

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

“KYRGYZSTAN AFTER THE EVENTS OF MARCH 24”

**WITH:
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H.E. ROZA OTUNBAYEVA: (In progress) – Minister Bakiyev to Vienna recently to speak at the Permanent Council of the ACA. Otherwise, we are very busy back home. And as you know, on the 10th of July in Kyrgyzstan we have presidential elections. And this is the most challenging event and sort of examination which we have to pass in front of the international community in order to prove our true intention to be a democratic country.

This is our second attempt to realize our ideas, our values, and our intentions after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. And when we became independent country, we promised and we want very much to be independent, marketarian (ph), but time has gone and unfortunately, on the 24th of March, it has happened so that the image of a country which was called as the isle of democracy Central Asia has disappeared sort of. And our president who was called here in the United States as Jefferson of Central Asia was praised very much by the international community. He has run away from the country.

This sujet (ph) is unforgettable for the whole nation and is shameful, disgraceful for the president. But it's happened so – in our nation's history, this is really such a sad lesson and we want to draw lessons for us and really try to make our best to be a new country, new relations, new attitude of the world to us.

Really, this is a big examination. Probably as Mr. Saakashvili also recently has written in The Financial Times article, it is not a difficult job to remove – not the most difficult job to remove the authoritarian regime. I should confess that it was not really difficult to go against Akayev, but the most difficult challenge is today really to continue to build the country.

And after the 24th, our government faced a lot of problems. Recently, a state commission, which was set up right after the revolution, summarized sort of an investigation and made a conclusion which was put into the paper – the consequences, the means of the revolution of 24th. And I think it is available in Russian. It is in all sites of my country – websites. And you can read it, and there is a very detailed description of the situation before 24 – why it has happened, the events of 24, and tasks for the years to come.

When I came to States just day before, I have started to talk to people and I understand that really people are not very much familiar of what has happened on the 24th. And everyone still keeps sort of very enlightened memories of what was the image of Kyrgyzstan for the last decade. And a lot of – (unintelligible) – what would be the results of your activity in the future.

I should tell you that really as Ukraine and as Georgia, Kyrgyzstan faced long-term authoritarian-such regimes ruling. The difference – I don't see quite a big difference between the content of our revolution and revolution in those other two countries. I would say that more and more, day by day, we need sort of exchange of information: how it's going, what is your results, what is the lessons – bitter lessons or successful lessons to get from each other.

There is of course a lot of – that was the idea of Ukraine and Georgia, to set up such a democratic alliance between us. We think that it is probably – we just do not know what is the status of such organization and we'll see how the development will go. But for Kyrgyzstan today, to learn more from the first steps from the years – for example, Georgia is two years ahead – what's happened and what was really not successful steps of Georgia. This is really very important.

Let me turn to our revolution. As you know, in Kyrgyzstan we have 43 parties, and they are not strong ones really. We have parties 10 years old like Socialist Party. We have some democratical-movement parties. They are probably also decade-long standing parties. But parties movement still is fragile, and when we are talking today after the revolution that we should have a parliamentary country, then it is really not realistic here in the way that parties did not establish themselves so strongly that they can pass 7, let's say, percentage benchmark and they might succeed over the election.

These parties, they couldn't build strong opposition in front of Akayev's regime. It has said a lot about regimes' mistakes and problems, but Akayev regime was flourishing on such a personal authority of very much centralized power. And over the years, we find that it is really impossible to live like that. It was impossible because year by year, everything in my country was under rule of president and his family and his close associates.

When we are talking today about this economical status, we find out that the countries – one of the last in the list of Transparency International regarding corruption matters, the foreign debt of the country was more than a national – the whole – what is that –

MR. : GDP.

MS. OTUNBAYEVA: GDP, and we find out that the lowest salary is part – this is the part of – our characteristic of the country. Everyone in Kyrgyzstan knew that the economy of the entire nation worked for Akayev's family and associates. On the paper, Akayev was the guarantor of our constitution, whereas in reality, he violated its norms many times while trying to turn the main law of the country into an obedient instrument to strengthen his power. All his democratic referendums were organized with only one purpose. We had four referendums, and the upcoming – if it will take place, this will be the fifth one to ensure his stay in power for as long as possible and continue his anti-public policies.

As a result of the disgraceful actions of the authoritarian regime, people lost their hope in the inalienability of their fundamental rights, which were widely violated. The judiciary system that was repeatedly called independent in fact became a subservient instrument without its own will in the hands of the head of the state and his allies. It was especially known over the parliamentary election. As you know, parliamentary election has been a catalyst for the fall of Akayev's regime. And Supreme Court took many times such controversial decisions, especially against the people from opposition, that nobody believes anymore in justice in my country. Independent or opposition mass media systematically face lawsuits initiated by the highest government officials. And I should tell you that many people in my country, especially journalists, they have been many times in prison. That was really a sort of a regular attitude in my country. And over the revolution, we had only two papers: Myastalitza (ph) and Res Publica, and only one, Liberty Radio, which have been very, very instrumental and efficient over the revolution.

Severe economic and social problems raise special concern among the people. And I should tell you that gap between rich and poor, gap between village and city – as in many developing countries, Bishkek City, capital, became such a conglomerate where all people from the mountainous places came to concentrate. And the country did not lack a variety of declared programs and madrassas. A lot of them – Akayev tried to feed people with all sorts of schemes, madrassas, and they didn't boost the people's quality of life at all. And unfortunately, I should stress that a lot of programs have been developed under very careful guidance of – (unintelligible) – and we think that we'll look into this method very carefully in the future.

Almost on a monthly basis, governmental officials reported on the reduction of poverty, growing economical indicators. However, thousands of citizens continue to leave their native lands, seeking substandard earning abroad. And as you know, Kyrgyzstan probably has informal numbers like about 700,000 living in Russia and in Kazakhstan. Those two countries, mostly where people go to work abroad and migrants – the problem of working migrants became one of the serious problems for the country. And if you go the south, to Osh Oblast, Jalal-Abad Oblast and Batken, you will not find a male population at all over the summer, for example. Women also, they go to Kazakhstan to work on tobacco, and this is the life of the villages.

I want to tell you particularly of this regard about the corruption which became a permanent disease of the country. And it is nothing original, nothing unique for Kyrgyzstan, as well as for many other developing countries – corruption, which during the previous regime was unimaginably pervasive but become an inalienable culture to our consciousness. The fight against corruption became a trendy subject for past government officials. Whenever possible, they praised the government's actions taken in such a vitally important area. Various councils, commissions, initiative groups against corruption were established. A great number of papers to fight corruption were written.

But of course, none of that would help because the corruption originated from the president himself. As the famous proverb says, "The fish is rotten from the head." All of these briefly described factors exhausted the patience of the people who were losing their

belief in justice. Moreover, the government was so self-assured in its immunity from accountability that it permitted fighting peaceful civilians who wanted to hear the answers to their grievances in 2002 in Ak Say (?) village in Southern Kyrgyzstan.

With all of these problems, the Kyrgyz Republic went to the parliamentary elections, the most important political event of the last year. President Akayev announced to the whole world that the elections would be held in full compliance to the international obligations of the country. However, in reality, everything turned out to be opposite. The parliamentary elections turned into a big orchestrated play and brought the country to a dangerous age.

And I'm sure that everyone in this audience, you followed such a dramatic development of our parliamentary election. And we passed really through such a difficult challenging time. And I can tell you that parliamentary elections became the last point when people thought that this regime should go away.

I want to tell you what was the situation just before the 24th of March. Those parties, which I mentioned before, they have been really very much sort of – they are really not very strong. They have been not united all together. And all of us, we started to build electoral blocks. My block was at the Ata-Jurt, built on the base of the most serious, the most strong group of deputies of the old parliament. The block of Mr. Bakiyev's People's Movement, this block was built on the base of seven parties, starting from Communist Party, which is really a very weak one today, up to the nationalistic parties. The third one, headed by Mr. Kulov, National Congress of Kyrgyzstan, had three parties under their auspice, and over the revolution was not very strong, this coalition, because of leaders' absence. And the fourth one – the former foreign minister, he built the fourth such block, New Course.

So all of us, we united – we have united just in advance – no, on 29th of December, and we signed such an agreement about our cooperation. That was a very serious message to Mr. Akayev that he should speak to opposition. He should cooperate. He should sort of engage the opposition. But for long years, Akayev lived sort of in such a special environment. He couldn't understand what is going on in country. We find a lot of papers in his archives and we know that just before the parliamentary election, a lot of people, they have gone from the White House. They knew that the time of Akayev coming to the end – and a lot of ministers, a lot of governors, they started to run to be members of parliament. And few just associates, they stood around Akayev. And a lot of papers – information, quite a deep analysis of what is going in country, they reached Akayev but no sign was given even or signs to Janusakev (ph) or to Tanayev, the prime minister, and absolutely no reaction, no reply to those papers.

So in other words, the White House was totally demoralized – no reaction was from White House. And we have seen over January and February that a lot of serious challenges face the White House but it was really absolutely a peaceful, quiet, and dark White House, which didn't react to any such challenge from the mass.

I should tell you that the family was the main actor in political life of the country – economical, political life. Everything was privatized by Akayev's family. Everything what was shining, what was moving, was under control of his son and his associates. And now state commission, headed by deputy prime minister, Mr. Usenov, is in charge to investigate and to look into the matter of assets of Mr. Akayev. My country hired now international lawyers also because there is such a sophisticated business – of hiding his assets, and will be not able of course to find out where he put – on which off-shores of the world all of this people's riches.

Today, a new Kyrgyzstan faces four goals: first, to eradicate corruption; second, to introduce a new economic policy, which is able to provide favorable environment for economic growth; third, to bring into governance a generation of young leaders and politicians; and fourth, to establish a strong democratic state and a strong civil society.

I think that this set of goals, this is just a preliminary. The first set, to gain – in this paper, a conclusion of state commission of the events of 24th, you'll find much broader in detail other goals and objects which my country put today forward. We have to strengthen today public hope in justice and a brighter future; the hope, which returned to people after the revolution. The first important test is of course the election of the 10th of July. We want the world to see the positive results of the revolution, and those who will do everything possible to hold just, honest, and transparent elections.

We are doing opposite work over the election to parliament's – Akayev's apparatus pushed everyone, all the administrative resources – governors, ministers – (unintelligible) – pushed students to vote for some candidates. And as you know, parliament is supposed to be such a center, which will – such an organ which will prolong the president's term for another time. And this time, we are doing opposite work. We are asking everyone: please do not push – 51 percent is just enough; 67, it is too good; and 70 to be too much. This is the work which we are doing today. And we want really to explain to everyone that this is really very important that everyone will vote according to their consciences, according to their will.

And students, they set up exactly the same sort of organization like Pora probably – organization – youth organization in Russia, that they don't want to be such a mass – puchevnaya massa, let's say – I really do not know this expression. And they want to vote this time on the free base. And I should tell you again, a revolution brought up new people and a new group of people, and youth organization, that was probably also something very special and very good.

Again, I should confess to you that no special assistance was given to our revolution from outside then. All of those tales and all of the rumors that someone specially came and inspired them, provoked, coached us, it's absolutely not true. And many times, commenting on the revolution, I told to many journalists in the world that that was the really people's revolution. It was people's intention to overthrow such an authoritarian regime.

And we had really very limited means in our hands. When I came last year to Washington in November, just talking about the status quo of Kyrgyzstan, I was telling that Liberty – Radio Liberty is so important; please don't downscale this radio. Radio is very important. Yes, I probably – I was hurt but not so much. And I should tell you, Radio Liberty played the same role like in the breakthrough of the Soviet Union in my country. We didn't have no television in my country. Five channels been privatized literally by Akayev's family. The first channel, which is a state channel, was totally under control of the government, and make so fully – such absolutely full programs – each of us from opposition, we have been pictured as absolutely – (chuckles) – ridiculous way. And of course people can't forget all of this rubbish stuff. And we want today to turn the first channel into the public, and this is really a very serious matter for the future.

And of course I should tell you that NGO society certainly was – coached for the last decade. We have vivid strong civil society in Kyrgyzstan, about 5,000 NGOs, and most of them, unfortunately or fortunately, they are more related to humanitarian needs. But of course part of them are political sort of oriented NGOs, and they are very strong, they are very vocal, and even today I should tell you that we feel very much they are such a very strong group on many, many issues – parties just coming up.

After the election we want to have a presidential parliamentary country. It means that we'll have party list, not just the majoritarian parliament which you have today. It is seventh year of fight for a place in this is majoritarian parliament, which was really not a great achievement of our political story – post-Soviet political story. And we want of course to add such a party list in near future.

And of course, today, after the revolution, we have this constitutional gathering, which works another time on – they are reviewing our constitution. And we want to make sure that there is a balance between executive and legislative powers and there is a balance between the court system in my country. And courts should be independent. Unfortunately, the constitutional court was not a good watchdog over this decade. And as I mentioned to you, we passed through four referendums and each time the power was concentrating in the hands of presidents.

So we are challenging a lot of difficulties. Of course, as many people tell, for Georgia and Russia – Georgia, and sorry, and Ukraine revolution were beautiful ones, very well organized, and ours was messier. Yes, unfortunately yes. But it's very much – it's part of Akayev's culture, political culture. When we brought people to the Central Square – and it has happened after when we were controlling half of the country – the south of the country. We have started the revolution from Jalal-Abad Oblast. We have been controlling Osh, Jalal-Abad, and Batken region. We passed the message on 24th March that this is serious; this is serious talk. You should speak with us. We should really think what we should do in this new parliament.

President's daughter, who became member of parliament, she dictated to the new parliament that no talk to opposition – there is no sense – and further I don't know. He was probably totally demoralized to that time and he was not an actor at all. His

daughter, his wife, they have been really the main rulers of the play. And daughter stood in front of the parliament many times with such a statement that no talks, no way, and so on and so on. And so on 24th, all of us, we came from the South to Bishkek and organized people from all of the corner of Kyrgyzstan, brought them to the central place. And we came to the central place. You will see probably a lot of pictures here. We brought special of those pictures.

And when we have brought all of those people to the Central Square, Akayev's team, they prepared a special group about a few hundreds of them who started to throw stones on people. Young people who didn't have – no plot of lands, no jobs, their voice has been stolen over the parliamentary elections, and they got stones. They started to oppose and we couldn't control them. People went straight to the White House, which they thought, this is the symbol of this unjust power. And it was uncontrollable and people took over the White House. That was really such a result of 24th and those people, we couldn't really stop those people. This is what you have seen on CNN and Euro news. That was unfortunately not the best pictures of our revolution.

So my talk probably was quite messy, and unfortunately there is not better construction and not better time to prepare best way for such a very serious talk at Carnegie Endowment. I think I need to stop to give time for questions. So thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. ASLUND: Thank you very much indeed.

Jackson Deihl, Washington Post.

Q: I wonder if I could ask you to talk a little bit about the democracy movement in your country and the security relationship that the Akayev government had with the United States. Did the U.S. security and military relationship with Kyrgyzstan have any effect in propping up in the government and any effect on your ability to carry out the democratic revolution or not? And what do you expect a future democratic government's relationship will be with the United States in military and security terms?

MS. OTUNBAYERA: Good question. I think we got a lot of assistance over the years from the United States to protect the democracy in our country and to build democracy, and we've been – as a member of the international community, we have – as you know, we committed to this anti-terroristic war, and we have air base – American air base in my country, and will not revise those commitments unless the war and the stabilization process in Afghanistan will not set on place.

For the future, I do hope that, for example, such a program with the OSCA and the strengthening of our militia, which passed through two difficult challenges, the first Aksy event when militia shot just ordinary people, and the second time now over this revolution when militia was totally demoralized but got immunity from the Aksy event

and was not against the people. Those two challenges strengthened the militia now, and the militia wants to be a sort of civil militia and needs a lot of strengthening. I hope United States will support this OSCA program on strengthening militia.

We have not a strong, of course, army, and again, my country has international commitments as part of security agreements with some of CIS countries. We are committed to have a base – Russian base also in Kant, and for this network, this sort of settlement of two bases and of our army, which years by years is supposed to be efficient, strong, mobile, small army. This is the aim which we are pursuing now. Thank you.

MR: ASLUND: Ambassador James Collins.

Q: Madame Minister, one of the –

MS. OTUNBAYERA: Acting Minister, Jim. (Laughter.)

Q: Acting, all right. One of the great challenges, I think, before any government, certainly has been true in Ukraine and Georgia, is to set certain priorities of things that will be done early. Could you give any sense for what you believe the next government really must do first, second, third? You know, you'll get hundreds of priorities, but sooner or later, government must act and do one or two things, for instance, on corruption?

MS. OTUNBAYERA: Corruption is really the high priority because we should get money back, a lot of money we hope. This is from the assets of Akayev and this is really to make clean the whole government, because the main player – economic player – is the government. And a lot of people working in the government, they earn big money, not because their salary's big, but because they really make a lot of business sitting in the government. So corruption is really a very serious matter – number one, probably – and we are very much eager to learn how to deal with corruption, how to fight corruption. And all sorts of programs will be – of course efficient one – will be very welcome in my country. We set up now anti-corruption committee and we are talking to this U.N. organization – drug and crime organization also, which asserts a lot of experience with this regard.

Secondly, Jim, I would underscore such economical development. It is so important in my country. I have fear that if we will not give visible improvement in a few years, then such a revolution, which we just had, it will take place each five years, let's say, or each six, seven, or 10 years. So people are exhausted, absolutely. People think that – at the same time, people are patient. They never lived very well and they never had sort of a privilege to live very well. But they will be patient unless the life will be just, unless the people on the top will be really just. And so there will be no gap between rich and poor. So with this regard, this improvement of economical life, it is high-priority, high agenda.

We have those priorities, such as in the industries, hydro-energy, transport, communication. We have a lot of routes to China, from China to Karachi, and so on. We are a country landlocked. For us, it is vital to have those good transport ways. And agriculture is vital and only probably a possible flourishing business. And again, we should have access to other places to sell our products. And such a high priority: tourism. We want to keep my country clean and beautiful to attract a lot of people from all over the world. We have some good projects now, an agenda, and we want to implement those projects.

And the third one, probably this is – (audio break, tape flip) – country as democratic. Democracy, in our understanding today – democracy, it's not a sort of word which my people understand straight away. That's a Latin word. Democracy, my people understand. This is people's ruling, people's participation. And today, when people took over the power which was given to the government, to the parliament, and they find out that they can't rule on the just way, they took back this power. Today they are sure that if this government now, ours, will not rule a just way, they will take again this power. And so that's why, for example, for us it is so important, this legitimacy of our power. And we want to have such a balance for powers in my country to have strong civil society, to have free mass media. And our mass media is free as never have been. But we should set some rules, which I mentioned before.

MR. ASLUND: Thank you. I would like to follow-up with a question about foreign policy myself. Has anything changed with the revolution, with Kyrgyzstan's relations with any other countries? And particularly, I wonder about your relationship with Russia and the U.S.? Is it the same or what has changed?

MS. OTUNBAYERA: I think, as in any country, foreign policy is quite conservative, right? I mean, as for my country, which is really such a new country, just setting up for the foreign policy, orientation and direction, after the revolution will not change dramatically our foreign policy sort of design, let's say. Kyrgyzstan has a strong relation with Russia and to continue to have those strong relations and this is a high priority. Russia is a strategical alliance and partner for Kyrgyzstan, and this is for a long term. It's long-term going relations and will continue to do so.

United States is very important ally for Kyrgyzstan and for everything what it means, West is, because of the United States in my country. I should confess you that we want more Europe, but Europe is not probably very much interested in Kyrgyzstan. We have only the German Embassy in Bishkek. And we have some other sort of representatives of French Embassy with the Office of Charge d'Affaires and what other – like Swiss and British, they have their aid agencies – but no other European presence. And whatever West means, it is United States in my country. My understanding is, as Eurasian nation, we want very much of – we follow not only Asian values, which are probably authentic for us, but also Euro from European or Western values, and this will always mean for us, first of all, United States – economically, politically, and spiritually.

Regarding other countries, China's role is more and more important in my country. So I just recently visited all the surrounding countries, our neighbors, and I find out that, of course, situation changed over this decade. Those countries, for Kazakhstan, Russia, and China, if a decade ago, they'd been just developing sort of countries, today each of them is investor. Each of them is very serious in their intention to Kyrgyzstan. They have a lot of free money and Kazakhstan, for example, is serious investor in my country. They bought a lot of things, property, banks, and so they have big potential to do so further. China's presence again, I want to stress this. I find that, for example, so important for my country to have this exchanges – people exchanges, academic exchanges with the West, which is very limited for my country, unfortunately. My country is not so rich as Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. We can't send our children to go abroad and to study full-time college courses, whereas China offers today a lot of scholarship and our people are happy to go and to study there, and sounds like – for us, for example, our will to have more and more students in the West, it is not reality so far.

MR. ASLUND: Molly O'Neill (sp), State Department.

Q: I don't know the extent to which you'd be willing to comment on this, but I just wondered if you would be willing to say anything about the situation in Uzbekistan and, you know, the recent developments there and the extent to which they pose any special challenge for you, especially the southern region? And, you know, what might you be doing to sort of ensure that you don't face special problems as a result of that?

MS. OTUNBAYERA: You are right. Events in Andijan, the latest events, affect us in some way because stability of my country very much depends from the stability of our neighbors. And Jalal Abad oblast, which neighbors to Andijan today is in quite a fragile status. And, as you know, my country is not in the best shape also after the revolution, and after all this, over the last year, what's happened in years in my country. And so, for all of us, we need strengthening the nation's security matters and everything. I guess the last report of ICG group regarding events in Uzbekistan quite accurate description of what's going on in Uzbekistan. We have such sort of information also. And events in Andijan, as you know, affected in such a way that we have about more than – I can't tell you how many – refugees for today, we have from Andijan. Not refugees, I will be politically correct, Uzbek citizens temporarily displaced in my country – 444 – this is the number for 18th of June – and 77 women and 17 children. So and about 40 people, they left from Vontiley (ph); they left the camp. And as you know, the camp is to be on another safe place and it's a much better situation, much better condition set up for those people.

Really, quite difficult to comment more for these events in the neighboring country. If I'll tell that this is purely their internal affairs, this would be really not probably – you'll shame me. But at the same time, it is events, which really are very serious, not just for today, but for the near future. And so follow very carefully those events. So far, we are dealing with those refugees and of course, you are aware that four of them recently have been released and somehow passed over to Uzbek side, and we are investigating this part very seriously. Why it's happened, who is guilty, and I hope that a

few days to come, we will find out why it's happened and so those people will be really punished civilly. We want to commit our international obligations and to look after those people from Uzbekistan.

MR. ASLUND: Thank you. I'll take one last question. Saltanat Berdikееva, Davis Manafort.

Q: Thanks. I was just wondering with the ongoing – in the post-revolution environment in Kyrgyzstan and especially with the ongoing sparks of protests in the country, there are visible signs of weakened security and police forces in the country. And I was just wondering, what are we – what is the government doing to restore rule of law and give, you know, strengthen the security forces in general? Thanks.

MS. OTUNBAYERA: Thank you, Saltanat. What I just mentioned about this program, Kyrgyzstan and OSCA, we are looking for a lot of assistance still from all of the sites, and I want to revive again a lot of programs with NATO for example, strengthening of the army's – the cooperation of our army with the North Atlantic Alliance. And I think this OSCA program on strengthening the police is vital for us. This is assistance of many European countries, including, I hope, United States to Kyrgyzstan. There is assistance also from China to our police and from point of material equipment and we have today, 17,000 police and it is quite a small number in comparison with, for example, Armenia even. We find out that in Armenia, there is 40,000, if I'm not mistaken. So for such a population like Kyrgyzstan about 5 million, it is quite a humble number to find out.

And we should restructure militia. As you know, in any former Soviet country, we have a lot of guy (?) people – (chuckles) – traffic police people, and we should really sort of cut them dramatically, but at the same time, to change the mind of those police that this is not oppressing of organ, but this is civil police, which should serve the nation, serve the people. So a lot of challenges, and we do have such a program. It's 10 years program and so we hope that this program will be successful. Meanwhile, from security forces, army, and police, all of them they are really building new programs and going through reforms. But how successful will be those reforms? It depends very much from the people who are on the top of those structures and it depends very much, of course, very much also from the assistance. Our budget, unfortunately, today is as pre-revolutionary budget, and so we hope that very soon, we will change the size of this budget as in Georgia for example. So thank you.

MR. ASLUND: Thank you very much and we wish you all the best.

(Applause.)

(END)