

ALERT SERIES

KYRGYZSTAN

**POLITICAL CONDITIONS
IN THE POST-SOVIET ERA**



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SUMMARY OF RECENT EVENTS

Kyrgyzstan emerged from the breakup of the Soviet Union with the makings of a multiparty democratic political system already in place. The President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, was elected democratically (although he ran unopposed), and since his election has championed efforts to democratize Kyrgyz society. Bishkek, the capital, has been the site of human rights congresses and meetings, and governmental organizations such as the United States Department of State and the Helsinki Commission have found that Kyrgyzstan has the best record on human rights and respect for ethnic minorities in Central Asia. A number of political parties have been organized, including a renascent Communist Party, and all are permitted to publish newspapers and hold meetings unimpeded by state interference. Freedom of religion has also been established, with Christians, Jews, Muslims, and even Hare Krishnas able to practice their religions and to disseminate their views without restriction. The only limitation placed on religious activities is that religions cannot organize their own political parties. Thus, the Islamic Renewal Party, which has a presence in most other Central Asian republics, is banned in Kyrgyzstan.

The new republic is by no means free of problems, however. The economic difficulties accompanying the transition to a market economy, combined with the adoption of the Kyrgyz Language Law (which makes Kyrgyz the state language and relegates Russian to a lesser role), have caused members of non-Kyrgyz ethnic groups to emigrate by the thousands. Relations between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks are tense, and could erupt into violent confrontations in the future. Kyrgyzstan's non-Turkic minorities, particularly Russian-speaking Jews, report some hostility at the societal level from Kyrgyz nationalists. In addition, a sizable portion of Kyrgyzstan's

bureaucrats are former Communist Party members who have still not accommodated themselves to working in a democratic republic. There are indications that some of them are tacitly opposing reform efforts initiated by President Akayev. Thus, Kyrgyzstan's future remains unclear: it is possible that existing democratic structures could become institutionalized, but also possible that ethnic strife, such as that which has devastated Tajikistan, could erupt.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Early Period

The first mention of the Kyrgyz in recorded history was in 569 A.D. when it is recorded that Zemarkhos, ambassador of Justinian II of Byzantium, received a Kyrgyz slave as a gift from the Khan of the Kok Turkic empire, which embraced almost the entire Silk Route between China and East Europe. The Kyrgyz tribes are noted again in the eighth and ninth centuries as allies of the Kok Turks in their unsuccessful campaigns against the Uighurs. It was at this time that the Kyrgyz people began to settle in present-day Kyrgyzstan. In the thirteenth century, the Kyrgyz were forced to become vassals of the Mongol armies of Ghengis Khan and his descendants; it was not until 1399 that they were able to regain their independence.¹

By the sixteenth century some of the Kyrgyz were subjects of the Mongol khans, and some of the Kazakhs. In the mid-eighteenth century, they took on their present social and tribal structure. Different tribal-clan units were ruled by an **aksakal**, (a 'white-beard' or elder), with the advice of a tribal council. Smaller units were administered by a **manap**. By the end of the

¹Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

eighteenth century the Kyrgyz had developed a consciousness of ethnic uniqueness, and by the mid-nineteenth century, most had become Sunni Muslims (see section on **Religion** below).² The Kyrgyz were allied with and an important component of the Khanate of Kokand which was established in the nineteenth century, to whom the Kyrgyz **manaps** were responsible for the payment of taxes and the raising of military units.³ (In Russian historiographic and ethnographic literature of the nineteenth century there often appears a confusion between the ethnonyms "Kyrgyz" and "Kazakh:" the Kazakhs are often referred to as "Kyrgyz" and the Kyrgyz as "Karakyrgyz."⁴)

With the advance of Russian armies, accompanied by colonists from other parts of the Russian Empire in the mid-nineteenth century, the Kyrgyz began to lose their most fertile and profitable lands. By 1867, part of Kyrgyzstan had been absorbed into the Russian province of Yedi-Su (sometimes called Semirech'ye), and by 1876 the Kyrgyz in present-day southern Kyrgyzstan were annexed by the Russian provinces of Syr-Darya and Ferghana.

There were many uprisings against Russian rule, all of which were costly to the Kyrgyz. The Kyrgyz in Andijan revolted against the Russians in 1897, and again in 1916. As a consequence of Kyrgyz defeats 30-40 percent of the Kyrgyz population were killed or emigrated,

²Huskey, Gene, "Kyrgyzstan: The Politics of Demographic and Economic Frustration," *Nations & Politics in the Soviet Successor States* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 399.

³Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

⁴Barthold, Wilhelm, *Zwoelf Vorlesungen ueber die Geschichte der Tuerken Mittelasiens* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1962), pp. 243-244.

either to Eastern Turkestan (the modern Sinkiang province of China) or to Afghanistan. Their livestock herds were reduced by 60-70 percent.⁵

The Soviet Period

When the Russian Revolution began in 1917, two Kyrgyz political groups, the **Shura-i Islamiye** and **Alash Orda**, joined forces and created a political party to fight for Kyrgyz national rights. In April 1918, however, the Bolshevik government, which had been organizing intensively in the Kyrgyz coal mines and urban areas, declared Kyrgyzstan to be part of the Turkestan ASSR. The **Bismachis**, Kyrgyz and other Central Asian armed units clashed frequently with Bolshevik troops, but with only partial success. The region was put under Soviet control only after Kyrgyzstan's last major uprising, led by the Social Democrats, was quelled in November 1920, but sporadic anti-Soviet disturbances continued to occur throughout the 1920s.

The Soviet government changed the structure of Kyrgyz life dramatically. In 1917 the Soviet government declared the equality of men and women, and in 1921 declared polygamy and the **kalym** (bride price) to be illegal. Kyrgyzstan was renamed the Kara-Kyrgyz Autonomous Oblast in October 1925, and became the Kyrgyz Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in February 1926.

Kyrgyz industry, built on abundant hydroelectric potential and large coal resources, developed very rapidly in the 1920s and 1930s. By 1940, Kyrgyz coal mines were producing 88 percent of the coal used in the Asian republics. In addition to coal production, a number of other

⁵Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

industries were developed in this period, including antimony production, nonferrous metallurgy, sugar refining, mercury processing, and various light industries. Beginning in the early 1930s, Kyrgyz agriculture, which had previously been in the hands of seminomads and clans, was collectivized; those opposing collectivization, mainly large and small landholders called **bais**, were either killed or imprisoned, or left to starve. The result of this process was the establishment of approximately 300,000 small, sedentary, collectivized livestock enterprises in Kyrgyzstan.

During the Stalin purges, which reached their height between 1936 and 1938, virtually the entire academic and creative intelligentsia was destroyed, and almost all of Kyrgyzstan's Muslim clerics were imprisoned or executed. While a complete accounting for the losses of the Stalinist era may not be possible, the Kyrgyz government has made a major effort, both in the later years of glasnost, and the first period of independence, to publish the names of the victims of this period and posthumously exonerate them of the crimes for which they had been convicted by the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan. One of the most disastrous facets of the purge was the Soviet government's attempt to destroy all books and manuscripts written in the Arabic script, a campaign which destroyed much of Kyrgyzstan's cultural heritage.

Glasnost and the Beginning of Democracy

Although the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan had slightly more than 150,000 members and candidate members at the beginning of 1990, avowed membership had vanished completely by the time the Communist Party was abolished in August 1991 (although a revived Kyrgyz Communist Party has recently emerged with 2,000 members; see below). Earlier in 1991, a

coalition of democratic parties had managed to elect Kyrgyzstan's first non-Communist president, and he and a coalition of other democratic forces in Kyrgyzstan have since kept Kyrgyzstan on the road to building a democratic state.

However, the transition has not been easy. Kyrgyzstan faces some serious economic difficulties, brought about by the transition from a centralized planned economy to a free market economy. In addition, just before independence, in 1990, a series of ethnic conflicts with Kyrgyzstan's Uzbek minority in the Osh Oblast, adjacent to what is now Uzbekistan, erupted over property rights.

POLITICAL PARTIES AND POLITICAL MOVEMENTS IN KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyzstan was the first Central Asian republic to begin to develop democratic institutions and a democratic opposition to the then ruling Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). The political party **Ashar** ['Key'], which describes itself as "social democratic" in its "Statement of General Principles,"⁶ was founded in June 1989 to stimulate democracy in Kyrgyzstan.⁷ The Kyrgyz press frequently denounced the Communist Party government while it was still in power.⁸ In May 1990, the **Kyrgyz Democratic Movement** (KDM) was founded; according to its Action

⁶Ashar, "Statement of General Principles," *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Bishkek: 17 January 1992), p. 2.

⁷Duyshon, Moldo and Usup-Chongayu, Jumagazy, *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Bishkek: 19 September 1991), p. 3.

⁸Aytmatov, Chingiz, *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan* (Frunze [now Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan]: 9 February 1990), p. 4. The distinguished writer disputed the need for a "people's front," as Ashar was then known; a report from the Central Committee of the Kyrgyz Communist Party claimed it was simply "not needed" (in *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan* (Frunze: 13 February 1990), p. 1, 4.

Program, it defines itself as "radical-democratic" and opposed to any form of totalitarianism.⁹ The Helsinki Commission notes that it was originally a coalition of several political parties.¹⁰

Asaba [‘Banner’] split off from the KDM in November 1990, claiming that the KDM was "not sufficiently organized or nationalist in spirit."¹¹ Asaba's aims are the "defense of the economic, social and political interests of the Kyrgyz people."¹² **Erkin Kyrgyzstan** [‘Free Kyrgyzstan’], founded in February 1991, was formed from nine "radical-democratic" parties opposed to "imperialist totalitarianism."¹³ Among its initiatives, **Erkin Kyrgyzstan** has demanded that all "communist fundamentalists" be purged from the government.¹⁴ According to its chairman, **Erkin Kyrgyzstan** seeks "to restore and raise the rights of the indigenous population to the necessary level, without jeopardizing the rights of all the people of Kyrgyzstan."¹⁵

The **Atameken** [‘Fatherland’] Party split off from **Erkin Kyrgyzstan** in 1992. Although one of its founders has claimed that it has a liberal and centrist orientation,¹⁶ a Russian newspaper

⁹Kyrgyzstan Democratic Movement, "Action Program," *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Bishkek: 16 April 1991), p. 3.

¹⁰Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 171.

¹¹Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 171.

¹²Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 171.

¹³Erkin Kyrgyzstan, "Press Release," *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Bishkek: 26 July 1991), p. 1.

¹⁴Erkin Kyrgyzstan, "Press Release: Appeal To Askar Akayev," *Kyrgyz Tuusu* (Bishkek: 31 July 1991), p. 2.

¹⁵Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 171.

¹⁶Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 171.

has pointed out that it has no Slavic members.¹⁷ Kyrgyzstan has also revived its Communist Party. According to a Kyrgyz government official, the reascent Communist Party has a membership of roughly 2,000,¹⁸ but the current head of the Kyrgyzstan Communist Party claims a total membership of 10,000.¹⁹ All of the political parties mentioned above operate freely and, with the exception of Atameken, have a multi-ethnic membership.

In addition to the political parties mentioned above, there are also a number of public organizations which have political objectives. These include the **Union for Civil Accord**, a coalition of minorities living in Kyrgyzstan (i.e., Russians, Koreans, Uighurs, Tatars, Bashkirs, Uzbeks and Jews),²⁰ which is opposed to nationalism and extremism. **Yntymak** ['Agreement'], a youth organization, was formed (through the efforts of the **KDM**, **Erkin Kyrgyzstan**, and **Asaba**) in the wake of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek ethnic clashes in 1990.²¹ **People's Unity** states that its goal is to unite "all reformist, left-center forces."²² Although these movements, and most of the political parties listed above, are currently free from ethnic bias, there is the ever-present danger that some of them will attempt to broaden their popular support by appealing to the more exclusionary nationalism popular among certain segments of the population.

¹⁷"New Atameken Party Formed," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow: 13 January 1993), p. 7, as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 29 January 1993, p. 53.

¹⁸"Interview with A. Jusupbekov," *Slovo Kyrgyzstana* (Bishkek: 23 January 1993), p. 6, as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 5 March 1993, p. 85.

¹⁹Temirov, T., "J. Amanbayev -- Leader of the Kyrgyzstan Communist Party," *Erkin Too* (Bishkek: 17 March 1993), p. 2.

²⁰Union for Civil Accord, "Press Release," *Kyrgyzstan Tuusu* (Bishkek: 3 August 1991), p. 3.

²¹B. Ryspayev, "Yntymak," *Kyrgyzstan Tuusu* (Bishkek: 16-17 March 1991), p. 6.

²²J. Saadanbekov, "Peoples Unity," *Kyrgyzstan Tuusu* (Bishkek: 6 August 1991), p. 3.

POLITICS IN KYRGYZSTAN -- 1990 TO THE PRESENT

In 1990, Askar Akayev was elected President of Kyrgyzstan with the support of a coalition of the parties mentioned above. Akayev was a member of neither the ruling establishment nor the CPSU, and his election was unprecedented in the Soviet Union. In order to mitigate the power of the Communist Party in Kyrgyzstan, Akayev formed a Presidential Council of advisors, made up of Kyrgyz intelligentsia and technocrats with democratic leanings.

Although the Communist Party continued to retain control over most governmental organs even after Akayev's election, both on the national and the local level, popular support for democracy began to dislodge the Communist leadership. Following a September 1990 hunger strike by members of the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement, the first secretary of the Communist Party Central Committee, A.M. Masaliyev, was forced to resign. Communist Party power effectively ended after the attempted coup against Gorbachev in August 1991.²³

After the failure of the coup -- Kyrgyzstan was the only Central Asian republic which actively opposed the coup -- President Akayev took steps to disband Kyrgyzstan's KGB [Komitet Gosudarstvennoy Bezopastnosti -- Committee for State Security] and seize property belonging to the CPSU. A number of Kyrgyzstan's new political parties, especially **Erkin Kyrgyzstan**, had earlier demanded a purge of communists from positions of authority in government and economic organs. This process, which began with the resignation of A.M. Masaliyev, was completed in the

²³Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

fall of 1991. As discussed below, lower-level bureaucrats have not been replaced, and are often resistant to change.²⁴

In September 1990, the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement issued a draft of a "Declaration of Sovereignty." Just before this issuance, the Kyrgyz party newspaper had announced that it no longer considered itself a newspaper of the Communist Party or the Soviet government in Kyrgyzstan, but instead would henceforth adopt a nonpartisan position, giving equal space to the Kyrgyz Democratic Movement and all related movements. As a result, it published the draft "Declaration on Sovereignty" and a lively discussion of the pros and cons of the document took place in its pages until the final collapse of the USSR on December 31, 1991.

The fall of the Soviet Union found Kyrgyzstan with a government prepared to make the transition to democracy already in place, and supported by a fully developed multiparty system. The government moved quickly to establish laws on "privatization" (i.e., the sale of government economic enterprises, property, and farms to investors in the private sector), with the intention of converting Kyrgyzstan from an administrative command economy to a market economy. These efforts have been impeded, however, by the lack of any legal code that could regulate the process. (The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic was passed after intensive debate only on May 5, 1993.) The government also rapidly began to develop official symbols of its new sovereign independence, such as a state seal and national hymn. Although Kyrgyz has been the official language of Kyrgyzstan (along with Russian) since October 27, 1989, steps are being made to

²⁴Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

change its alphabet back to the Latin script (it was converted forcibly to the Cyrillic alphabet in 1940) and expand the network of schools in the republic which teach in the Latin script.²⁵

These efforts are not taking place without difficulty, however. For example, at the Central Asia International Conference on Human Rights (December 6-7, 1992) in Bishkek, a special security brigade from neighboring Uzbekistan arrived in Bishkek and kidnapped Abdumannob Pulatov, the Chairman of the Uzbekistan Human Rights Society and co-organizer of the International Conference on Human Rights. Taken back to Tashkent, Pulatov was charged with insulting the President of Uzbekistan and sentenced to three years imprisonment.²⁶

This incident indicates that the Kyrgyz security apparatus must have been aware of Uzbekistan's intentions, and cooperated with Uzbek authorities. In comparison with some other newly independent Central Asian republics, officials at the top levels of government in Kyrgyzstan display a real commitment to the protection of human, ethnic and religious rights, but the government does not yet appear to be in full control of the bureaucracy it inherited from the Soviet era.²⁷

²⁵"Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted at the 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan 12th Session," [Bishkek: *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 21 May 1993, pp. 2-3] as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia* 9 August 1993, pp. 88-101.

²⁶Naftalin, Micah, *Statement before the Commission on Security and Cooperation's Hearing on the Situation in Central Asia* (Washington, D.C.: 25 March 1993), p. 9.

²⁷"Uzbekistan Reportedly Seeking Extradition Of Russian Journalist In Pulatov Case," *British Broadcasting Corporation* (London: 18 February 1993) -- as reported on NEXIS database. "Tashkent Court Releases Uzbek Opposition Figure," *British Broadcasting Corporation* (London: 29 January 1993) -- as reported on NEXIS database.

LANGUAGE LAW

In 1991, the last year of Soviet rule, the Kyrgyz Parliament passed a language law granting Kyrgyz equal status with Russian as the state language of the republic. Previously, Soviet propaganda had claimed that the Kyrgyz language had first been written down under Soviet rule, something that was pointed to as an achievement of Soviet nationality policy. Although this portrayal of Kyrgyz as solely a language of oral communication was patently false, it tended to restrict the use of Kyrgyz in official life, and the republic's educational network gave the Kyrgyz language little emphasis. As a consequence, few schools taught in Kyrgyz, especially in the cities. The new language law is directed at changing this trend and reinstating Kyrgyz as the republic's primary official language. To this end, teaching in the Kyrgyz language in schools at all levels is being expanded rapidly under the independent government.²⁸ The language laws have aroused great dissatisfaction among the Russian-speaking population (see below) because they are likely to curb the educational and employment opportunities of those who do not become proficient in Kyrgyz. According to Article 5 of the Kyrgyz Constitution, the official language of the Kyrgyz Republic is Kyrgyz, although it also specifies that "the Kyrgyz Republic guarantees the preservation, equality, and unrestricted development and functioning of Russian and all other

²⁸Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

languages employed by the population of the republic.²⁹ Knowledge of Kyrgyz is a requirement for the office of the President (Article 43) of the Kyrgyz Republic.³⁰

RELIGION

Islam is the religion of the ethnic Kyrgyz majority in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the Kazakh, Uzbek, Dungan and Uighur minorities. For most of the Soviet period, the practice of Islam was discouraged by Soviet officialdom and, when it was not being persecuted by government authorities, it was barely tolerated. In 1944, all Muslim believers in the former Soviet Union were placed under the jurisdiction of Spiritual Directorates which had been disbanded in 1937 and then reorganized; in Kyrgyzstan, this meant that official Kyrgyz Islam was administered financially and administratively by the Spiritual Administration for Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, based in Uzbekistan. The organization exerted its authority in Kyrgyzstan through the **Imam-Kazi**.

During the late 1980s, however, the Soviet state liberalized its attitude towards Islam; as a consequence, mosque construction and reconstruction began to flourish. Where there were only 33 official mosques in Kyrgyzstan in the 1950s through 1970s, there are now hundreds, many of which had been functioning unofficially prior to glasnost. Kyrgyzstan's independence brought

²⁹"Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted at the 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan 12th Session," (Bishkek: *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 21 May 1993, pp. 2-3) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 9 August 1993, p. 89.

³⁰"Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted at the 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan 12th Session," (Bishkek: *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 21 May 1993, pp. 2-3) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 9 August 1993, p. 93.

with it a corresponding wane in the influence of the Spiritual Administration in Tashkent, and increased the importance of the Kyrgyz **kazi**ate, based in Osh, and the recently-formed Islamic Center in Bishkek.

In December 1991, the Law On Religion And Religious Organizations was passed by the Kyrgyz parliament. It states that every citizen of Kyrgyzstan has the right to "freely and independently determine his attitudes toward religion...and to express and disseminate convictions associated with religious attitudes."³¹ According to the new law, Church and State are separate. The only restriction on religious freedom is a ban on religions organizing their own political parties. Article 8 of the Kyrgyz Constitution, passed in May 1993, affirms the separation of church and state, but forbids the "creation of political parties on a religious basis" and the "interference of ministers of religious organizations and cults in the activity of the state authorities."³²

Although Islam is Kyrgyzstan's predominate religion, there are also religious communities of Russian Orthodox, Roman Catholics, some Protestant groups, and Jews, all of which have complete freedom to practice their faiths. According to the United States Department of State, "the Government has encouraged the practice and revival of all faiths. Missionaries and evangelists are not restricted, and all have access to facilities and are free to proselytize."³³ The

³¹Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 172.

³²"Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted at the 12th Supreme Soviet of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan," (Bishkek: *Slovo Kyrgyzstana*, 21 May 1993, pp. 2-3) as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 9 August 1993, p. 89.

³³U.S. Department of State, *Country Reports On Human Rights Practices for 1992* (Washington, D.C.: U. S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 822.

Helsinki Commission has noted, however, that the language of the laws on religious freedom is vague. While no religious freedoms -- other than the freedom to organize religious-based political parties -- have been curtailed, it is unclear what might happen in the future.³⁴

KYRGYZSTAN'S ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES

Based on the Soviet Census of 1989, the total population of Kyrgyzstan on January 1, 1990 was 4,367,000, up from 3,522,832 in 1979. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan's capital and largest city, had a 1989 population of 634,000; Osh Oblast's population was 2,062,000, and Issyk Kul Oblast's 676,000. Sixty-two percent of the population is rural, and 38 percent urban. The rate of birth (for every 1000 of population) in 1989 was 30.4; the mortality rate was 7.2, and natural population growth was 23.2. The majority of the population is under the age of 16.³⁵

Ethnic Kyrgyz constitute the core population of Kyrgyzstan; they numbered 2,228,482 (52.5 percent of the total population), at the time of the 1989 census. They are spread throughout the republic, and predominate in most rural regions. The second largest ethno-linguistic group is comprised of the Russians, totalling 916,543 in 1989 (or 21.5 percent), located primarily in urban centers. The Uzbeks, who are concentrated in Osh Oblast adjoining Uzbekistan, totalled 550,095 (13 percent) of Kyrgyzstan's population. Other ethno-linguistic groups with substantial

³⁴Commission For Security And Cooperation In Europe, *Implementation Of The Helsinki Accords: Human Rights And Democratization In Europe* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, January 1993), p. 172.

³⁵Nissman, David, "Kyrgyzstan," *Collier's Encyclopedia* (New York: Vol. 14, Macmillan, 1993), p. 212-216.

populations include the Ukrainians, the Volga Germans, the Kazakhs, the Tajiks, the Uighurs and the Dungans.

Turkic peoples

As discussed in greater detail above, for the most part, Kyrgyzstan's Turkic ethnic groups enjoy unrestricted political and human rights, and religious freedoms, both in law and in practice. All citizens of Kyrgyzstan have the right to own property. All ethnic groups are free to pursue activities related to their ethnic and cultural identity, including obtaining schooling in their own language. Two issues could pose potential problems for all Turkic communities: the new government's difficulty in controlling the bureaucracy it inherited from the Soviet era, and ethnic tensions between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. In addition, the Turkic groups which do not speak Kyrgyz (Uzbeks, Kazakhs, and Uighurs), are likely to be affected negatively by the introduction of Kyrgyz as the state language (as discussed above), although the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe maintains that as long as local citizens are given the opportunity to learn the local language during the transition, "the language laws passed in all of the former Soviet republics are not in and of themselves violations of anyone's human rights."³⁶

Kyrgyz

³⁶"Draft Copy Of Paper On Tajikistan," letter from Patricia Carley, Helsinki Commission (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe), to John Evans, Resource Information Center, 28 June 1993.

The Kyrgyz constitute the largest single segment of the population of the republic. Ethnographers believe that Kyrgyz tribes began to move into the present territory of Kyrgyzstan no later than the tenth century A.D., although it is clear that the majority of the Kyrgyz did not begin to reside permanently in Kyrgyzstan until the sixteenth century. Although most ethnic Kyrgyz live inside the republic, there are also some 300,000 Kyrgyz scattered in other parts of Central Asia (primarily Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan), another 300,000 in the Kyzyl-Suu Autonomous Region of the Sinkiang-Uighur Autonomous Region of the Peoples Republic of China, and an unknown number in the Pamirs of Afghanistan. There are also smaller Kyrgyz groups in Turkey, Tibet and Pakistan. The Kyrgyz, who had primarily practiced the religion of Shamanism³⁷ before the eighth-century Muslim conquest of Central Asia, were on the easternmost limit of the Muslim expansion.³⁸ It was in the eighth century that their conversion to Islam began, a slow process that continued well up into the nineteenth century. The Kyrgyz language is a member of the Eastern Kipchak group of Turkic languages, most closely related to modern Kazakh; in the republic of Kyrgyzstan it is divided into two distinct dialects, Northern and Southern. Originally, the Kyrgyz used the Arabic script; in the early 1920s they changed to the Latin alphabet, and in 1940 were forced to adopt the Cyrillic script. They are now changing back to the Latin alphabet.

³⁷Shamanism, an ancient polytheistic religion in Siberia and among native Americans, is characterized by shamans, or leaders, who are believed to have medicinal powers and to divine knowledge through trances. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the World's Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1982), p. 123, 132, 133, 134.

³⁸Inan, Abdulkadir, *Tarihte be Bugun Samanizm: Materyallar ve Arastirmalar* (Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1954), pp. 7-9.

Other Turkic Peoples

The **Uzbeks**, **Kazakhs** and **Uighurs** each have schools and newspapers in their own languages in those areas where they predominate. The **Uzbeks**, forming 13 percent of the population, are concentrated in Osh Oblast, which adjoins Uzbekistan. They began to settle on Kyrgyz lands following the conquest of the Kyrgyz by the Khanate of Khokand in the 19th century. Both in the 19th and in the 20th centuries there have been ethnic conflicts between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks, most recently in 1990. Ethnic tensions between the Kyrgyz and the Uzbeks could potentially escalate into violent conflict in the future. The **Kazakhs**, totalling 37,318 in the 1989 census, are concentrated in the north of Kyrgyzstan, along the border with Kazakhstan. The **Uighurs**, many of whom emigrated to Kyrgyzstan after Mao Zedong took power in the Peoples Republic of China in 1948, totalled 36,779.

Non-Turkic Ethnic Minorities

As discussed in greater detail above, Kyrgyzstan's various non-Turkic ethnic groups enjoy what are, for the most part, unrestricted political, human, and religious rights. All citizens of Kyrgyzstan have the right to own property, and all ethnic groups are free to pursue activities related to their ethnic and cultural identity, including obtaining schooling in their own language. There are some unresolved problems, however, which could affect Kyrgyzstan's non-Turkic minorities. Although non-Turkic minorities currently participate freely in politics, and a ban on religious-based parties precludes the possibility of exclusively Islamic parties forming in Kyrgyzstan, one political party, **Atameken** (see section on political parties above), appears not to

have any Slavic members, suggesting the potential for the growth of an exclusionary nationalism.³⁹

The new government does not yet appear to be fully capable of controlling the bureaucracy it inherited from the Soviet era. In addition, despite the government's apparently sincere commitment to human rights, some societal hostility towards non-Turkic minorities, particularly but not exclusively Jews, exists. The non-Turkic groups which do not speak Kyrgyz may also be affected negatively by the introduction of Kyrgyz as the state language (as discussed above), although the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe maintains that as long as Russian-speakers are given the opportunity to learn the local language during the transition, "the language laws passed in all of the former Soviet republics are not in and of themselves violations of anyone's human rights."⁴⁰

Russians

The proportion of ethnic Russians in Kyrgyzstan, which numbered 916,543 in 1989, is falling, both because of a lower birth-rate than the Turkic peoples of Kyrgyzstan, and because of outmigration of Russians following the declaration of Kyrgyz independence and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Russians first settled in the territory of present-day Kyrgyzstan following the Russian conquest of northern Kyrgyzstan in 1861. By 1876, Russia had also annexed southern

³⁹"New Atameken Party Formed," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow: 13 January 1993), p. 7, as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 29 January 1993, p. 53.

⁴⁰"Draft Copy Of Paper On Tajikistan," letter from Patricia Carley, Helsinki Commission (Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe), to John Evans, Resource Information Center, 28 June 1993.

Kyrgyzstan, and the influx of settlers increased. The Tsarist government granted Kyrgyz lands to Russian settlers, a policy that led to a number of clashes between the Russians and Kyrgyz; the most serious of these was the Andijan uprising of 1916. The Russians are now concentrated in urban areas.

At present, Russians enjoy an almost complete freedom of religious and political participation -- the only known problem being their exclusion from one of Kyrgyzstan's political parties, Atameken (see section on political parties above). The major concern expressed by Russians has been the new language laws and the Constitution which makes Kyrgyz the sole official language of the republic (see section on the language laws above). While Russian remains a widely-used language in Kyrgyzstan, its status has been reduced. Some Russians interpret the new legislation as allotting the Kyrgyz language equal or superior status to Russian, and have returned to Russia rather than adapt to the new conditions. A journalist, reporting from Bishkek, has claimed in the Russian press that "the economic independence of Kyrgyzstan cannot be defended if those specialists who are still here will emigrate because of language problems. Thousands and tens of thousands are leaving."⁴¹ The Russian ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, in an interview with the Russian press, noted that in the first nine months of 1992, 77,000 people had left the republic and that 50,000 of them were Russians. He added that

There are a whole series of reasons for the migration: the danger of being close to a conflict zone [Tajikistan], worsening ethnic problems, the language law, which does not allow immigrants to hold jobs to which they could otherwise aspire. There are also difficulties in enrolling children in school, since more and more educational institutions are switching to instruction in the Kirgiz language. As the official language, Kirgiz is being

⁴¹Blyum, Yuriy, "It Would Appear That Everyone Is Equal," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow: 20 February 1993), p. 6 -- as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 18 March 93, p. 92.

introduced throughout the republic more and more intensively, thereby restricting areas where Russians living there can be employed.⁴²

President Akayev, however, has stated categorically that Russian will remain the language of "interethnic communication, whether certain forces and political movements like it or not."⁴³

Jews

According to a report distributed by the Union of Councils for Soviet Jews, "anti-Semitism in Kyrgyzstan was never widespread."⁴⁴ Nevertheless, it notes that Jews continue to leave Kyrgyzstan due to economic difficulties, disbelief in the government's ability to control the situation, and "abusive" anti-Jewish attacks from some Kyrgyz radical nationalists which the government has been unable to stem. A report given at a hearing of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe noted the arrest of a Jewish family in Kyrgyzstan on a blood libel charge (the family was alleged to have murdered a Kyrgyz child to use her blood for baking Matzah on Passover: the charge was later dropped).⁴⁵

The language law issue (see section on the language law, and on Russians, above), does not affect all of Kyrgyzstan's Jews equally. Sephardic (Bukharan) Jews have lived in Central Asia

⁴²"Migrants' Golden Gene Pool: Russian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Mikhail Romanov on Our Tasks in Central Asia," *Kuranty* (Moscow: 17 February 1993), p. 5 -- as reported in Foreign Broadcast Information Service [FBIS], *Daily Report: Central Eurasia*, 20 March 1993, p. 101.

⁴³Vladina, Kira, "Interview with Askar Akayev," *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* (Moscow: 30 December, 1992), as reported by British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], January 5, 1993.

⁴⁴Ablova, Natalia, *Jewish Situation in Kyrgyzstan (short summary)* (Washington, D.C.: Union of Councils of Soviet Jews, 1 March 1993).

⁴⁵Naftalin, Micah, *Statement before the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe's Hearing on the Situation in Central Asia* (Washington, D.C.: 25 March 1993), p. 12.

for centuries, and are integrated linguistically into the Kyrgyz-language community. In contrast, Ashkenazi Jews are European Jews who settled in Kyrgyzstan from other parts of the Soviet Union during the Soviet period. As a consequence, they are Russian-speakers and just as alien to the Kyrgyz-language community as are the Russians. They consequently face the same possible threat of language discrimination faced by other non-Kyrgyz language speakers.

Other Ethnic Groups: Germans, Tajiks, and Dungans

Germans (101,198 in 1989), were mostly resettled in Kyrgyzstan during World War II. Although they have their own newspapers and schools, there has been a significant outmigration since the declaration of Kyrgyzstan's independence and Germany's program of repatriation for ethnic Germans. At the beginning of 1992, the First Congress of Germans from Kyrgyzstan took place in Bishkek, and participants discussed the emigration of some 30,000 ethnic Germans from Kyrgyzstan to Germany. In his speech at the Congress, President Akayev spoke of efforts to accommodate German needs for those who remained in the country.⁴⁶ Germany and Kyrgyzstan set up a working group to encourage ethnic Germans in the republic to remain there, and Germany will send financial aid to Kyrgyzstan to assist in this effort.⁴⁷

The Tajiks (33,846 in 1989) are an Iranian-language people living in areas adjoining Tajikistan. The Dungans, a Muslim people speaking a Chinese dialect live primarily in rural areas.

⁴⁶"Congress of Germans in Kyrgyzstan," *Mayak Radio* (Moscow: 4 January 1992) -- as reported in NEXIS database.

⁴⁷"Germany, Kyrgyzstan to Discuss Help for Ethnic Germans," *Reuter Library Report* (London: Reuters, April 6, 1992) -- as reported in NEXIS database.

The Tajiks and Dungans have their own mass media, schools, and their own affiliate in the Kyrgyz Academy of Sciences.

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