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Realities of Transformation

Democratization Policies in Central Asia Revisited

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In the era of globalization, democratization has become a universal trend, and this does not exclude Central Asia. However, there is some evidence that many international organizations lack tailor-made democratization strategies as well as in-depth knowledge of the Central Asian states. Furthermore, scholars and practitioners are trying to get to the bottom of the correlation between democratization and security.

The drafting for the project "Security through democratization? A theoretically based analysis of security-related democratization efforts made by the OSCE" was initiated in 2001 at the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) in Hamburg. In January 2003, the research project focusing on developments in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan was started. Throughout the project, the aim was to produce useful comparative analyses that might shed light on individual issues or states, and on regional similarities or differences.

This book is the outcome of the collaborative work by a core team led by Andrea Berg and Anna Kreikemeyer (Centre for OSCE Research in Hamburg, Germany). The team is comprised of the following persons: Atyrkul Alisheva (Institute for Regional Studies in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan), Sofia Issenova (Global Internet Policy Initiative in Almaty, Kazakhstan), Marina Pikulina (S-Monitor Group in Tashkent, Uzbekistan), Dosym Satpayev (Assessment Risks Group in Almaty, Kazakhstan), and Farkhod Tolipov (University of World Economy and Diplomacy in Tashkent, Uzbekistan). Judith Beyer (Max-Planck-Institute for Social Anthropology in Halle, Germany) and Paul Georg Geiss (Department of Political Science at the University of Vienna, Austria) provided additional articles. John Myraunet and Fausta Šimaitytė compiled the chronology of OSCE activities in Central Asia.

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Rhetoric of "Transformation":
The Case of the Kyrgyz Constitutional Reform

In this article, the concept of transformation is analysed from a new perspective that significantly differs from previous studies on the topic. In the case of the post-socialist republic of Kyrgyzstan, it is suggested that transformation should not always be equated with present-day real-life social change, but rather with the powerful rhetoric of Western scientific discourse, which has found its way into the public discourse of the Central Asian states. Moreover, the concept of transformation has not only been used in Kyrgyzstan since the country’s independence; its roots can be traced back to the socialist era. In this paper, the changing attitude toward the concept of transformation within the discipline called transformation studies is reviewed first, after which an anthropological account of transformation is given in order to show that long-term field research, an actor-centred approach and a pluralistic conception of Soviet history all help to develop new ways of analysing social change in post-socialist countries. In the following, the local usage of the concept of transformation is investigated in the context of the Kyrgyz constitutional reform, which unfolded in 2003. An in-depth analysis of speeches given by the president, as well as newspaper articles from both governmental and oppositional newspapers show that transformation is used as a common rhetorical tool and is therefore a powerful instrument in current political debates in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan.

The development of the concept of transformation

The concept of transformation was developed in the context of worldwide political changes referred to as the "third wave of democracy". These changes include the demise of authoritarianism in South-European states, the end of military dictatorships in Latin America in the 1980s, and the construction of new post-Soviet states following the break-up of the Soviet Union in the 1990s. Due to the early and simplified assumption that social change occurs in a linear way, the concept of transformation was regarded as a promising analytical tool in the new branch of social science called transfor-

1 In this article, the term "transformation" is viewed as encompassing other terms such as "transition" or "system change" (see also Merkel 1999: 76). The term "transformation" and its by-products has been used in italics throughout the whole article in order to stress the author's disagreement with the general assumptions behind this concept.
tion that countries "in transformation" inevitably pass through the stages of liberalization and democratization in order to reach the final stage of consolidation in which newly established democratic institutions take root. In light of the fact that this consolidation has taken place in only a few countries, which have been ranked as being "in transformation", the new approach offered by Merkel et al. tries to adapt the model to the realities of post-socialist or post-authoritarian states. In doing so, however, the authors do not question the model itself, but only components of it. Scholars from outside the branch of transformation studies, however, have different explanations for the incompatibility of the theories with the real-life situations with which the people in those countries are forced to deal. According to the political scientist Thomas Carothers, who has published extensively on the inadequacy of the "transition paradigm", as he calls it, the whole concept has to be discarded as dysfunctional:

"The transition paradigm was a product of a certain time - the heady early days of the third wave - and that time has now passed. It is unnecessary for democracy activists to move on to new frameworks, new debates, and perhaps eventually a new paradigm of political change - one suited to the landscape of today, not the lingering hopes of an earlier era."

The failure of many reforms, which were being carried out in the name of transformation, resulted in a severe loss of prestige of the sub-discipline of transformation studies. Carothers' call to discard the paradigm altogether and move on to a new model of analysis of social change can be regarded as a most extreme reaction against transitology. As a result, the sub-discipline is now looking for new ways of dealing with the phenomenon of transformation. Within the past years, it has come closer to anthropological ways of analysing social change, for example, in arguing for more actor-centred approaches, or a more differentiated view on the impact of Soviet history on the post-Soviet successor states. This leads us to the question whether anthropolo-

Anthropological accounts of transformation

While scholars within the discipline of transformation studies regard countries such as Kyrgyzstan only to be "in transformation" because they are called post-Soviet or post-socialist (indicating that they had been stagnant up until then), anthropological studies hold a different view: change is not confined to a particular period, and history is regarded as inherently transitional. Transformation, therefore, can neither be viewed as a post-authoritarian or

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4 See Sachs and Lipton 1990a, b.
5 King 2000: 165 ff.
6 Bernhard 1996: 323.
7 Merkel et al. 2003.
post-socialist phenomenon alone, but should be seen as referring to any historical period of any state or any group. Thus, the need arises for contextualization. Also, the transformation of a given societal entity cannot be analysed without paying attention to what is empirically observable in the supposed transformation of that specific entity. Theoretical discussions, models and hypotheses need grounding in observations that are made in real-life situations. Questions posed by anthropologists include: “What does change mean for the local population experiencing it?”; “What strategies do people develop in order to live in an environment that has been described as transitional by outsiders?” and “How do people react towards foreign models of shock therapy and democratization?”

A large number of case studies by anthropologists in post-socialist environments has provided answers to these questions, showing, for example, that aspects of market economy, which are being introduced to those countries, may be perceived negatively by the local population. Caroline Humphrey argues that, while production and manpower are aspects, which the local population can compare to components of the socialist economic model, consumption and trade are foreign to them. Trade is especially regarded as “speculative behaviour” since, according to the Marxist ideal, true value can only originate from manpower. By investigating local economic perceptions, Humphrey was able to show why people do not accept the economic models that were intended for them by external experts. She also points out alternative strategies that people develop, such as savings strategies, or a return to subsistence economy, in order to withdraw from the mechanisms of the market.

Ruth Mandel shows how international organizations unintentionally further increase the brain drain of qualified local experts. Many leave the local job market to work for international organizations. Through their activities, these organizations create what Mandel calls a “para-state”, offering high salaries and interesting working opportunities to pull local experts out of the job market. These actors who lay the foundation for models of transformation are thereby unavailable for jobs in state institutions, thus leaving transformation to those who do not make it into the more prestigious para-state.

As shown above, an anthropological view on transformation, such as that offered by Humphrey or Mandel, succeeds in pointing out the shortcomings of the theories and models of transitiologists. Thus, anthropology has much to offer as a discipline; its analytical tools can be used in future discussions as well as in the elaboration of new models and theories argued for by Thomas Carothers and others. Some of its contributions are long-term fieldwork instead of short-term consultation; an actor-centred approach instead of one focusing on institutions; and an understanding of history, not as a legacy,

which is dragged along and hinders progress, but as something that is instrumentalized and actively makes use of the opportunity to position oneself in the present. Last but not least, anthropology offers a pluralistic conception of culture in sharp contrast to the often-deterministic use of the term within transitiology. In the context of transformation studies, the term culture has come to be used whenever transitiologists have had to describe and explain why the behaviour of local actors deviated from their assumptions. The concept of culture has more or less been regarded as a primordial constant, which is not subject to change and hinders transformation. An anthropological perspective, however, can do more than simply deconstruct assumptions made by others. It may also give an alternative point of view on the phenomenon of transformation itself. In this article, it is argued that transformation is a powerful rhetorical instrument in Kyrgyzstan. Looking at the rhetorical use of the concept rather than regarding it as a real-life phenomenon enables us to illustrate the instrumental character of the term and the manifold ways in which it is utilized in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan. This is not to deny that states like Kyrgyzstan are experiencing serious problems and have been subject to massive political, economic, legal and social changes since their independence. What is being suggested here is that the analysis of the concept of transformation needs to be looked at from a different perspective.

Looking at transformation as a rhetorical instrument—an alternative approach

While scientific theories and models of transformation are subject to more and more critique from both outside and from within the sub-discipline, the general use of the concept of transformation is increasingly being used. In the course of the past 20 years, transformation has become one of the most commonly used terms alongside good governance, democratization, sustainability and development cooperation. Like these concepts, it has been converted from a purely scholarly term to a slogan, which is frequently used in the rhetoric of politicians, international organizations and the media. How can this development be explained?

Since the mid-90s, the use of the term transformation has been of an increasingly self-evident nature, despite the lack of a proper definition and not knowing what exactly is understood by it. A few practical examples shall explain this argument: since 1992 the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has been publishing a Law in Transition-report in which the current state of legal affairs in transitional countries is described. The World Bank has been publishing a Transition Newsletter in which it informs about its activities in transitional countries. For Central Asia, the US

9 See Hann (ed.) 2002; Humphrey 2002; Verdery 1996.
10 Humphrey 2002: 59.
11 Ibid.: 56.
12 See, for example, Brunner 1997: 103 ff.
In this article, it is held that the concept of *transformation* has become such a widespread phenomenon in post-socialist Kyrgyzstan, because the local population was already familiar with its usage in socialist political discourse. The success of the concept of *transformation* in Kyrgyzstan is not only due to the high degree of familiarity of the country with Western theories and models as propagated through international organizations. Significant parallels can also be traced between the perception of overall social change as developed in transistology and the concept of social *transformation* as first verbalized in the theory of Karl Marx, and, as later reinterpreted and amplified, in statements made by the Soviet party secretaries. Therefore, it was not necessary to export the concept to Kyrgyzstan after the country’s independence, because a socialist version of it already existed there.

**What Akaev and Marx have in common**

Karl Marx’s view of social change can be subsumed into his model of stages, according to which society has progressed from a primitive society to a slaveholder society, to feudalism and then to capitalism in order to reach the final stage of communism. As in the conception of social change in transformation studies, Marx also viewed social change as a strictly linear development. According to Marx, history unfolds in consecutive or overlapping stages of different levels of production. The achievement of a new stage of social development is envisioned as being always linked with class struggle for access to and the distribution of resources. Inter-class fights lead to the collapse of the old system and to the attainment of a new stage. Only when the final stage of communism has been reached, will all grievances cease. When the Soviet Union was founded in 1922, the first party secretary, Vladimir Lenin, advanced Marx’s teachings, which he declared as “almighty, because they are true”, by emphasizing the role of the party as the organ responsible for implementing social progress. According to Lenin, only a firmly organized cadre party would be able to guide the proletariat to its victory. He also modified the model of stages as developed by Marx and added the stage of *stakopcm* (state-monopolistic capitalism) as a particular form of capitalism to the model. After Lenin, Joseph Stalin again modified the model of stages by proclaiming that one could not wait for a worldwide revolution to reach the last stage of communism, as Lenin had previously argued. Instead, he opted for an immediate intensification of the class struggle; thereby declaring ethnic cleansings, show trials and the Gulag-system as legitimate means to achieve this end. He viewed social change as inevitable

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15 A recent publication of well-known Russian writer Victor Pelehin carries the title *The dialectics of the transition period: From nowhere to nowhere* (2004).
16 Hann 1994: 236.
20 Marx referred to socialism as an economical “transition stage” which he ranked between capitalism and communism (see Kritik des Gothaer Programms, in: MEW 19: 28).
22 LW 19: 3.
and predestined and described the forthcoming uprising as the “disentanglement from knots of fate”.

Lenin and Stalin had almost unrestrained access to the media and both had for a while occupied the position of chief editor of the daily newspaper Pravda. Published articles as well as appeals for protest meetings in Pravda levered the policies undertaken by the party secretaries. With the media functioning as an instrument of the Soviet revolution from its very beginning, Lenin and Stalin ensured that their activities and vision of the future of communist society were spread throughout all countries and republics of the Soviet empire. Especially Stalin used the media for propagandistic ends. The local population, therefore, did not have to read Marx in order to become familiar with the concept of social change as evolving in linear stages. It can be assumed that the citizens already knew of the stages through the interpretation provided by the respective Soviet party secretaries.

Even up until shortly before the break-up of the Soviet Union, the preoccupation with the role of social change as evolving in a linear manner proved to be useful in legitimizing actions introduced by the head of the party. In 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev took up the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party and started a radical political, economic, legal and social reform, following Western-style models. While he broke with almost 70 years of Soviet tradition, he tried to link his undertaking to the Soviet past to show that reforms were still being carried out in the name of the Soviet people. Speaking on behalf of the party, Gorbachev’s protégé, Lukyanov, explained the new approach as follows: “We are constructing a law-based state in a Soviet form, that is, in the form that the people have chosen as a result of the Great October Socialist Revolution”. Gorbachev travelled throughout the Soviet Union in order to promote his reforms and his speeches were published in Pravda. In his speech of 16 February in 1987 in the Kremlin, he criticized the economic, social and moral decay of the country, a situation that left no option other than to initiate radical reforms and far-reaching democratization (Russ.: demokratizatsiya) of society. According to Gorbachev, the sole alternative, which remained, was that of a “revolutionary transition”. He not only demanded this revolutionary attitude from the deputies of the Kremlin to whom he was giving the speech, but also from the general population. In his speech, the people (Russ.: narod) were given the significance Marx had attributed them with; Gorbachev refers to them as “the most important factor of the perestroika”.

As pointed out, the original model of stages as developed by Marx has been changed and instrumentalized by different Soviet party secretaries for their own political ends. Although only a few of Marx’s original formulations have made it into the rhetoric of the party heads, a general understanding of social change has taken place in a linear way, and the ability to implement this through revolutionary means prevailed throughout all of the Soviet era. The current rhetoric of transformation in the post-socialist state of Kyrgyzstan can therefore be viewed as the continuation of older practices. It is applied in post-socialist contexts because of the relevance it had acquired in the Soviet period. President Askar Akaev, in particular, used the concept of transformation as a rhetorical instrument for his own ends. Like the party secretaries before him, he relied on the role of the media as a broker and multiplier of the concept. When instrumentalized in this way, the term transformation – as used in the local Kyrgyz context – obtains quite another meaning than the one thought of in the theories and models of transformation studies. Which meaning is involved here will be shown in a case study which was conducted in spring 2003, namely that of the Kyrgyz constitutional reform.

The case of the Kyrgyz constitutional reform

On 2 February 2003, the Kyrgyz citizens were called upon to go to the polls to make two decisions: whether a new version of the Kyrgyz constitution should be adopted, and whether president Askar Akaev should remain in office until the end of his term in October 2005. According to the Kyrgyz Central Election Committee, out of the 86.68 per cent who cast their vote, 76.61 per cent voted in favour of the new constitution, and 78.74 per cent wanted to see Akaev continue his term. The events leading to this referendum are complex and cannot be explained within the limited frame of this article. However, it is important to note that the new version of Kyrgyzstan’s constitution did not evolve from serious attempts to reform the state’s structure. Rather, the referendum has to be regarded as a clever move by Akaev to calm down the population, as well as the international community, which was alerted to his questionable motives, when, in March 2002, during a demonstration for the release of an oppositionist, five people were shot dead by police and several injured. The incident became known as “The Aksy-event” and was labelled by the opposition and international organizations as a serious breach of human rights. The new version of the Kyrgyz constitution was referred to by Akaev as a “constitution of human rights”, and its changed content as a compilation of the opinions of all citizens. The second question posed at the referendum can only be interpreted as a direct move against the opposition, which had united in the course of the above-mentioned events.

23 Stalin 1950 [1905]: 160 ff.
26 It had been common procedure to publish speeches of First Secretaries of the Communist Party since the 1930s.
27 See Gorbachev 1987.
28 Ibid.

29 For a detailed account of the constitutional reform, see Kunze 2003; Nelle 2004, and OSCE/ODIHR 2003.
and which began to pose a growing threat to Akaev’s integrity, calling for his
abdication and general reforms of the state sector. In order to promote the
new constitution throughout the country, Akaev made extensive use of the
media. In three speeches, held before and after the referendum, as well as
through newspapers closely associated with the government, he tried to bias
the Kyrgyz population. The concept of transformation served him as an im-
portant rhetorical instrument. However, the oppositional newspapers also
made use of the term.

The transformation of the constitution

In Kyrgyzstan the transformation concept was used especially in
the category of readers’ letters, polemics and interviews, while the oppo-
sitional newspapers made use of it in pleas to the local population before the
referendum and in their coverage subsequent to the event. In the following,
a qualitative analysis of the three speeches given by the president as well as
some of the more striking articles out of the above-mentioned categories
show how the concept of transformation is used in the local context. As will
be shown, it serves two purposes: first, to explain the changes in the new
constitution; and second, to refer to changes in Kyrgyz society itself.

The transformation of the constitution

The presentation of changes in the new constitution made by Akaev and the
media refers to four new legal provisions. These provisions are human rights,
democratization, decentralization and judicial reforms. In Akaev’s first
speech entitled “The people has deliberated and suggested”, the president
formulated a new national idea for the year 2003, which is supposed to be
reflected in the new constitution: “Kyrgyzstan – the Land of Human Rights”.
According to him, the new constitution not only proclaims to, but also actu-
ally puts human rights into common practice. The new provisions were also
declared as furthering the processes of democratization and decentralization
in the political sector, thus transferring more power to the local regions. He
declared that judicial reforms would guarantee the immunity of those judges,
who, for a long time, have been subject to critique from within and without
the country. In his speech, Akaev also frequently used terms such as civil
society, rule of law and, time and time again, the term human rights; he also
declared that, should the population accept the new constitution, all these
concepts would be realized. When referring to the old version of the constitu-

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30 *Slovo Kyrgyzztana* is the oldest newspaper in Kyrgyzstan; published since 1925, tradition-
ally it acts as an instrument of the government. In it, Akaev’s speeches and decrees are
printed in their original version and his picture is often placed on the front page. The
newspaper is published three times a week with a circulation of 7,000 copies. *Vechernii
Bishkek* was founded in 1974 and is the most-read newspaper in Kyrgyzstan with a circu-
lation of 60,000 copies in its weekend edition. This newspaper is also associated with the
government: At the time of the constitutional referendum, the son-in-law of Akaev was
the editor in chief. The oppositional newspaper *Moja Stolica* was founded in 2001 and is
published five times a week with a circulation of 5,000 copies; its weekend edition en-
compasses 17,000 copies. The newspaper can be described as very critical towards the
government, reporting mainly on political topics. *Res Publica* is a weekly oppositional
newspaper. Both oppositional newspapers work closely together, since they are often in
danger of being closed down because of their critical coversages.

31 It has become almost a tradition for Akaev to formulate a new “national idea” for every
year. Interestingly, his ideas are often in stark contrast to social reality. For example, after
the inter-ethnic conflict occurring in the Southern part of the country in 1990, he moulded
the slogan “Kyrgyzstan – our common house”. After the “Aksy-event” in 2002, his slo-
gan now refers to the supposedly functioning human rights system in the country.
tion, Akaev uses the term “constitution of the transition period” (Russ. konstitucia perekhodnogo perioda) and, by comparing Kyrgyzstan’s reforms with those of the other Central Asian republics, he has tried to strengthen the impression that the country continues to be the leader in terms of introducing and implementing reforms. The governmental newspapers Slovo Kyrgyzstana and Vechernii Bishkek took up Akaev’s opinions on the new constitution and duplicated them in all five categories with reader’s articles predominantly dealing with the positive transformation of the constitution. However, it is doubtful whether these letters actually reflect the opinion of the Kyrgyz population. According to many sources interviewed within the frame of the research presented here, it is likely that these letters were “bought”. This habit would also seem compatible with the practice of Akaev, who, shortly before the referendum, had distributed presents, honorary titles and awards as well as raised the salaries of government officials and promised an increase in pensions.32 On a general note, the governmental newspapers were preoccupied with showing that the new constitution, as well as Akaev’s confirmation as president, was the wish of the population. By assigning reader’s letters and interviews a prominent position in their issues, the newspapers tried to contrive authenticity. After reading through the letters and analysing the interviews, it becomes obvious that Akaev’s statements were never questioned. Also, no other topics or other provisions were ever made the subject of discussions. Thereby, the governmental newspapers tried to show that the Kyrgyz population was united with regard to the referendum – a concept that Akaev had also referred to in his first speech.

However, referring to the new constitution as a transformation of the old one was not restricted to the governmental newspapers. In Moja Stolica and Res Publica as well, the concept of transformation was used – although in the opposite way. While the governmental newspapers were eager to show the progress made from the old to the new version, the oppositional newspapers regarded the new version as being more autocratic, as not protecting human rights, as limiting the influence of the population on state politics and as not guaranteeing the independence of the judiciary. In pleas made to the population as well as to the international community, opposition politicians, and NGOs tried to convince the population not to endorse the two questions being posed at the referendum. If adopted, the new constitution would not only have a negative impact on the state sector, but on society as a whole: “The project for the adoption of a new constitution may cause regressive processes, lead to instability and the continuing polarization of the society as well as hinder the socio-economic transformation of the country”.33 After

the referendum, the oppositional newspapers, in their coverage, referred to the newly adopted constitution as a regression (Russ. otkat) to undemocratic and authoritarian regimes.

Despite these different assessments made by Akaev and the media, it is striking that concepts such as civil society, democratization and rule of law were not made subject of discussions, but rather taken for granted. For example, what is understood by the term civil society was never questioned. The subject of discussions only dealt with whether or not these concepts would be realized in the new version of the constitution. This observation applies to the concept of transformation as well. Whereas Akaev and the governmental newspapers regarded the new version as guaranteeing the progressive development of the country, the oppositional newspapers saw it in a guarantee for its continuing decay. All of them, however, had an understanding of the concept of transformation as developing in a linear way. The direction in which the country was “transforming” was merely disputed. In the same way, both types of newspapers gave an account of the new constitution as the cornerstone of Kyrgyz history. The point, therefore, is not only that the constitution was transforming, but also that Kyrgyz society itself was viewed as being “in transformation”. In Akaev’s speeches, as well as in the media discourse, the event of the constitutional referendum was linked to the development of Kyrgyz society.

The transformation of Kyrgyz society

Already in his first speech, Akaev not only referred to the transformation of the constitution, but also extrapolated – out of its possible adoption – consequences for the development of Kyrgyz society. According to him, “The new constitution will guide our country further on its ways to democracy, economic affluence, peace and national unity”.34 In the following weeks, these formulations turned up frequently in the governmental newspapers. Especially in the categories of coverage, reader’s letters and interviews, the referendum was linked to the above-mentioned concepts. In his second speech entitled “Ahead of us lie high goals and difficult tasks” given on 5 February 2003, shortly after the referendum, Akaev iterated the four positions mentioned earlier (human rights, democratization, decentralization and an independent judiciary) and declared them realized. He again emphasized that this result had only been achieved because of societal consensus. According to him, Kyrgyzstan has entered a new stage, which he calls the “period of stable development” (Russ. ustoichivo razvitie). In retrospect, he regarded the strong position of the president – as it was defined in the old constitution – as justified: “The bygone period was hard [...]. Especially in this period a strong presidential power was needed, being able to protect the country from all

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32 This piece of information comes from newspaper articles in which Akaev’s behaviour was portrayed in a positive way. See for example the article “Present from the President” (Prezidentskiy prezent), Vechernii Bishkek, 21 January 2003.
33 From “The South and the North raise objection” (jug i Sever vyrazhajut neoglasie), 21 January 2003, in Moja Stolica.
34 Extract from Akaev’s first speech, 13 January 2003, in: Slovo Kyrgyzstana.
possible commotions and warranting a peaceful political and socio-economic transformation of the whole society".35 In the adoption of the new constitution, he saw a sign indicating that Kyrgyzstan was not deadlocked, but actively working towards its transformation. In his speech, he linked the adoption of the constitution with the year 2003 and referred to it as the year of “Kyrgyz statehood”, which had been recognized as such by the United Nations. He regarded the history of Kyrgyz society, its thousand years of old tradition and its wisdom as a guarantee for the future of the country. These formulations were taken up by the governmental newspapers as well, and were most explicitly duplicated in a letter by some Kyrgyz citizens, which was addressed to Akaev directly and published in Slovo Kyrgyzstana:

“We, as deputies of the Kyrgyz society, attach in the recognition of the year 2003 as the year of Kyrgyz statehood by the UN a large importance for our young Kyrgyz state. We are striving to erect a democratic society according to your national idea ‘Kyrgyzstan – Land of Human Rights’. The legal basis for the further development of our state will be the new constitution, adopted through the referendum this year. It will serve as a symbol for the striving of our people towards stable development (Russ. ustoichivoe razvitie) and growth. We need, now more than ever, peace and national unity in our society".36

After the ceremony for the signing of the constitution on 18 February, Akaev gave his third speech, “Learning to live according to the new constitution”. He called it a “historical” day. According to him, the new constitution had already contributed to a new quality of statehood and facilitated the transformation of the republic to a “higher orbit of historical development” (Russ. na bolee vysokuiu orbitu istoricheskogo razvitija). Having gone through a period of transformation, Kyrgyzstan had now arrived at the most effective and dynamic form of government. In the future, the “spirit of political ascent and societal enthusiasm” would need sheltering. In this regard, Akaev again appealed to overall societal consensus.

It is noteworthy that Akaev creatively plays with the concept of transformation in his speeches by describing the old constitution as the “conception of the transition period” and claims that the country has left this period behind and has reached a stage of “stable development”. The new constitution is regarded as an instruction on how to live in this new epoch, and Akaev tries to give the impression that the shady past has been left behind. Instead of succumbing to the Westernized forms of transformation, he creates a Kyrgyz version of it: neither shock therapy nor transition politics are used as slogans in his speeches. By developing his own concept, he rather distances himself from the failed reformatory attempts of the international community. In his speeches, the new constitution is referred to as the visible evidence of the successful transformation of state and society alike.

In the oppositional newspapers as well, the new constitution was considered more than just a legal document. Opposition NGOs equated the document with the destabilization of the socio-political situation in the country. Many of their pleas made prior to the referendum appealed to the “historical responsibility of the voters for the next generation”.37 In the name of “peace” and “unity”, they called for the rejection of the new version. Another congruity between the statements made in governmental newspapers and the oppositional newspapers is the voice appeal to the “wisdom of the Kyrgyz people”. In many articles, the Soviet past was made the subject of discussion. Compared to that period, the situation in current Kyrgyzstan was described as being a lot worse: “The Republic has regressed fifty years. The citizens see no hope for their future. Where are our leaders, where is our independent development (Russ. nezavisimoe dvizhenie) that can help us progress?38 The Soviet past was instrumentalized in the oppositional newspapers in positive and negative ways: first, by comparing the former welfare state with the current state, as in the example cited above and, second, by describing the new constitution as “pro-Akaev” and comparing it to the “Stalinist constitution” of the past.39 The oppositional newspapers thereby appealed to the collective consciousness of the older Kyrgyz generation. As done in the governmental newspapers, the oppositional newspapers associated the referendum with the transformation of Kyrgyz society. The conception that the development of the society is hindered by the new constitution shows that, also in oppositional newspapers, historical development is viewed in a linear way. In contrast to Slovo Kyrgyzstana and Vechernii Bishkek, however, the concept of transformation ceased to be used immediately after the referendum. The rhetoric of transformation in the oppositional newspapers, as having the power to be effective, only aimed at calling attention to the negative changes occurring in the state sector. Although it does not represent a constant feature of reporting, it nevertheless has to be regarded as a tool the government uses. Despite the fact that the oppositional newspapers, including its readers who are critical of Akaev, are familiar with the concept, the governmental newspapers continued to refer to the concept of transformation throughout the whole six-week period. As shown, it was Akaev who, most of the time, invented new meanings and made use of them in his speeches. This calls for a more thorough investigation as to how the president personally biased the concept of transformation.

36 Excerpt from the plea “Akaev has outwitted everybody once again” (Akaev provel vsekh esche raz), in: Moia Stolica, 17 January 2003.
37 See for example the article “Notes of an observer ... or propagandistic trick?” (Zametki obzrevatelia: ... ili propagandistskig truk?), ibid.
Akaev's personal use of the concept of transformation

Akaev's use of the concept of transformation in regard to the constitutional referendum shows significant parallels to the way it was used in the Soviet period. His justification that, during recent years, a strong presidency had been necessary resembles statements made by Lenin who argued for a strong "party cadre" in order to convey the revolutionary consciousness to the proletariat. Furthermore, Akaev also sees himself as a visionary and main initiator of reforms. His evolutionary historical model of society described in his speeches and distributed by the media can be compared to the way Stalin viewed social change. Like Stalin, Akaev talked of Soviet society and portrayed the development of Kyrgyz society as historically unavoidable and rooted in fate. In the end, he – like Gorbachev – legitimized his proceedings by referring to Kyrgyz citizens as the actual "reform engine". He declared that the Kyrgyz populace was the catalyst for the new constitution. Like the Soviet party secretaries before him, Akaev has unlimited access to the media. Besides the press, most television channels and radio stations are either directly under the control of the government, or in the hands of his extended family. Oppositional media is constantly struggling with repression and false allegations, leading to defamation lawsuits, bans and prohibitions.

By using the concept of transformation, Akaev tied in former historical concepts of linear social development as first verbalized by Marx and later significantly shaped by the Soviet party secretaries for their own political needs. By combining the "transformation of the constitution" with the "transformation of society", Akaev linked his own political ambitions with a socialist, historical model of development, which must be considered as still being prevalent in the consciousness of the Kyrgyz population. As in the past, it is the media that has helped distribute this rhetoric, with journalists at the same time buying in to it and thereby actively shaping it.

As the party secretaries before him, Akaev affixed his own seal on the concept of transformation. His formulation of "reaching a higher orbit of historical development" can be regarded as stemming from his scientific background as a physicist: he uses terms inspired by the natural sciences in order to explain his model of transformation. Since the beginning of his term in office, he has published extensively on this topic. In his first book entitled "The transition economy in the eyes of a physicist" from 2000, he developed his own mathematical approach on how to end the transition period in Kyrgyzstan. One year later, he published the book "A remarkable decade". In 2002, "A difficult way towards democracy" and "Kyrgyz statehood and the national epos Manas" were published. Here as well, the transformation of Kyrgyz society is prevalent in his arguments prognosticating the future development of the country. Moreover, Akaev has given his model of transformation a national touch. In his speeches, he tried to legitimize his actions regarding the new constitution, by linking the political event directly with the Kyrgyz population: he referred to the people as wise (Russ. mudryi) and independent (Russ. nezavisymi). Governmental newspaper articles focused especially on the Kyrgyz mountaineers, who, according to legend, symbolize independence and wisdom. By referring to these qualities, Akaev connects aspects of Kyrgyz identity and national consciousness with the upcoming political event. Both Akaev and the governmental newspapers portrayed the day of the referendum as a "historical" event. He also spoke of the "symbolic significance" of the celebration of the 22-century-long history of the Kyrgyz state in 2003 and the fact that the UN had acknowledged the year as such. Akaev also deemed the 125th anniversary in 2003 of the capital Bishkek as symbolic.

Eventually, the day of the national referendum was declared a public holiday. Governmental newspapers published articles on how the national rice dish pasly had been cooked for the eldest, how sporting events and concerts had been scheduled and how throughout the country people were celebrating. An author of the governmental newspaper Vechernii Bishkek suggested that the day of the referendum be elevated to an official holiday: "Patriots of the Fatherland Day". To understand these statements, one has to bear in mind what role elections played during the Soviet period: elections were regarded as the regular confirmation of the Communist Party's existing state of affairs, which had already been decided on; and they legitimized the continuing existence and rule of the Party itself. The reforms as initiated by Gorbachev in the 1990s did not change this custom very much: the existing system was only modified, but not abolished. Concerning Akaev's increasingly authoritarian managerial style, it can be assumed that he, quite willingly, accepted this Soviet tradition of regarding elections as an instrument which is used to acknowledge the status quo. The proclamation of "national unity", which Akaev frequently referred to in his speeches, can also be explained in this context: in Kyrgyzstan, elections continue to be viewed as an occasion to demonstrate the unity of society and the people's support for the president.

40 During a conference of the Center for Strategic & International Studies in Washington, DC in September 2002, Akaev declared: "In terms of democratization, among the post-Soviet countries, the Kyrgyz Republic – and I put it quite reasonably – is one of the leading countries. And I do not want to minimize my personal role in this process." Cited in: Regine Spector 2004: 3.
42 Akaev and the governmental media ignored the fact that, in the resolution of the UN, the allegedly 2200-year old existence of the Kyrgyz state is not mentioned at all.
43 See the article "Hello, patriot!" (Zdravstvui, patriot!), in: Vechernii Bishkek, 3 February 2003.
Conclusion

In this article, it is argued that the concept of transformation can be looked at from quite a different perspective than has usually been applied in the branch of "transformation studies". Rather than regarding transformation as a real-life phenomenon, which is associated with a "third wave of democracy" occurring in post-socialist countries, in this article the instrumental use of the term, as a rhetorical tool in public discourse, has been explored in the case of the Kyrgyz constitutional referendum. As the result of a qualitative analysis of speeches and newspaper articles on the referendum, one can sum up that the rhetoric on transformation constituted a high percentage of the media coverage of the constitutional reform. Following Akayev's lead, governmental newspapers used the term transformation as well as other key terms, such as human rights, civil society, rule of law and democratization, and thereby distributed these concepts to the wider Kyrgyz public. Journalists of the oppositional newspapers also framed their pleas and opinions with the help of the concept of transformation. As the anthropologist Kevin Latham has argued in the context of Chinese media discourse, it is the creative use of the concept by journalists themselves rather than the simple carrying-out of commands that ensures the successful distribution of the rhetoric.

Moreover, it is argued in this article that transformation is used in such a predominant way in Kyrgyzstan, because a socialist version of the concept already existed many years prior to its independence, thereby constituting a part of the historical legacy of the country. However, this legacy is not being handed down unchanged; it is being employed in new ways according to the will of the ruler.

If one distinguishes between the use of the concept of transformation and the meanings attached to it, it becomes evident that the concept itself has never been questioned in Kyrgyz public discourse. Regarding the way it was used in the constitutional referendum, according to linguist Georg Stötzl, one could speak of transformation as a non-controversial concept. Stötzl maintains that controversial concepts are those linguistic-political conflicts, which are carried out in public, because they carry with them polemic images or certain non-universal ideas. If one transfers Stötzl's concept to the way the concept of transformation has been employed in public discourse in Kyrgyzstan, it becomes clear that no such linguistic-political conflicts were present. Rather, the meaning of transformation was taken for granted and essentially not questioned at all. What was questioned, however, was the way it is supposed to be carried out and whether the country was progressing or relapsing.

To sum up, the concept of transformation may shape reality, because it is able to legitimize those actions as exemplified in Akayev's political ambitions. As the term has not only been employed by the president, but also in the media, the rhetoric of transformation therefore constitutes an important part of public (and also private) discourse about the future political, economic, legal and social development of Kyrgyzstan, thereby influencing the activities of the people as well. However, the concept of transformation should not be mistaken for reality itself. Viewing transformation as a consciously and unconsciously employed rhetoric has proven to be fruitful in showing the instrumental character of the term and its manifold uses in a post-socialist context. Future research into exploring how social change is experienced in the post-socialist republics in question should take this rhetorical dimension of the concept of transformation into account rather than fall victim to it.

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Within the frame of the research project described here, interviews with Kyrgyz legal experts such as judges, lawyers and teachers of law were conducted in order to analyse the use of the concept of "transformation" in the local population. Evidently, legal experts frequently used the concept of "transformation" in order to position themselves in a situation they referred to as unstable and unsafe. While the interviewees suspected Kyrgyzstan of becoming an autocracy (with the new constitution being a first step in this direction), their hopes, however, were framed in the rhetoric of "transformation" describing a better future. An important result of these interviews was that, while the respondents viewed their own position in the process of the political "transformation" as insignificant, they did not wait for outside assistance when designing their own personal future.

See Wells 1996.

45 Huntington 1991.
46 Stötzl 1995.
47 Stötzl, for example, analyses public debates in Germany on the topic of “Gastarbeiter” (foreign workers: literally “guest workers”). Embedded in the term is the assumption that these workers, who came to help rebuild Germany after World War II, at some time have to go home again – as guests usually do.
Farkhod Tolipov

Power, Nation-Building, and Legacy – A Comparative Analysis of Central Asian Leadership

Introduction

The first leaders of the post-Soviet and newly independent Central Asian states are very interesting phenomena in terms of their roles, images, status and personality. Their accession to and retaining of power, their ruling of the respective countries and their soon-to-be ending presidencies play a crucial role in shaping the political systems of these young states, and will leave a deep trace in the overall process of nation and state-building in Central Asia. Against the background of the very complicated and rapidly changing post-cold war international system and the formation of the so-called new world order, the five presidents and their respective states, which at the same time constitute one common region, play an important role in shaping the statehood of their nations. They not only have to conceive and consolidate the sovereignty and cohesion of their countries, but must also successfully integrate them into the international community.

The following analysis of the leaders and their respective regimes deals with questions such as: What are the power resources of presidents and their political regimes? What types of leadership exist? Who are those leaders who share a common background that dates back to Soviet period? Do they shape the common future of Central Asia?

Kazakhstan

Power

The Supreme Council of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic appointed Nursultan Nazarbaev, born on 6 July 1940 – former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kazakhstan – president on 24 April 1990. In the national elections of 1 December 1991, he was elected president. In the referendum of 29 April 1995, his presidential term was extended to the year 2000. However, on 8 October 1998, the parliament of Kazakhstan decided to end his tenure in 1999 and in the next presidential elections, on 10 January 1999, Nazarbaev was, once again, re-elected.

* This article was written before the political events in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 and in Uzbekistan in May 2005 took place. The editors decided to publish it as a document which reflects a certain moment in history. For current developments in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, see the articles by Berg and Kriekemeyer in Part IV of this volume.