NATION-BUILDING

UZBEKISTAN: SOVIET SYNDROME IN THE STATE, SOCIETY, AND IDEOLOGY

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Introduction

I believe that *post-Sovietism* is the aptest way to describe the wide-scale transformations unfolding in the post-Soviet era in the newly independent Central Asian states. It presupposes that certain new, modern institutional qualities of nation- and state-building will appear because of the very natural need to adjust to the existing world order.

Part of society expected that independence would revive, partially or on a larger scale, what can be called *pre-Sovietism*: a set of features that describe domestic and foreign policy as well as the relations between the former "colonies" that existed even before Soviet power came to these parts of the world.

Meanwhile, everything that should, or could, appear in the form of post-Sovietism and pre-Sovietism was nothing other than *neo-Sovietism.* This is not a chance phenomenon—it was called to life by political, social, psychological, historical, economic, and geographic reality, factors that were permanently present across this vast territory.

Practically all the former Soviet republics, the CIS members, were affected by the Soviet syndrome which came to the fore as the most obvious phenomenon in Uzbekistan's state administration-civil society-ideology system.

Administration Efficiency

To assess administration efficiency we should recognize the existence of another problem—the gap between democracy de jure and democracy de facto in Uzbekistan. The former means that the

legislative and institutional forms of democratic governance are in place; the latter—that the form has an adequate content, i.e. that the laws are being implemented while the democratic institutions are functioning without hindrance. An analysis, however, reveals a gap between de jure and de facto democracy in Uzbekistan in nine spheres and the presence of eight conceptual dichotomous questions of democratic construction.[1]

This gap obviously has little in common with the course aimed at liberalizing the economic, legal, and spiritual spheres announced back in 1999 by the 14th Session of the Oliy Majlis (parliament) of Uzbekistan. It described the new principle of state- and society-building as: "From a strong state to a strong civil society" which was probably expected to modify one of the main principles of the socio-economic and political reforms in Uzbekistan during the early period of independence: "the state is the main reformer."

What are the nine problems and eight conceptual questions?

The first problem is related to the party system. Today we can say with good reason that the process of forming a party system as the key element of civil society is stalling. The parties on the political scene are practically indistinguishable as far as their programs, provisions, and specific political activities are concerned. There is no competition among them—what is more they present no opposition to power. Their ideological postulates are vague while their prestige and influence among the people are hard to detect. No opposition parties appeared in Uzbekistan during sixteen years of independence and democracy-building.

There are objective and subjective reasons for this: on the one hand, total *party-zation* of the Soviet period was replaced by nearly total *departy-zation* of the independence period; the ideological chaos did nothing to promote full-scale *re-party-zation.* On the other hand, emergence of a genuine party system was deliberately suppressed by undemocratic political methods.

The second problem is related to the local self-administration structures, the makhallas (neighborhood communities). In the capital, for example, especially in the districts of multi-story apartment blocks, makhalla committees and housing administrations (preserved from Soviet times) are competing for the right to deal with everyday issues. None, however, are suited to deal with social and everyday problems. This means that people are gradually losing faith in the self-administration structures, which have limited themselves to apartment renovation and collecting utility payments (in the case of the housing administrations) or to the distribution of the modest material assistance and money allocated by the state to keep the poorest families afloat (in the case of the makhallas). This cannot be described as true self-administration.

The nature of the makhallas' activities, including social support to those who need it most, and, on the whole, self-administration should differ in the most resolute way from what the state is doing in the sphere of state governance. The makhallas should not be turned into state structures and become indistinguishable from state administration. The Human Rights Watch Report on makhallas published in 2003 said that the Uzbek government had turned the makhallas, formerly an independent self-administration structure, into a nationwide system of control and supervision.[2] Some of the conclusions about the makhallas' controlling functions look like an overstatement—the makhalla as an institution is very weak. One thing is clear however: its functions have been distorted—it serves as an instrument for bringing the will of the state to the grass-roots level—not vice versa.

[1] I prefer the term "democratic construction" to the more common "democracy-building" to refer not so much to the practical process of building democracy as a political system as to the theoretical process of formulating an adapted conception of democracy.

[2] See: *Uzbekistan: From House to House*, Human Rights Watch Report, Vol. 15, No. 7, September 2003, available at [www.hrw.org].

The makhalla, however, remains a moral authority; its system of moral regulators is a product of the many centuries of communal living. It should be modernized to meet the standards of local self-administration seen in developed democratic states. It should develop not only as an integral part of Uzbek culture and traditional way of life; it should develop as a badly needed element of any democratic society with strong institutions of local self-administration.

The third problem is created by regionalism and the clan system which President Karimov described as a threat to national security. No civil society can develop into a strong system as long as remnants of tribal and clan relations survive in it. Regionalism and the clan system tear civil society apart and distort what should function as democratic state administration.

Structures (more often than not informal) based on kinship, territorial, or ethnic affiliation that appear in state or other organizations guided by narrow selfish group interests and pushing them to the fore to the detriment of the common cause and state and national interests can be described as dangerous especially since they tend to push their members up in all the hierarchies.

If preserved regionalism and clan relations may contribute in particular to the self-isolation of regions and a breakdown in traditional economic ties. They may encourage centrifugal tendencies in the form of power squabbles among clans and regions (rather than a power struggle among constructive political forces). Self-isolation of social segments is a destructive phenomenon: they are no longer tied together in a harmonious way typical of the relations that keep civil society together.

The fourth problem is the republic's media. As the fourth power they are expected to be the core of civil society yet in this sphere too Soviet remnants are obvious. The Media Democratization Fund functions in the republic which is gradually building up a legal foundation to allow the democratic media to function; every year young journalists are sent abroad to gain working experience, but nothing changes. The media lacks a cutting edge; they are mostly engaged in lauding the state's policy.

So far the press has not become a fourth power in its own right to be listened to and recognized as such; the media are still weak, they have not become independent and democratic.

The fifth problem is connected with the undeveloped mechanisms of public opinion polls. It is of a dual nature: How is public opinion formed and how is it taken into account? In democratic countries public opinion is an instrument that measures the state of civil society. We have to admit that in Uzbekistan neither the process of forming nor of studying public opinion has become a common attribute of political life. Random opinion polls among various population groups can be dismissed as feeble and ineffective attempts to find out what the nation really thinks. On many occasions the polled either cannot grasp the purpose and meaning of the polls or are unprepared to speak openly (they either fear possible repercussions or are suspicious). Not infrequently, the local authorities, which are supposed to be interested in what the people on their territories think, ban public opinion polls in their regions.

On the other hand, no one seems to be interested in the results produced by independent sociological centers, although civil society should be strong both institutionally and functionally. In other words, the quality and efficiency of the relations between the state and civil society depend on the extent to which the interests of population groups and society as a whole are taken into account in the political decision-making process.

I would like to say here that the transition to a market economy will throw social stratification into broader relief. This means that by forming public opinion and taking it into account we should harmonize, in every way possible, the interests of various population, professional, and other groups, as well as of associations and organizations. The efficiency of state governance largely depends on this.

The sixth problem is caused by the worsening quality and lower efficiency of the relations between society and the state. This is one of the most exact parameters for describing the state of civil

society and the nature of state governance. The experience of post-communist countries has identified the nature of state governance, which tends to develop into the monopoly of a certain group on political and administrative wisdom as the main source of conflicts between the ordinary people and the bureaucracy. This monopoly cannot correctly assess reality mainly because of the inflated (albeit informally) social and cultural status of the bureaucracy that identifies itself with the state and the way the state is governed.

This may lead to a crippled legal system which lacks many of the needed laws, and to impunity and criminalization of many spheres of life. The nation and bureaucrats are parting ways: the latter are mostly guided by personal or departmental interests.

People have no confidence in the power structures mainly because the state cannot explain in clear terms what it is doing, how it is acting and why; it cannot execute the decisions passed because of the low administering skills and lack of professionalism; the state structures have opted for undemocratic methods and style—they prefer functioning as closed structures, suppress openness, and are dedicated to nepotism; bureaucrats are serving their own interests or the interests of their bosses and pushing through decisions that have nothing in common with the interests of society.

In this way the low efficiency of the state structures and their inability to address the real problems the country and common people are facing and to explain them to the nation has lowered people's confidence in the state and alienated them from the state structures. I would like to point out that at the same time democratic relations in society, political involvement, spirituality, and patriotism are depend, to a great extent, on what the heads of local structures and local functionaries are doing.

Abdulla Abdukhalilov, an Uzbek political scientist, has pointed out the lack of transparency and balancing tools in Uzbekistan's administrative system and enumerated the factors responsible for this state of affairs:

1. The lack of real opposition parties in parliament;
2. The lack of a civil society capable of articulating and aggregating its requirements;
3. The lack of a mechanism for ensuring a constructive dialog between the state and civil society.
4. The lack in the republic's mass media of independent information-analytical programs that raise the population's political culture. This is responsible for the population's insufficient awareness about the activity of the state structures.

Public opinion polls revealed the fact that people did not know the names of the key ministers and other officials of Uzbekistan, such as the minister of justice, minister of the interior, and minister of defense. It was also revealed that the country's population was more informed about the personalities and activity of the Russian Federation's ministers.

The republic still lacks a law on civil servants, which is leading to non-regulated relations among bureaucrats and between the client and the official. This is conducive to the zones of vagueness in administrative activities. The republic's administrative system has not rid itself of the dysfunctional elements inherited from Soviet times described by American sociologist Robert Merton. He regarded the bureaucratic system in the context of a substitution of goals. In his opinion, the bureaucrat primarily serves the interests of his organization and not the resolution of social problems.[3]

The seventh problem is closely connected with the previous one: the situation in the judicial and legal system remains the same year after year.

[3] See: A. Abdukhalilov, "Stages and Special Features of the Administrative Reforms in the Republic of Uzbekistan," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* No. 6 (48), 2007.

People complain about the misconduct of the law-enforcing structures and court decisions more and more often. This is amply testified by the statistics of complaints to the Ombudsman of the Oliy Majlis.

Society is concerned about the misconduct of ministry of the interior officials who are not merely rude to people—they resort to mental and physical violence; they are cruel to those detained and not alien to extortions; more often than not they neglect their duties of maintaining law and order and uprooting crime.

The eighth problem lies in the economic sphere: the non-market mechanisms that are still used in this sphere have done nothing to encourage private business and market relations. The republic's economy can be described as an obviously rent economy that allows influential groups to reap profits (so-called economic rent). Uzbek economists Eshref and Iskander Trushins have pointed out that in many CIS countries the struggle over rents and redistribution of rents has become the main content of the transition period: transition to a more effective economy and fair distribution of national income have been ignored. "Businessmen in the partially reformed transition economies promptly realized that it is much more profitable to preserve their privileges than bother about opening new enterprises or reconstructing the already functioning ones. Corruption is the natural result of the system of rent seeking."[4]

Meanwhile the market misbehaved in a puzzling way: during 2007 the price of sunflower oil went up by 130-160 percent (from 1,600-1,800 soums to 3,700-4,700 soums per liter by December 2007). Today, sunflower oil costs 3,700-4,200 soums per liter. Cotton seed oil is only marginally cheaper: 3,000 soums per liter in the market. When distributed through the makhalla self-administration structures (the Uzbek equivalent of the food coupons system) everyone stands a chance of buying two bottles of oil for the price of 1,700 soums. Normally, people are told that the delivered oil costs 1,700 soums. It is sold, however, for 1,800 soums per liter (100 soums are charged for delivery). There is no reliable information about the time of cheap oil deliveries: there are no schedules; people are informed through the makhalla or housing committees. Oil is delivered, on average, once every one or two months, which stirs up the local people. This can be described as a system of distributing rather than selling vegetable oil.[5]

The ninth problem is caused by the discrepancy between the slogans, political principles, and even some of the laws and the real situation in the sphere of education and spiritual life. The education crisis that hit the schools, lyceums, colleges, and universities was caused by the shortage of highly skilled teachers, textbooks (especially in the Uzbek language), technical means of education, etc. The state has pushed science to the backburner (today a university assistant professor earns about $200). The educational system is too ideological—another vestige of the Soviet system. Starting in the seventh year at secondary schools and up to acquiring the bachelor degree, students have to cope with subjects such as "the national independence idea" and "fundamentals of spirituality" as part of the curriculum. Schools and lyceums pay more attention to Soviet-style discipline than to the quality of knowledge they are expected to supply.

This means that in Uzbekistan as a newly independent state in which the remnants of the Soviet political tradition are still very strong governance efficiency totally depends on an omnipotent state apparatus. I suggest calling this system the **apparatus management.** It cannot function other than relying on clientage, nepotism, plutocracy, the clan system, and the *absence of demos.* This makes the task of overcoming state administration kleptocratia difficult. It seems that this is typical of all Central Asian countries.

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[4] E. Trushin, I. Trushin, "Institutsionalnye bartery v economicheskom razvitii Uzbekistana," in: *Tsentralnaia Azia i Yuzhny Kavkaz: nasushchnye problemy,* ed. by B. Rumer, TOO East Point, Almaty, 2006, p. 227.

[5] Fergana.Ru [www.fergana.ru], 7 April, 2008.

E. Wayne Merry has offered an interesting description of the system: "…the post-colonial experience of the Third World is most relevant to Central Asia, in the replication there of what in Africa is called the "Big Man" regime type. Such regimes tend to be dominated by members of single ethnic group or clans and by the enshrinement in power of a single individual or, more commonly, a Great Leader and his family (leading to the *sotto voce* witticism in several post-Soviet states that Stalin's quest to build "socialism in one state" has been replaced by the goal of "socialism in one family"). Such regimes do not distinguish public from private wealth, transforming corruption from a form of social deviance into effective state policy. These regimes maintain political control by strictly limiting participation in the political process; be extending state authority over a wide range of civil institutions, including business, labor unions, organized religion, and the media; … and by lecturing Western critics that the local populations are "not ready" for democracy which "takes time". Finally, such regimes almost invariably encounter a crisis when attempting a generational transfer of power within the ruling family or clan, as the authority and legitimacy of the first post-colonial "Big Man" creates shoes too large for a successor to fill." [6]

Meanwhile, political life is brimming with talk of reforms. Politicians, ideologists, and analysts alike are fond of talking about them to explain the temporary hardships in the economic, social, and other spheres. American political scientist Gregory Gleason has written: "To the citizens of Central Asia, reform has become a permanent condition of governance and more of an explanation for why things do not work than for why they do."[7]

The eight conceptual questions are the following:

(1) Compatibility of a Secular State and the Islamic Culture.

The well-known principle of separation of religion from the state was accepted everywhere *a priori,* as an axiom. Today, however, Islamic revival in society and the challenge of religious extremists demand that the principle should be confirmed by academic substantiation and public discussions.

(2) Compatibility of Islam and Democracy.

Religious extremists who are opposed to the state insist on theocracy; they argue that Uzbekistan should opt for a caliphate as the country's only true road. They took up arms to fight the state for this idea. It seems that correct interpretation of Islam is the best weapon to be used against the radicalization of Islam. Is it correct to alienate Islam from democracy? This question should be comprehensively discussed in the democratic process.

(3) Democracy or Autocracy?

There is a newly fledged opinion supported at least by some analysts that Asian societies, and Central Asia in particular, are alien to democracy, which they dismiss as a Western phenomenon. The local rhetoric was borrowed and developed by certain foreign analysts (or vice versa: local ideologists borrowed it from their foreign colleagues). Russian analyst Vitali Naumkin, for example, has written: "When Western analysts speak of Karimov's authoritarianism, they overlook the fact that authoritarianism is not a whim or a political line, but the integral feature of Uzbekistan's traditional political culture."[8] Hundreds of thousands of Uzbek citizens, especially intellectuals and the youth who want

[6] E.W. Merry, "The Politics of Central Asia: National in Form, Soviet in Content," in: *In the Tracks of Tamerlane. Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century*, ed. by D. Burghart and T. Sabonis-Helf, National Defense University, Washington, D.C., 2004, p. 30.

[7] G. Gleason, "Reform Strategies in Central Asia: Early Starters, Late Starters, and Non-Starters," in: *In the Tracks of Tamerlane. Central Asia's Path to the 21st Century,* p. 43.

[8] V. Naumkin, "Uzbekistan's State-Building Fatigue," *The Washington Quarterly,* Summer 2006, p. 138.

democracy more than anything else, will hardly hail this definition of their political culture.

(4) Security or Democracy?

The opinion that national security comes before democratization is a popular one. It rests on the "security first" formula and is fed by the challenges to security that the country has been facing throughout the entire period of its independent existence. It seems that the concepts have been unduly narrowed down. Security and democracy are not two alternatives even in the face of threats. The opposite is true: the world community is gradually accepting another maxim: democracy promotes security; it can even be described as an important condition of stability, peace, and security. In Uzbekistan, too, those involved in the democratic discourse should identify their position in relation to this conceptual issue.

(5) A National or Universal Model?

The question of the relations between the national and universal models of democracy has not yet found a conceptual solution. Talk about the national model has being going on in Uzbekistan for a long time but so far it is reduced to a very simple formula: we shall not copy Western democracy. This distorts, very much like in Soviet times, the ideas the public has about the world, democracy, and even about its own country.

(6) Gradual or Fast Movement?

Those who support the status quo invented a conception of stage-by-stage movement toward democracy; to justify it they point out that it took the Western states two, three, or even more centuries to finally arrive at democracy. They also argue that society is not ready to embrace democracy and that too rapid liberalization might destabilize the sociopolitical situation in Uzbekistan. This question permits many approaches—so far the discussions are dominated by the thesis about democracy as a bright future, which brings to mind the Soviet past.

(7) Liberalism or Paternalism?

There is a deeply rooted conviction in the minds of the public that Uzbekistan is a state with strong paternalist traditions in which there is no place for the liberal tradition. This means that the state will loom prominently in all spheres of life. If this is true, does the course toward liberalization proclaimed in 1999 have any meaning?

(8) Modernization or Traditionalism?

There is another conceptual hindrance when it comes to grasping the meaning of the democratic process in Uzbekistan. Much has been said about potentially painful repercussions for traditional Uzbek society of modernization of the state and its elements (democratization, urbanization, and industrialization). David Apter, a prominent American political scientist, has identified modernization as a "…process of consciously directing and controlling the social consequences of increased role differentiation and organizational complexity in a society."[9] He writes that such countries as Uzbekistan, which have already tried to leap from feudalism to socialism, current modernization might turn into another leap—this time from traditionalism to a new society. Therefore, warns David Apter, the modernization policy should take into account that there are stable norms, values, and institutions typical of pre-modernization and pre-democratic periods.

[9] D. Apter, *The Politics of Modernization,* The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1965, p. 56.

These are fundamental conceptual dichotomies directly related to the central issue: the timely nature, content, form, and prospects of the state's democratic choice.

The State of Civil Society

In Uzbekistan, talk about a civil society (CS) and building it has reached euphoric heights. To promote democracy the country needs CS institutions—the task of creating them has almost become a state strategy. However, political theory does not confirm this.

When writing about civil society as the sum-total of self-organizing mediation groups, outstanding American political scientist Philippe Schmitter has warned that the groups per se are "necessary, but not sufficient evidence for the existence of a CS since these units can be manipulated by public or private actors and they can be mere façades masking actions by social groups intended to usurp power from legitimate state authorities or to exert domination over other social groups in 'uncivil' ways."[10] Although it helps to consolidate democracy, civil society is not its immediate cause. "It cannot unilaterally bring about democracy, or sustain democratic institutions and practices once they are in place."[11]

In this light creating CS institutions in Uzbekistan looks very much like a Soviet campaign rather than as a natural process, a product of democracy that should breed democracy. When talking about a natural process, we should bear in mind that the nation of Uzbekistan is still steeped in prejudices that divide it. I particularly have in mind the very persistent clan system. This means that all the talk about certain national specifics, the Asiatic type of society as the main stumbling block on the road to democracy, distorts reality: here theoretical generalizations brim with serious misrepresentations.

Uzbekistan is not so much an abstract Asiatic society as a very specific body of divided micro-communities (clans and other groups) that still remember their tribal affiliation. It was they who largely predetermined the philosophy of paternalism, the strong central power that integrates clans, tribes, and local communities into one nation and one state, thus ensuring a higher level of their security and survival. Persisting vestiges of the past are an objective problem. There is a subjective problem often described as "political will." Philippe Schmitter has pointed it out: "Unfortunately, most actors in contemporary neodemocracies are likely to be affected by short-term and egoistic calculations under conditions of high uncertainty and, hence, are unlikely to be able to see the long-term desirability of constructing a distinctive public space."[12]

I can say even more: wittingly or unwittingly, in Uzbekistan conformism and lack of democratic reflection are encouraged (indeed, Birk and Erlik, two democratic parties that left the stage could have been replaced with a new democratic opposition—the process might have become natural, uninterrupted, and sustainable). Instead, there is social rejection of democracy.

The longer the state as the main reformer puts off liberalization and democratization the harder it will be for it to preserve its reforming mission of a democracy initiator. The state sees gradual democratization as the only way since, it is believed, the nation is not ready for radical democratic changes. No convincing arguments are offered while the political parties of Uzbekistan, which should have encouraged democratization, are nothing but opportunist. In the course of time the nation will gradually lose its willingness to adopt democracy—procrastination with deprive it of its **natural democratic principles.**

[10] Ph. Schmitter, "Some Propositions about Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy," *Reihe Politikwissenschaft*, No. 10, September 1993, p. 4, available at [http://www.ihs.ac.at/publications/pol/pw_10.pdf].

[11] Ibidem.

[12] Ibid., p. 15.

We have arrived at a strange conclusion: the longer the state remains devoted to the policy of slow democratic reforms, being convinced that the shoots of democracy should be raised slowly and cautiously, the less democracy it will receive. This strategy is erroneous: it ignores the *a priori* existence of the natural democratic principles in social relations that do not call for excessive state encouragement.

There is a highly alarming trend toward authoritarianism—not merely state authoritarianism but, strange as it may seem, social authoritarianism. The latter means that society steadily reproduces generations of administrators, politicians, and bureaucrats who regard undemocratic administrative methods as the most required, most reliable, comfortable, and the only possible method of self-reproduction. This creates an amazing political metamorphosis: authoritarianism that permeates practically all social and state strata is legitimized.

I call this "national democracy" a "**conformist democracy**," the term "democracy" here is used ironically. General conformism, agreement with all the decisions passed by the powers that be, social indifference, and absenteeism are typical features of conformist democracy, the latter word used here conventionally and ironically. General agreement creates the illusion of legitimacy and nationwide support of the government. In the final analysis, this allows the government (if not all of it, at least some of its segments) to freeload on the conformism of the masses. The examples are numerous. Conformist democracy revealed its nature, for example, when the deployment/withdrawal of the American military contingent on/from Uzbekistan within the framework of the counterterrorist operation in Afghanistan was an issue. Deployment was hailed by the masses, while withdrawal demanded in the name of the masses caused another bout of appreciation.

The Soviet syndrome revealed itself when anti-Americanism was fanned on the strength of the unjustified and actively promoted opinion that the United States was plotting against Uzbekistan. When answering the question about potential American involvement in the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan, its former president Askar Akaev said: "I think that American influence was instrumental." He added that the opposition was "supported by the (U.S. organizations.—*F.T.*) National Democratic Institute, Freedom House, and others... They were providing the training and financial support," he said.[13] These arguments have become favorites with the critics of U.S. democratization policy.

Many observers and analysts agree that foreign influence was obvious in the Balkans, Georgia, and Ukraine. This argument is frequently used in Uzbekistan on the strength of the following arguments:

- Mass actions were prepared in advance;
- The methods used in Serbia, Georgia, and Ukraine were the same; the scenarios of the democratic elections in Afghanistan and Iraq have much in common;
- Members of foreign organizations pooled forces with local activists to point to the accumulating social and economic problems in an effort to stir up mass discontent and sow mistrust in the government.

Observers point out that the mass rallies and changes in power in different countries look similar. To support this they talk about seminars and training sessions organized by foreign NGOs; they teach the younger generation democracy, political awareness, and political involvement. Observers are frequently ironic when speaking about specific projects realized by international organizations in the host countries.

I cannot totally agree with this. Here are my arguments.

[13] N.P. Walsh, "Deposed Kyrgyz President Blames United States for Coup," *The Guardian*, 31 March, 2005, available at [http://www.rall.com/2005_03_01_archive.html].

- First, what else should they teach those who attend their seminars and training sessions if not political awareness and political involvement? It should be said that those who treat the subjects of the seminar with suspicion are "incautious:" in fact any subject of a seminar or training session, any lecture or comment of a foreign expert (or even of a local professor) can be misinterpreted.
- Second, Uzbekistan has been talking about greater political involvement as a desired aim. Indeed, it was back in 1999 that the state, the parliament, and the president formulated a strategic course toward liberalization and a transition from a strong state to a strong civil society. This means that sooner or later parties and other groups will become involved in real political rivalry irrespective of the presence or absence of foreign NGOs.
- Third, thanks to the state programs designed to support academics and students, hundreds of citizens of Uzbekistan travel abroad (to the United States among other countries) every year to study or gain job experience. Many of them, this is especially true of those who study the humanities (political science, sociology, and history), are given professional lessons in democracy. The number of those who studied abroad or were involved in all sorts of international projects and conferences is rising with each passing year. If NGOs are plotting against Uzbekistan they should have done so among those who study and work abroad. Does this mean that the Iron Curtain should be dropped once more?
- Fourth, the mighty flow of academic and journalist literature from abroad (journals, newspapers, books, leaflets, video material, etc.) is of huge independent importance. Not all of them offer positive information about Uzbekistan and the sociopolitical process underway in the country. Many authors are very critical about Uzbekistan—in fact they are more critical than the foreign NGOs.
- Fifth, there is the Internet. The worldwide network does not need NGOs to spread huge amounts of truthful, false, friendly, or unfriendly information every day of the year.
- Sixth, from the very first days of the republic's independence the international community supplied positive assessments of the reforms as well as official criticism that has nothing to do with the "plotting NGOs." The U.S. Congress regularly discussed Central Asia's human rights and democracy record and arrived at far from positive conclusions. The EBRD, likewise, was very critical during its session in Tashkent in May 2003. Can public opinion let official criticism pass unnoticed inside the country?
- Seventh, the foreign NGOs have become victims of a "witch hunt" intended to distract public opinion. Indeed, hardly any of the accusations (even if some of them can be described as justified) were supported by legal investigation. A Georgian academic who analyzed the domestic and external factors of the Rose Revolution has offered a very apt remark: "External forces, however, cannot ensure the victory of a 'velvet revolution' if the country is not ready for it."[14]

The suspicions that foreign NGOs are preparing an "orange revolution" in Uzbekistan are groundless. This is not where their interests lie: the West and the international community want stronger political and social stability in Central Asia. Destabilization might encourage terrorist and extremist organizations of all hues. Those of them (Hizb ut-Tahrir is a pertinent example) that openly reject democracy will push forward to seize power.

[14] M. Matsaberidze, "The Rose Revolution and the Southern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* No. 2 (32), 2005.

The Content of National Ideology

We all know that the nation's political behavior is largely determined by slogans, calls, quotes, etc. selected to produce the strongest impact on the people's minds. Here are some of the ones used in Uzbekistan:

The country's "own road of independence and progress."

Uzbekistan is a state with a great future.

Ideas against ideas, education against ignorance.

National program of training.

Molding a perfect personality.

Spirituality and enlightenment.

From a strong state to a strong civil society.

Turkestan is our common home.

To globalism via regionalism.

Grain independence.

Energy independence.

Export-oriented economy.

The ideas and conceptions are absolutely correct and reflect, on the whole, the state's good intentions and tasks as well as the nation's sentiments. It looks, however, as though they have become absolutes or impressive scenery for the political system (very much like in Soviet times). It seems that national ideology was mistaken for a set of maxims designed to demonstrate the republic's unique and very specific development roads. Ideology in general does serve this aim yet it also reveals the fact the experience of others contains similar features that can be borrowed and locally reproduced.

For example, **the country's specifics were expressed not so much through rather unique experience that could not be reproduced in other countries, which makes the advance toward democracy very specific and which can do without copying foreign patterns. The country's specifics were expressed through reproducing those characteristics of the nation and national culture which, in fact, blocked the road toward democracy.** I have already written that the clan system is one aspect of these specifics. While correctly pointing out that the vestiges of the clan system not merely obstruct the republic's progress toward democracy but also threaten its security the ideologists and the political elite have done nothing to remove these vestiges. They even "conserved" them.

The paradox of the rhetoric of the national model of democracy is created by the fact that it used to monopolize democracy as a system and a value. Artur Atanesian was quite right when he wrote that "the post-Soviet CIS leaders are trying to adapt themselves to the need to introduce democratic change and, at the same time, to adjust these changes to themselves."[15] The neo-Soviet agitators have usurped the only possible interpretation of the essence of democracy and the ways leading to it. As a result we have arrived not at a national model of democracy but rather at a national model of its rejection. Ideology has played a fatal role in this.

[15] [http://www.perspektivy.info/oykumena/krug/paradoksy_demokratii_i_tendencii_demokratizacii_v_stranah_centralnoiy_azii_i_iuzhnogo_kavkaza_2008-0-12-10-39.htm].

Starting in the late 2003 neo-ideologists have been pushing forward their ultra-nationalistic rhetoric. They were especially eloquent on the eve of the closing down of the Open Society Institute of the Soros Foundation in Tashkent. An article in the *Khalk suzi* newspaper proved to be one of the most eloquent contributions to the propaganda efforts. Its author turned to national values to rebuff those who (in his opinion) were lecturing on democracy and human rights. "From this point of view," writes the author, "we cannot describe a man who has acquired profound knowledge of democracy and armed himself with it but has no national values in his heart an Uzbek and a perfect person (*Komil-inson*). It seems that to understand these values one must be born an Uzbek."[16]

Ideology is a powerful instrument used to shape and mobilize public opinion. It seems that the time has come for the academics and ideologists of Uzbekistan to ponder on a new content and new form of what is called national ideology. So far, ideological activities and propaganda in Uzbekistan were mainly engrossed in the moral-ethical and historical aspects. Ideology, meanwhile, has another aspect—a sociopolitical one that remains practically unrevealed. Here I shall offer some of the approaches to national ideology without claiming complete coverage of the issue.

Ideology is not an immutable code; it has two important sides:

(1) a means of the nation's sociopolitical self-expression and

(2) the "ether" through which the state and society exchange information and ideas.

This makes national ideology a dynamic communication system, a milieu of the impulses of mutual state/society mobilization. This is the meaning of ideology. From the point of view of its content the "ether" should be filled with "currents" and "impulses" which will contribute to national resurrection and encourage national passionarity. This can be achieved by moving in the following directions.

In the past Uzbekistan was a center of sciences and arts—it should regain this role to avoid the fate predicted by Frédéric Joliot-Curie, who said that science was as important for nations as air and water; a country that did not develop science would inevitably become a colony. Today, support of science and scientists is the state's main task.

Uzbekistan should become the center of a modern, developed, and strong system of upbringing and education of the rising generation; its potential is enough to accomplish this. I think that the republic and the region should revive, in modern form, the Jadidist Movement.

It is Uzbekistan's historical task to shoulder regional responsibility and become the region's integration core.

The nation will probably have to ponder seriously on the conception of Islamic democracy (similar to Christian democracy in Europe).

These are merely outlines of new approaches to national ideology that should be developed in the atmosphere of a broad and public democratic discussion.

Will There be Democracy?

Inertia is the main symptom of the illness that has afflicted Uzbekistan's political system and that I call "the Soviet syndrome." This limits the present regime's potential. Together with the objective problems democratic construction in Uzbekistan has been confronted with a conservative element.

How should we move toward democracy? I believe that the thesis of an open discussion of the country's problems and the recognition that there are numerous possible solutions could serve as a

[16] "Loyalty to the National Spirit," *Khalk suzi*, 16 December, 2006 (in Uzbek).

starting point. Dankwart Rustow has asserted that democracy does not call for an ultimate consensus. It is somewhere between imposed uniformity (conducive to tyranny in one of its forms) and irreconcilable enmity that destroys community through civil war or secession. This is the form of government organization that grows stronger from disagreement of half of the governed.[17]

There is one more delusion: it is commonly believed that the transition to democracy requires socioeconomic prerequisites. The vast empirical material accumulated today and the experience of many countries has convinced political scientists that there is no direct dependence between democratization and the economic development level. Democratization is not a direct outcome of economic modernization; it can be launched in economically undeveloped societies though a higher development level adds stability to democracy.[18]

According to Andrey Melvil, an analysis of the regularities of democratic transitions permits a theoretical-methodological synthesis of the structural and procedural approaches. The former asserts that democratization results depend mainly on socioeconomic and cultural axiological prerequisites and conditions conducive to (or opposing) the emergence and cementing of democratic institutions and norms. The procedural approach concentrates on the specifics and the order of specific decisions and actions carried out by a limited circle of political actors who initiated and were directly involved in the democratization process.[19] To grasp the specific features of democracy construction in Uzbekistan we should take into account the objective (structural) and subjective (procedural, or voluntarist as they are sometimes called) factors.

The nine problems and eight conceptual dichotomies discussed above are waiting for their solution at the country's new democratization stage. Who will solve them, who can be described as a vehicle of the democratic idea? Uzbekistan is moving toward democracy on the crest of the so-called third democratization wave described by Samuel Huntington. Having studied the transitions from non-democratic to democratic regimes that took place more or less simultaneously (he called them a democratization wave), he arrived at an important conclusion about its causes and also about a "reverse wave," that is, a transition back from democracy to authoritarian regimes. His formula of democratization methods, according to which democratic transitions may be accomplished through transformation, replacement or, so to speak, transplacement (jointly realized changes), looks like the most convincing one.[20] In the first case the democratization initiative belongs to those who have power, the authoritative regime plays the main role in putting an end to the existing regime or, rather, changing it into a democratic one. In the second case the group of reformers at the helm is small and weak. Strong opposition shoulders the democratization initiative and can depose the ruling regime. Finally, both the government and the opposition have equal democratization potential. This happens when a considerable number of reformers sit in the cabinet. In this case democratization is carried out jointly by the government and the opposition.

It seems that Uzbekistan has not yet "exhausted" the transition variants. The "reformation from the above" potential is still great: Uzbekistan can get rid of the Soviet syndrome by resorting to perestroika and new thinking in the same way as reforms were launched in the Soviet state. The present weakness of the demos is one of the arguments in favor of this road.

In Uzbekistan 2008 was marked by certain very cautious moves toward political reforms. In October Tashkent hosted a Media Forum that attracted members of well-known international organi-

[17] See: D.A. Rustow, "Ttransitions to Democracy—Toward a Dynamic Model," *Comparative Politics,* Vol. 2, No. 3, 1970.

[18] See, for example: A.Yu. Melvil, "Opyt teoretiko-metodologicheskogo sinteza strukturnogo i protsedurnogo podkhodov k demokraticheskim tranzitam," *Polis,* No. 2, 1998.

[19] Ibidem.

[20] See: S. Huntington, *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century,* University of Oklahoma Press, 1991, p. 114.

zations, including those working in the human rights sphere. The discussion about the state of human rights and the course of political reforms in Uzbekistan was fairly open.

At the very beginning of 2008 Uzbekistan annulled the death penalty and the republic carried out several other reforms in the judicial-legal system: today, the courts alone have the right to sanction arrests. The country adopted a program timed to coincide with the anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; it ratified the Convention on the Worst Forms of Child Labor. These were positive steps.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

On 23 December, 2007 the country re-elected President Karimov to a new seven-year term, which means that the power change in the republic will be carried out in a way that will ensure policy continuity and preservation of the paradigm of power. This change will rely on "conformist democracy" and opportunism of the political parties; the incumbent's closest circle, which is responsible for the apparatus management, will be the moving force behind the power transfer. This could have been accepted as a model of transfer of power to a new generation of leaders; it could have been even described as proto-democratic for the want of a better model. Much will depend, however, on the type of new generation of leaders; a systemic approach (rather than individual characteristics) reveals that during the independence years Uzbekistan introduced (or rather restored) the Soviet political system. This describes the new generation as a vehicle of the neo-Soviet world outlook.

The moment of truth has come. Can we accept the Central Asian developments as the beginning of end of the notorious transition period, the favorite excuse of all political leaders? It looks as if the Central Asian countries are moving away from the transition period to a new formation (transition from a transition, so to speak).

Today, we are aware of six methods of regime change in the post-Soviet expanse. In Russia the then President Boris Yeltsyn retired; Vladimir Putin filled the post and was later elected president. In Azerbaijan power was transferred from father to son. In Georgia the political opposition forced the president to resign. In Ukraine the opposition won the presidential elections. In Moldova the communists regained power. In Kyrgyzstan the power change was carried out by a variety of political forces which closed ranks against one man—the president; this became possible partly because of a bad political blunder he made on the eve of the presidential elections.

None of the above was a genuinely democratic phenomenon. This is explained by two fundamental factors: **the vestiges of the Soviet system as an endogenous factor and the Cold War heritage as an exogenous factor.** I shall specify. First: the essence of the transition from one formation to another remains vague: indeed, a transition from what to what? Is it a transition from socialism to capitalism, from totalitarianism to democracy, or from a planned economy to a market economy? These are not rhetorical questions since the Central Asian countries are living simultaneously in a natural economy, a capitalist system, and a modern scientific and technological revolution.[21] The question of democracy in this region turned out to be wider than the question of political values or form of governance: this is the question of the Central Asian nations' self-identification. The question of national democracy becomes a question of regional democracy for the Central Asian republics and peoples.[22]

[21] For more detail, see: F. Tolipov, "Democracy, Nationalism and Regionalism in Central Asia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus,* No. 4, 2000.

[22] For more detail, see: F. Tolipov, "National Democratism or Democratic Nationalism?" in: *Security through Democratization? A Theoretically Based Analysis of Security-Related Democratization Efforts Made by the OSCE. Three Comparative Case Studies (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, 2003-2004),* Center for OSCE Research, Hamburg, 2004.

Second, there is a connection between democracy and geopolitics. In Central Asia geopolitics, or new geopolitics, has also penetrated (in the same way as the issue of democracy) national genetics. Uzbekistan's democratic self-identification (if I may say so) will not merely be a result of the country's domestic sociopolitical evolution; to a great extent it will be the result of an external impact of a dual—containing and stimulating—nature. For example, recently the disagreements between Russia and the U.S./West over the democratic prospects for the post-Soviet states (especially in the Central Asian countries) have become clearer. To specify: what the West describes as support and promotion of democracy, Russia (and the majority of the CIS countries) take as a geopolitical scheme.

For the time being, the newly independent Central Asian states remain under the spell of the Soviet syndrome. The democratic West has also fallen victim to it: it regards us, the post-Soviet states, as new Soviet states.