



**INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION OF THE
PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF TURKIC-SPEAKING COUNTRIES
Presidential Election and Referendum on Form of Government
Kyrgyz Republic
10 January 2021**

STATEMENT

Following the invitation from Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic, the International Observation Mission (*hereinafter referred to as the Mission*) of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) conducted short-term monitoring of the Presidential Election and Referendum on Determining the Form of Government held in the Kyrgyz Republic on 10 January 2021. The Mission comprised members of the parliaments of Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the diplomatic staff of the TURKPA Secretariat (*see the list of Mission*).

The presidential elections and referendum in the Kyrgyz Republic are primarily regulated by the Constitution, the Constitutional Law on Presidential and Parliamentary Elections (Electoral Law) last amended in 2020, the Constitutional Law on Referendum last amended in 2019, the Law on Election Commissions last amended in 2019 and legislation on criminal and administrative sanctions, as well as instructions of the Central Election Commission. Kyrgyzstan is a party to the main international and regional human rights and election-related instruments. Kyrgyzstan has also ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

The elections are administered by the Central Election Commission (CEC), 54 Territorial Election Commissions (TECs) and 2,462 Precinct Election Commissions (PECs). Out-of-country voting was conducted at 48 polling stations with 35575 registered voters. The CEC is a permanent body responsible for the organization of elections and referenda. The 12 CEC members are appointed for a five-year term by the Parliament, upon nominations from the president, the parliamentary majority, and the parliamentary opposition, each nominating 4 members.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the CEC's Rules of Procedure were amended to allow holding CEC sessions online, thus allowing CEC members and secretariat working remotely. Moreover, the CEC in co-operation with the Ministry of Health has developed specific measures against spread of the disease, which relate to voting procedures, including social distancing at voting premises and provision of electoral officials and voters with personal protective equipment. In this respect, the CEC has also conducted a comprehensive voter information campaign to inform on health-related adjustments to election day procedures.

The number of presidential candidates was 17, including one woman, and most of them are in the 35-55 years' age bracket. All the candidates are self-nominated, while the Constitution grants possibilities to be nominated both independently and by political parties. As prescribed by the Electoral Law, in case if no candidate receives more than half of the votes in the first round, a run-off takes place between the two candidates with the most votes within 20 days.

The campaign started on 15 December and ended on 9 January, 24 hours prior to voting. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, contestants have used different campaign means, including social media. As a result, candidates held an active online campaign and had an opportunity to communicate with a broad audience, when voters were well informed of election platforms of candidates, their goals and objectives.

The Mission met with the Acting President, Chairman of the Jogorku Kenesh Mr. Talant Mamytov, Chairperson of the CEC Ms. Nurzhan Shaildabekova and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic Mr. Ruslan Kazakbayev. During these meetings, the Mission was informed in detail as regards the measures taken on preparations for the presidential election and referendum.

Members of the Mission have also held meetings with the candidates contesting presidential election. They briefed the observers on their election platforms, propaganda activities before elections and their expectations from the 10 January elections.

On the voting day, the Mission visited a number of polling stations in the capital city Bishkek, having observed the voting process at all stages, starting from the opening of polling stations till the counting of votes. The Mission had an opportunity to monitor the casting of votes, talk to voters, polling stations' officials and also to local observers on the ground.

According to the information of the CEC, voter turnout for the presidential election was approximately 39,75%, meanwhile for the referendum was 39,88%.

The legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic guarantees the freedom of expression and press requiring the media to provide unbiased and equal coverage of all contestants. The Electoral Law provides a comprehensive definition of election agitation and free time to the presidential candidates. At the same time, the Law obliges all television and radio companies to reserve a paid broadcasting time for campaigning by the candidates and political parties.

Only those media accredited by the CEC are allowed to cover election-related activities and political campaign, as well as sell advertisement airtime and space to the contestants. In this framework, airtime in mass media has fairly been allocated for all contestants with equal coverage of campaign.

The Mission underlines important achievements in the development of democratic election-related standards in the Kyrgyz Republic. Furthermore, the Strategy for Improving the Electoral Legislation in 2018-2020 reflects an inclusive conceptual approach of the Kyrgyz government to the democratic expression of people's will. The Strategy itself comprehensively regulates legal relations of participants of electoral process and mechanisms in addressing violations of the election legislation, raising awareness among citizens about the election process, improving their legal culture, participation of people with disabilities and those citizens temporarily staying out of the country, as well as increasing capacity and efficiency of the work of election commissions on the ground.

The Mission particularly considers the latest legislative amendments, as strengthening democratic standards of the election process in Kyrgyzstan. Among those are lowering the threshold for the return of the electoral deposit for candidates, engagement of volunteers in the campaign, definition of misuse of administrative resources, campaigning in online media, rights of observers and responsibility for vote-buying. Moreover, the Mission is of opinion that adoption of the amendments, such as suspending provisions allowing to hold repeat elections and impossibility to change electoral address for voters inside the country, streamlines the entire election process.

The Constitutional Law on Referendum and its last amendments stipulates the basic democratic principles of the nation-wide voting, such as transparency and votes cast by secret ballot. Additionally, the Constitutional Law precisely determines rules for the agitation and procedural aspects of election administration during the referendum, as well as the listing of the issues, which cannot be put to the referendum. The Mission stresses that the Law on Determining the Form of Government adopted by the Jogorku Kenesh on 10 December 2020 reinforced relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Law on Referendum.

The Mission emphasizes that presidential election and referendum were held in calm and, at the same time, highly competitive environment and have demonstrated a solid foundation of democratic values observed by all the institutions and participants of the election process. The election process itself was characterized by the variety of opinions and pluralism providing contestants with all necessary tools for legal appeal.

The Mission positively assesses the application of high technologies during the voting process, including use of biometric data, electronic vote counting equipment for scanning and counting the ballots, which immediately produces the election results after the close of the polls. The Mission appreciates the equipment of the most of polling stations with ramps for voters with mobility impairment, meanwhile, voter education materials were also produced by the CEC for voters with hearing or visual impairments.

The Mission commends the work conducted by the CEC on ensuring voters with comprehensive information about election and referendum and conducting trainings for law enforcement agencies. As regards the pandemic-related measures on the voting day, the Mission commends the excellent work of the election administration bodies in this direction and obedience of rules by voters. The Mission particularly underlines that those measures did not create obstacles for polling places` accessibility.

One of the essential improvements that the Mission noted was the facilitation of voting by Kyrgyz citizens abroad. This aspect is exemplified by the fact that for this election and referendum 48 polling stations were established at the Kyrgyz diplomatic missions, more than during the previous elections. Thus, thousands of Kyrgyz citizens were able to vote in neighbouring and other countries.

The legislation provides for election observation by contesting parties, citizen and international observers at all stages of the electoral process. All observers have the right to observe the election process from the formation of election administration bodies up to voter registration and voting process at all stages.

The Mission highly appreciates the legal and logistical conditions provided for international observation of elections in Kyrgyzstan. In its activity, the Mission followed the objectivity, justness, transparency and impartiality principles in accordance with the TURKPA Regulations on Election Observation and relevant international instruments.

The Mission concludes that the presidential election and referendum on determining the form of government in the Kyrgyz Republic of 10 January 2021 were held in compliance with the democratic and international election standards.

TURKPA INTERNATIONAL OBSERVATION MISSION
Presidential Election and Referendum on Form of Government
Kyrgyz Republic – 10 January 2021

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11 January 2021, Bishkek.