ENGVALL, *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2011, Accessed October 21, 2014, <<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1107Engvall.pdf>>.

⁴⁸ G.M. GLEASON, *Central Asia: State Building in the Face of Insurgent Islam*, [in:] A.J. TELLIS, M. WILLS (eds.), *Strategic Asia 2004-05: Confronting Terrorism in the Pursuit of Power*, Seattle, WA: The National Bureau of Asian Research 2004, p. 209.

force issued a warrant for Aliyev's arrest on charges including fraud and the kidnapping of two officials from the Nurbank bank, where he then owned a majority stake. Since being charged, Aliyev has remained in Vienna, fighting extradition."⁴⁹

The history of violence as an instrument of Kyrgyz politics goes deeper back into the past, notably to 2002. In March 2002, a group of supporters of one of the imprisoned opposition leaders tried to organize a meeting to support him. In clashes with the police, 6 people were killed and more than 60 were injured. This was the first violent civil confrontation since the Republic's independence in 1991.⁵⁰ The overthrow of the two presidents in 2005 and 2010 demonstrates that violence has become an accepted method of Kyrgyz politics. As it was stressed by Cheterian,⁵¹ "state institutions are extremely weak and shallow, unable even to defend their own existence. For the second time in five years, a mere 10-15,000 angry opposition activists were enough to bring down the President and overthrow the ruling administration." A crucial moment in Kyrgyz politics has come with the coup in 2005. The President, representing the highest symbol of power in the country, was overthrown in a relatively bloodless way. This led to many demonstrations and unrest during the next years. President Akayev refused to use violence against the demonstrators, maybe from personal conviction, maybe out of the fear that such order would not be fulfilled by security forces. "President Bakiyev may have considered the reason for Akayev's failure to be the insufficiency of his soft authoritarianism, which led Bakiyev to move to hard-authoritarianism."⁵² A similar point of view was declared during one of my interviews in Bishkek. "In 2005, Bakiyev participated in the revolution, he knew how it had occurred, he knew how people had been mobilized. He apparently thought that if Akayev had been slightly harder and had killed several people, he probably would not face such fate. Therefore Bakiyev

⁴⁹ A. COHEN, *Kazakhstan: The Road to Independence. Energy Policy and the Birth of Nation*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2008, Accessed October 20, 2014, <http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2008_cohen_kazakhstan_the_road_to_independence.pdf>.

⁵⁰ R. ABAZOV, *The Political Culture of Central Asia: A Case of Kyrgyzstan*, March 2003, Accessed October 21, 2014, <http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/44057/ichaptersection_singledocument/ba79d7dd-6c34-47b8-9770-73aaf6738f3a/en/06.pdf>.

⁵¹ V. CHETERIAN, *Kyrgyzstan: Central Asia's Island of Instability*, "Survival". *Global Politics and Strategy*, Vol. 52, No. 5, October-November 2010, p. 22.

⁵² Y.E. GÜRBÜZ, *Kyrgyzstan: In Search for Stability*, p. 195.

devoted so much attention to the security forces and the stabilization through hard power.”⁵³

Bakiyev has learned from the mistakes of his predecessor, he gained an absolute control of the security forces, which were used against regime opponents. There were murders of several important political figures, who were associated with the presidential family.⁵⁴ “Bakiyev used intimidation and force against his growing ranks of foes. He personalized control over the security apparatus, putting a brother and a son of his in charge of the Presidential Guard and the National Security Service, respectively, and installing close allies at the defence and interior ministries.”⁵⁵ There was a number of high-profile assassinations of opposition politicians and journalists in 2010, with arrests and sentencing of others.⁵⁶

As Engvall⁵⁷ highlighted, the use of violence became critical in Bakiyev’s efforts to destroy the opposition and consolidate the political power. One example was the case of opposition politician Tekebaev, in 2006, who was detained at the airport in Warsaw for the possession and trafficking of drugs. “It later became apparent that this had been secretly planted in his luggage at Bishkek airport by a uniformed official. The parliament assembled urgently and took a decision that demanded the removal of the Chief of National Security Service, his deputy and the brother of Bakiev – Zhanys. The President rejected this demand, claiming that this event was a conspiracy committed by foreign agents.”⁵⁸ It is believed that the President’s brother Zhanys had plotted the assassination of regime opponents, including the former head of the President’s administration and journalists.⁵⁹

⁵³ Interview, BIS-2012-11-18, political scientist, anonymously, 18.11.2012, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ K. COLLINS, *Kyrgyzstan's Latest Revolution*, p. 153.

⁵⁶ A. MATVEEVA, *Kyrgyzstan in Crisis: Permanent Revolution and the Curse of Nationalism*, Crisis States Working Papers, Series No. 2, September 2010, Accessed October 21, 2014, <http://mercury.ethz.ch/serviceengine/Files/ISN/121500/ipublicationdocument_singledocument/53ebff58-dae8-4f47-90fa-c7d6649ae4d1/en/WP79.2.pdf>.

⁵⁷ J. ENGVALL, *Flirting with State Failure: Power and Politics in Kyrgyzstan since Independence*, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute – Silk Road Studies Program, April 2011, Accessed October 21, 2014, <<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/silkroadpapers/1107Engvall.pdf>>.

⁵⁸ H. ALKAN, *Post-Soviet Politics in Kyrgyzstan: Between Centralism and Localism?*, p. 367.

⁵⁹ E. MARAT, *Bakiyev, the Security Structures, and the April 7 Violence in Kyrgyzstan*, CACI Analyst, 28.4.2010, Accessed October 22, 2014, <<http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5316>>.

Despite all the measures, the regime fell due to the protest which took Bakiyev long-term preparation. Contrary to Akayev, the President used force against demonstrators. Bakiyev and his family believed that if they killed a few people it would intimidate others, the crowd would disappear, and there would not be protests against his government.⁶⁰ The regimes that fell in 2005 and 2010 were similar in many ways. However, the ways in which people were mobilized against the regime were completely different. “In 2010, there would have been no revolution if the police had not intervened so hard against the 300 demonstrators who assembled there in the morning. However, the police started attacking them and within a few hours several thousand people gathered there. So it was provoked by police action.”⁶¹ The regime representatives made a strategic mistake, because at the time of the protest in Bishkek special forces were outside the capital. “Most of the security forces were still in Talas, where the protests had started one day before.”⁶² One of the fundamental causes of the fall of the Bakiyev regime was, according to some authors, that it could not control the army. “Unlike the police, Kyrgyzstan’s army never genuinely recognized Bakiyev’s authority. This is partly due to the still powerful Soviet tradition that prevents the army from intervening in domestic affairs.”⁶³

CONCLUSION

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are counterparts in Central Asia in the sustainability and stability of regimes. President Nazarbayev has ruled since the independence, while in Kyrgyzstan, there were revolutions and regime changes in 2005 and 2010. The second Kyrgyz President tried to consolidate his power and he managed to use similar tools as in Kazakhstan in the field of institutional performance. On the other hand, state institutions remained weak

⁶⁰ Interview, BIS-2012-11-18, political scientist, anonymously, 18.11.2012, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Interview, BIS-2012-12-06, political scientist, anonymously, 6.12.2012, Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

⁶³ E. MARAT, *Bakiyev, the Security Structures, and the April 7 Violence in Kyrgyzstan*, CACI Analyst, 28.4.2010, Accessed October 22, 2014, <<http://old.cacianalyst.org/?q=node/5316>>.

and a lack of state-building is one of the possible explanations why his regime lasted only five years.

The important difference between the two countries is their economic performance. While Kazakhstan is the most developed country in the region with a high standard of living for the majority of the population, Kyrgyzstan is among the poorest countries. Before the revolution of 2010, there was an increase in prices which raised dissatisfaction among the inhabitants. Nevertheless, economic performance was not the immediate cause of the fall of the regime, it only created conditions for unrest.

President Bakiyev put perhaps too much confidence in the security forces (mainly in the special units), which should be able to deal with the threat of demonstrations and riots. As it turned out, it failed at the critical moment – just a few thousand people were enough to overthrow the president. The use of violence brought a reverse effect, instead of scaring demonstrators it helped their mobilization. Kazakhstan has not experienced in strong expressions of dissatisfaction against the President. Protests are not usually directed against him, but have a social or economic background. Moreover, as it was shown during the Zhanaozen events, the regime is able to deal with such kinds of problems.

There is no doubt that the economic development of both countries is different, which creates preconditions for disaffection in Kyrgyzstan, although several regions of Kazakhstan also stay poor. The second elementary difference lies in the consolidation of the countries. Kyrgyzstan, at least in 2010, was not consolidated as a state. Despite the fact that the regime seemed stronger due to the concentration of power and the control of the security forces and economic flows, the protest showed the weakness of the regime as well as the Kyrgyz state.

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FOREVER (UN)STABLE REGIMES?

THE COMPARISON OF KAZAKHSTAN AND KYRGYZSTAN

S u m m a r y

Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan are following different trajectories in terms of stability and leadership. On the one hand, the Kazakh president, Nazarbayev, successfully manages issues within the country, on the other hand Kyrgyzstan has fallen into a period of protests, revolutions and instability in 2005–2010. The article focuses on three dimensions in order to explain

this difference: political performance, economic performance and security performance. Despite a huge contrast in economic conditions, Kyrgyz presidents could be successful in maintaining their positions. However, the use of similar tools like in Kazakhstan in political and security areas failed because of state-building effort almost in the whole history of independent Kyrgyzstan.

Key words: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, political institutions, economy, security.

WIECZNIE (NIE) STABILNE SYSTEMY?
PORÓWNANIE KAZACHSTANU I KIRGISTANU

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Drogi przemian politycznych, stabilności i przywództwa są różne w przypadku Kazachstanu i Kirgistanu. Z jednej strony, prezydent Kazachstanu N. Nazarbajew z powodzeniem poradził sobie ze skalą problemów dotyczących jego państwo, z drugiej strony, w latach 2005-2010 Kirgistan znalazł się na etapie protestów, rewolucji i niestabilności. W celu wyjaśnienia różnic między systemami politycznymi tych dwóch państw, autor skupia się w niniejszym artykule na trzech wymiarach: politycznym, ekonomicznym i poziomie bezpieczeństwa. Pomimo ogromnej różnicy ekonomicznej między tymi państwami, prezydenci Kirgistanu mogą być postrzegani jako skuteczni w utrzymywaniu swojej pozycji. Jednak, mimo korzystania z podobnych narzędzi (zasobów) – jak w Kazachstanie – w kwestiach politycznych i bezpieczeństwa, niemal w całej historii niepodległego Kirgistanu budowa efektywnego państwa nie została zrealizowana w sposób pomyślny.

Słowa kluczowe: Kazachstan, Kirgistan, instytucje polityczne, gospodarka, bezpieczeństwo.