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OSCE MANAGES TO IRRITATE TAJIKISTAN, KYRGYZSTAN AND HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCATES, TOO

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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has managed to irritate Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and human rights advocates all in the span of a week. The OSCEs annual human rights-focused conference [REDACTED] the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting [REDACTED] as the friction point for frustration on many sides.

Tajikistan [REDACTED] spent much of 2015 working to relegate the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRPT) from the realm of legal opposition to that of a branded terrorist organization [REDACTED] primed for trouble. Ahead of the OSCE conference in Warsaw as well as the 33rd session of the UNs Human Rights Council, during which the final outcomes from Tajikistans spring UPR would be adopted, Tajikistan pushed back on less-than-favorable assessments of its rights record. According to RFE/RL, Tajikistan said there was no political motive in the various cases against opposing politicians, activists and lawyers. Tajikistan also rejected a recommendation to better media freedoms in the country, noting that Dushanbe had created all necessary conditions for a free press.

On the first day of the OSCE conference, September 19, during a session discussing Tajikistan, about 20 Tajiks staged a protest. Wearing shirts with pictures of imprisoned politicians and lawyers, the Europe-dwelling Tajiks stood silently in the room. The next day, there were reports that about 50 relatives of the protesters had been arrested in Tajikistan.

The OSCE, without comment, posted a statement from the IRPT regarding the arrests.

Authorities in Tajikistan are now targeting, detaining, torturing and threatening family members and relatives of the opposition activists who arranged protest and walk in during yesterdays HD Implementation Meeting organized by the ODHIR in Warsaw in order to stamp out dissent, the statement began.

The authorities told the detained relatives to ask their beloved ones not to participate in protests and criticize the Government in Europes largest human rights conference * otherwise they will be brutally punished.

Getting confirmation is difficult, but this would not be the first instance of Tajik authorities taking aim at relatives in lieu of having access to irritating political dissenters or activists. Last December, after the IRPTs leader Muhiddin Kabiri spoke via Skype at a Freedom House event in Washington DC, Kabiris 95-year-old father was briefly detained.

While the IRPT complained of detentions, a group of students in Tajikistan staged a protest of the OSCE in Dushanbe. The pro-government youth group had reportedly sent a letter to the OSCE protesting the protesters. Asia-Plus interviewed one of the student leaders, Asliddin Khoushvakhtov, who said, In the letter that was sent to the OSCE on September 20, we expressed perplexity how supporters of the banned Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and Group 24 managed to enter the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw without difficulty.

Kyrgyzstan has also gotten in on the action, criticizing the OSCE for allowing Kadyrzhan Batyrov, an ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan, to speak. Batyrov is one of a number of ethnic Uzbeks from southern Kyrgyzstan accused by the state of inciting interethnic violence in the wake of the 2010 revolution. Batyrov fled Kyrgyzstan [] he has since be sentenced in absentia to life in prison-ultimately gaining asylum in Sweden.

Eurasianet summed the effect of Batyrovs remarks perfectly: The remarks were like a red rag to a bull to officials in Kyrgyzstan and about as badly timed as could be. While Kyrgyz President Almazbek Atambayev rests in Moscow [] reportedly experiencing heart problems on his way to New York last week [] administration is pushing forward with a call for a referendum to alter the Kyrgyz constitution. Opposition figures, namely those who served in the transitional government, say that the state is gearing up to arrest them on trumped up charges, possibly with regard to aiding Batyrov in his escape. Batyrov is being used as the stick with which to beat them, Eurasianet notes.

Kyrgyzstans diplomatic leaders took aim at the OSCEs Office for Democratic Institutions and

Human Rights (ODIHR) for hosting Batyrov.

We believe that the actions of ODIHR are a sign of extreme disrespect not only to the judicial system of the state, but also to all the people of the Kyrgyz Republic. We regard this as a challenge to our country, which goes along a thorny and difficult path of building a true democracy, Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Erlan Abdyldaev said.

While Batyrov escaped Kyrgyzstan, another Uzbek activist, Azimjon Askarov, did not. His conviction and reported torture at the hands of the Kyrgyz security services has been the subject of significant tension. After the U.S. State Department granted Askarov a human rights defender award in 2015, Bishkek denounced a 1993 cooperation treaty. Then in April the UN Human Rights Committee finally ruled that Askarov's rights had been violated and called for his immediate release. The mechanism for that release is a clause in the Kyrgyz constitution that permits citizens to appeal to international bodies if their rights have been violated. [] is one of the mines Atambayev hopes to exorcise from the Kyrgyz constitution via referendum this winter.

Some of the staunchest opponents of the proposed constitutional changes come from the same cadre of politicians who served (as Atambayev did) in the interim government after the 2010 revolution. The political storm in Kyrgyzstan deserves close watching, particularly as there seems to be a growing public discontent with the smooth sailing of the referendum bill through parliament. An anti-referendum movement is collecting signatures, and according to 24.kg The movement members stressed that they reserve the right to hold mass protests.

Lastly, human rights defenders are frustrated with the OSCE, too. Kenneth Roth, Human Rights Watch's executive director, called on the OSCE to change the way it works with regard to specific issues. The OSCE needs to catch up with the real world, Roth said, noting that the groups consensus-based decisionmaking process at times hampers the organizations efforts. The OSCE, with 57 members, operates via consensus. But consensus for the basic acts of monitoring and reporting on human rights violations, or for the budgetary allocations to finance that basic work, should not be required on a case-by-case basis. The ability of a member to veto such initiatives has stymied the groups work and impeded its effectiveness.

It seems the OSCE is both doing too much and not nearly enough, depending on who you ask.

Kaynak/Source: