

# Kyrgyzstan Clashes with Belarus Over the Bakiev Clan

Yesterday Belarus officially declared that it would not extradite the former head of Kyrgyzstan's security service Janysh Bakiev.

That was the State Prosecution Office's response to an extradition request from Bishkek. Kyrgyzstan accuses Janysh Bakiev of committing a number of violent crimes. Minsk calls Kyrgyzstan's request politically motivated.

On 17 August, Belarusian activist Mikhail Pashkevich took a photograph of a Kyrgyz man near a restaurant thinking that it was the former Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiev who has been living in Belarus since April 2010. The Kyrgyz government have tried – without success – to bring him back to prosecute him for crimes committed during his time in office.

However, the man in the picture has been subsequently identified as Janysh Bakiev, the younger brother of Kurmanbek. Two other Kyrgyzstani citizens sought for crimes in their home country were with him. That triggered a serious diplomatic scandal between Belarus and Kyrgyzstan, the recall of Kyrgyzstan's ambassador and an attack on the Belarusian embassy in Bishkek.

## **Belarusian Embassy under Attack**

Kyrgyz authorities reacted immediately. Already on 21 August Kyrgyzstan Foreign Ministry handed to the Belarusian ambassador a note demanding the arrest of Janysh Bakiev. The next day the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Kyrgyzstan explained that the individuals in the picture are accused of killing among others the former head of presidential administration of Kyrgyzstan. Belarusian

authorities then denied Janysh's presence in Belarus.

On 24 August, the Kyrgyz ambassador to Belarus was recalled to Bishkek. Belarus decided not to respond in kind and kept its ambassador in Bishkek. Minsk apparently wants to soften the crisis. On the same day, Pashkevich, who photographed Janysh Bakiev, told the media that some suspicious people were following and threatening him for revealing Janysh's location.

On 28 August, Kyrgyz protesters threw stones at the Belarusian embassy in Bishkek and tried to storm the building. Kyrgyz police explained that this is how Bakiev's victims were protesting Belarus' actions. On 3 September, the Kyrgyz president recalled his country's ambassador to Minsk. It is now clear that the Belarusian government was aware of Janysh living in Belarus and apparently helped him to hide in the country.

### **Bishkek Tolerated the Presence of its Ousted President in Belarus**

Such harsh reaction to the revelation of Janysh Bakiev's whereabouts contrasts with Bishkek's silent tolerance of the former Kyrgyz president's presence in Belarus. Kurmanbek has been openly living in Belarus for years, where he has reportedly bought a USD 1.7m mansion and taken up citizenship. Sometimes he holds press conferences and invites journalists for tea at his house – without actually allowing anybody into his house. He reiterated that he was paying for everything out of his own pocket without the Belarusian government's help.

Relations between the two nations continued despite sporadic ritual demands for the former president's extradition to Bishkek. In October 2011 high-level Belarusian officials even attended the inauguration of the new Kyrgyz president Almazbek Atambayev. On 5 July, Kyrgyzstan withheld its vote for a resolution of the UN Human Rights Council on the human rights situation in Belarus. The new Kyrgyzstani government

had more important business to attend to and was too weak to deal with the former president.

Actually, the Kyrgyz government might easily let Kurmanbek stay in exile, as his return would bring no real benefits for the new regime. Moreover, Kurmanbek was considered to be under the strong influence of his brother Janysh and son Maxim – the main villains in Kyrgyzstani public opinion. Janysh was responsible for the security services and gave orders to shoot at protesters. The current Kyrgyzstani authorities even set a prize for anyone providing information on the whereabouts of Janysh.

### **“Dictators Solidarity”**

Some analysts believe that Lukashenka has helped out Bakiev and his retinue out of personal, apparently emotional motives. The Belarusian ruler considered it necessary to give refuge to the ousted “fellow dictator” and give a signal that he would also – like Bakiev – without hesitation crush protests. But this may be only a part of the real explanation.

A more rational scheme, however, may be behind bringing Bakievs to Belarus. In its relations with Russia, Belarus has a constant problem of disproportional forces. To compensate for its own weaknesses in this relationship, Lukashenka has worked on building up relations elsewhere and finding allies to counterbalance Moscow.

His major partner among post-Soviet nations is Kazakhstan's president Nazarbayev. Minsk paid for that cooperation when it [solved](#) for Nazarbayev his “Bakiev problem”. After his flight to Kazakhstan in April 2010 Bakiev became a doubtful asset for Nazarbayev. The fugitive leader and his team were eager and able to wreak havoc in Kyrgyzstan. A few weeks after Bakiev was ousted, his supporters instigated massive bloody inter-ethnic clashes in the southern Kyrgyz province of Osh.

Nazarbayev hardly wanted to see a destabilised Kyrgyzstan on

his borders. And he was happy to send Bakiev thousands of miles to the west, to Belarus.

Lukashenka made an attempt to capitalise on Bakiev's arrival in Belarus. He reportedly came in July 2010 to the summit of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation with a letter from Bakiev urging CSTO nations to intervene militarily in Kyrgyzstan. The Belarusian leader found no support for this idea, and from his proposal the heads of state only included in a final declaration a brief sentence about “unconstitutional power change” in Kyrgyzstan. Next year, Lukashenka again articulated the idea of [using CSTO troops to suppress revolutions](#) in post-Soviet nations yet it failed as well

### **Bakievs Stay in Minsk**

The extradition of Kurmanbek Bakiev is very unlikely. Kyrgyzstan has no leverage to force the extradition, and Russia and the US just wanted him to [go](#) and have no interest in his prosecution. The same is true even for Janysh. Bishkek believes to have enough evidence to build up a case against the former security service chief. It guarantees a fair trial and asks for help both from the CIS and Interpol. Yet both have limited influence on Belarus.

Belarusian authorities may also have a mercantile interest in keeping the former ruling clan in the country. Bakiev's son Maxim has been staying in the UK since 2010 – though officially he still does not have political refugee status. The charges against Maxim are not lighter than those against Janysh.

In the past, many speculated that Saddam Hussein and Muammar Qadhafi would find refuge in Belarus. None of them ended up in Belarus which could have saved their lives. The feeling of solidarity between dictators coupled with the money which they have bring could yet again make Belarus a potential safe haven

for fallen dictators from around the world.