

DEMOCRATIZATION IN POST-SOVIET CENTRAL ASIA: AMERICAN IMPACT

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ABSTRACT

The author analyzes how the Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan) are moving toward democracy, as well as the political and geopolitical reasons behind the United States' interest in the region triggered by the Soviet Union's disintegration and Washington's desire to consolidate its position in the post-Soviet space. It was determined to realize its interests by planting democratic values in the newly independent states and urging them to orientate themselves toward democratic principles when shaping their policies. In this way, the Central Asian countries could count on Washington's political support and economic aid.

In an effort to enter the world scene as democratic states, the Central Asian countries built state structures that relied on constitutions describing them as democratic states; they created a party and election system and passed laws on the freedom of speech, glasnost, etc. This, however, has not transformed the post-Soviet Central Asian republics into paragons of democracy: the clan system is very much alive in the corridors of power; Soviet mentality remains predominant among state officials (practically all the top figures preserved their posts in the newly independent states); and the influence of Russia and the authoritarian traditions inherited from the past is still very obvious.

KEYWORDS: *Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Central Asia, the U.S., democratization.*

Introduction

As part of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics and the United States were involved in the Cold War as opponents or even adversaries. When the Soviet Union fell apart, American diplomacy wisely concentrated on all the post-Soviet states to prevent Russia's stronger position in the post-Soviet space and in Central Asia in particular.

In the post-Cold War era, America, which no longer needed its military superiority but still had to keep potential rivals in check, armed itself with the self-imposed duty of promoting liberal democratic values as an alternative method for preserving its hegemony.

Strong and sustainable political parties dedicated to the idea of democracy were seen as the main instrument of democratization. The National Democratic Institute (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) were drawn into the process with programs "that promote the rule of law and respect for human rights, strengthen the unity and effectiveness of the democratic forces in transitional societies, encourage dialogue among different sectors of society, and advance solutions to national problems."¹

Washington's interests in Central Asia presupposed that the regional states should be encouraged to rely on democratic principles when establishing their new independent policies as a condition for America extending its political support and economic assistance.

As independent states, the local countries, their common history notwithstanding, were developing along different paths. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan looked to the West. Despite the numerous and serious shortcomings in forming democratic institutions, they stood apart from their Central Asian neighbors in terms of their more or less identical plans to become modern states and acquire corresponding mechanisms through social, economic, and political reforms.

The United States assessed the degree of the region's democratization by what was accomplished in these three states. Washington used the same democratization mechanisms in all the Central Asian countries, however the results differed from country to country. Here I will offer an overview of the processes unfolding in each of the three republics mentioned above and their specifics.

Kazakhstan

The U.S. was the first state to recognize independence of Kazakhstan (which stirred up no enthusiasm among the local people and the republic's leaders) on 25 December, 1991; in January 1992 it opened its embassy in Almaty, the republic's capital at the time. Simultaneously, the NDI began its work in the republic to help citizens of the newly independent state learn more about their rights, duties, and involvement in the election and political processes.

Nursultan Nazarbaev was elected president of Kazakhstan with a huge majority of 98 percent.² His only opponent failed to gather the 100 thousand signatures needed to join the race.

President George W. Bush, who invited his newly elected colleague to visit Washington, started bilateral relations between the two countries, which announced that they had launched "new relationships." The sides signed the Agreement on Trade Relations, the Bilateral Investment Treaty on

¹ *National Endowment for Democracy Strategy Document*, January 1992, Washington D.C., p. 4.

² See: "History of Presidential Elections in Kazakhstan since 1991," Permanent Mission of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, available at [<http://www.kazakhstanun.org/press-releases/history-of-presidential-elections-in-kazakhstan-since-1991.html>], 28 August, 2013.

Reciprocal Encouragement and Protection of Investments, a memorandum on mutual understanding, and a joint statement on the avoidance of double taxation.

From the very beginning, the sides proceeded from the conviction that security of Kazakhstan was a sine qua non of stability in Asia. In December 1992, the two states signed an agreement concerning the activity of the peace corps of the United States in the Republic of Kazakhstan, under which American volunteers contributed to carrying out the social and economic reforms in Kazakhstan. The republic received considerable assistance from charity and humanitarian organizations.

President Nazarbaev deemed it necessary to reorganize the party system in the republic to move it closer to true democracy; he transformed the republic's Communist Party, which had lost legitimacy and popular support anyway, into a socialist party. The new name for the old party duped no one since the top figures and the party's political makeup remained the same. This meant that the country needed new political parties: the state's democratic nature proclaimed in Art 1 of the Constitution of Kazakhstan ("The Republic of Kazakhstan proclaims itself a democratic ... state")³ required a multi-party system. The People's Congress of Kazakhstan set up by the president on 5 October, 1991 at the Constituent Congress was registered with the Ministry of Justice on 31 December, 1991⁴; in 1992, another party appeared, the People's Unity of Kazakhstan; a year later President Nazarbaev became its leader. Two pro-presidential parties that followed the same political course could not pass for a multi-party system. In 1994, the parliament was elected for the first time on a multi-party basis; the People's Unity of Kazakhstan, the president's party, won the majority of seats.

International observers could not agree on the degree of the elections' democratic nature and transparency. The OSCE insisted that the results be annulled because of numerous frauds, cases of simultaneous voting for several candidates, and because of the opposition's limited access to the media and the very short election campaign, which had not allowed the parties, movements, and candidates to properly present their programs.⁵ The United States, on the other hand, represented by an NDI delegation, concluded: "In certain instances, changes in the system may be necessary, not because they are required by the international norm but to increase public's confidence in the election process."⁶

In 1994, U.S. Secretary of State Warren Christopher visited Kazakhstan; later the same year, President Nazarbaev met President Clinton in the White House to sign a treaty under which Kazakhstan joined the nuclear non-proliferation treaty to become a non-nuclear state. "The Administration is showing its appreciation to Mr. Nazarbaev by announcing plans to more than triple aid to Kazakhstan, from \$91 million this year to \$311 million next year. Some of it will be used to dismantle warheads. The Administration will sign more than half a dozen cooperation agreements with the Kazakh leader on economic, military and space matters... Administration officials want to use Mr. Nazarbaev's visit partly to show that they are paying more attention to the former Soviet republics other than Russia."⁷ In February 1995 at the Washington Summit, President Clinton said that Kazakhstan was "critical" for democracy in Central Asia.⁸ In 1994, America and Kazakhstan signed the Demo-

³ [<http://www.akorda.kz/en/category/konstituciya>].

⁴ See: "Politicheskie partii Respubliki Kazakhstan," *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 8, 1997, available at [http://www.ca-c.org/journal/08-1997/st_19_par_kaz.shtml], 29 September, 2013.

⁵ See: O. Tokhtanbayev, *Kazakhstan: Transition to Democracy?* The Institute of Economics and Social Sciences of Bilkent University, Ankara, September 2001, 48 pp.

⁶ *NDI Pre-Election Report. The March 1994 Elections in Kazakhstan*, 22 February, 1994, National Democratic Institute for International Affairs, available at [http://www.ndi.org/files/345_kz_94preelection.pdf], 11 September, 2013, p. 16.

⁷ S. Greenhouse, "Clinton and Kazakh Chief Each Filling a Need. Washington," *New York Times*, 13 February, 1994, available at [<http://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/13/world/clinton-and-kazakh-chief-each-filling-a-need.html>], 4 October, 2013.

⁸ See: *The Parliamentary Elections in Kazakhstan*, Kazakhstan, Almaty, 7 March, 1994, 103rd Congress, 2nd Session, A Report Prepared by the Staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, p. 15.

cratic Partnership Charter between the United States of America and the Republic of Kazakhstan, in which the sides pledged to be guided by the principles of democracy, private property, free market, the rule of law, and respect for human rights and basic freedoms.⁹

In the latter half of the 1990s, however, the United States became concerned with the lack of progress in democratic reforms and human rights protection in Kazakhstan; Washington was very irritated by the decision to replace the presidential election of 1995 with a referendum that extended Nazarbaev's presidential term to 2000.¹⁰

The 1999 law on the media was another important step toward stronger democratization; it opened access to information for private persons, allowed privately owned media, and banned censorship.¹¹ In the West, however, the law caused mixed feelings; American analysts doubted that the law would be scrupulously observed; they pointed out that, in practice, the government interfered with the development of independent media and functioning of the multi-party system and that the president had gained more power at the expense of the parliament.

The 1998 financial crisis in Russia demonstrated that in a country with a high level of corruption it is hard, if possible at all, to control economic liberalization unaccompanied by corresponding political reforms. The degree of democracy in Kazakhstan corresponded to the level of American economic assistance; American diplomats were increasing their pressure to establish punishments for the Kazakhstan officials guilty of violations of human rights and infringements on political competition. Prior to 2000, this created new dynamics in the relations between the United States and Kazakhstan, whose leaders were not overjoyed by America's criticism of the political system in their country, which cooled down Washington's previously warm attitude toward its close ally.¹²

In 1998, the U.S. Department of State summarized the efficiency of all the branches of power in Kazakhstan in its Kazakhstan Country Report on Human Rights Practices: "The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens in some areas, but serious problems remain in others. Democratic institutions are weak. The Government infringed on citizens' right to change their government, notably in its flawed conduct of preparations for the January 1999 presidential election... Government tolerance of the independent media markedly deteriorated; freedom of assembly sometimes was restricted... Domestic violence against women remained a problem. There was discrimination against women, the disabled, and ethnic minorities."¹³

Plainly speaking, Kazakhstan was not progressing toward liberal democracy, while the United States was becoming even more outspoken about the need for democratization in the newly independent states.

After he took the helm, George W. Bush steered the country toward greater geopolitical involvement in the region, this course becoming known as the policy of long-term involvement. Washington, which had set itself the task of bringing about a regime change, very soon arrived at the Color Revolution tactics.¹⁴

⁹ See: *Kharta o demokraticeskoy partnerstve mezhdu respublikoy Kazakhstan i Soedinennymi Shtatami Ameriki*, Washington, 14 February, 1994, available at [http://kazakhstan.news-city.info/docs/sistemi/dok_perbaz.htm], 15 September, 2013.

¹⁰ See: S.R. Roberts, *Kazakhstan and the United States: Twenty Years of Ambiguous Partnership*, The Atlantic Council of the United States, Washington, D.C., 2011, p. 4.

¹¹ [http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=30015965&sublink=20000], 7 October, 2013.

¹² See: S.R. Roberts, op. cit., p. 4.

¹³ *Kazakhstan Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, U.S. Department of State, Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 26 February, 1999, available at [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/kazaksta.html], 20 September, 2013.

¹⁴ See: D.V. Dorofeyev, "Tsvetnye revolyutsii' v Tsentralno-Aziatskom regione v kontekste vneshnepoliticheskoy strategii SShA," *Kultura narodov Prichernomoria*, No. 125, 2008, p. 51.

Early in 2003, the American legislators discussed several bills in which the governments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan were described as “dictatorial and tyrannical.” A year later, President George W. Bush doubled the budget of the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to step up American interference in the domestic affairs of the Middle East and Central Asia.¹⁵

The relations between the two states remained quite successful because there were no strong anti-American feelings in Kazakhstan and no perceptible threats to the country’s independence; a certain amount of coolness, however, could be detected. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, who visited Kazakhstan on 12-13 October, 2005, insisted on more radical political reforms.

As an independent state, Kazakhstan has been pursuing a fairly consistent foreign policy immune to all sorts of pressure. As the actual leader of post-Soviet Central Asia, Astana has to take the lessons learned from the Color Revolutions into account.¹⁶ It seems that Kazakhstan became the region’s leader in the sphere of economic modernization and democratic changes amid the persisting internal instability in Kyrgyzstan and international isolation of Uzbekistan. This means that Kazakhstan may replace Kyrgyzstan as the “island of democracy” in the region and Uzbekistan as the United States’ privileged Central Asian partner.

Kyrgyzstan

In December 1991, Askar Akaev was brought to power by democratic, even if uncontested, elections. Thus the country embarked on the road of democratic changes: while the Soviet Union was still alive, Akaev was the republic’s most active leader and supporter of the policy of glasnost, perestroika, and democratization.¹⁷

Fully aware of the fact that, as a small state with no natural riches, Kirghizia needed a strong patron, especially at the early stages of its independent existence, President Akaev worked hard to attract the attention of the world community to the republic’s intellectual and political potential.

Art 1 of the Constitution adopted on 16 December, 1991 described Kyrgyzstan as “a sovereign, democratic, secular, unitary and social state governed by the rule of law.”¹⁸ From that time on, the United States, which had already established bilateral relations with Kyrgyzstan, began to encourage its movement toward democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights.

“The United States Department of State and the Helsinki Commission have found that Kyrgyzstan has the best record on human rights and respect for ethnic minorities in Central Asia. A number of political parties have been organized, including a renascent Communist Party, and all are permitted to publish newspapers and hold meetings unimpeded by state interference. Freedom of religion has also been established, with Christians, Jews, Muslims, and even Hare Krishnas able to practice their religions and to disseminate their views without restriction. The only limitation placed on religious activities is that religions cannot organize their own political parties. Thus, the Islamic Renewal Party, which has a presence in most other Central Asian republics, is banned in Kyrgyzstan.”¹⁹

¹⁵ See: M. Laumulin, “U.S. Strategy and Policy in Central Asia,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 4 (46), 2007, p. 50.

¹⁶ See: L. Skakovsky, “Kazakhstan v mezhdunarodnoy politike,” *Mezhdunarodnye protsessy*, available at [<http://www.intertrends.ru/nineth/013.htm>], 11 December, 2013.

¹⁷ See: E. Huskey, “The Rise of Contested Politics in Central Asia: Elections in Kyrgyzstan, 1989-1990,” *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 47, No. 5, July 1995, p. 828.

¹⁸ Constitution of the Republic of Kyrgyzstan.

¹⁹ *Kyrgyzstan: Political Conditions in the Post-Soviet Era*, INS Resource Information Center, 1993, p. 1.

Freedom House, one of the prominent NGOs, likewise approved the country's progress toward democracy; in its annual report, it highly assessed its achievements in the sphere of civil rights and duties.²⁰

"By 1993, Akaev had created powerful international images of his republic, painting it as an 'island of democracy in a Central Asian sea of authoritarianism' and portraying himself as a founding father of Kyrgyz democracy."²¹

Kyrgyzstan, which badly needed American aid to improve its economic situation, proclaimed a course toward democratization; the United States, in turn, supported President Akaev who, however, was building a regime of his personal power.²²

Democratization and accelerated progress toward market economy (shock therapy) attracted American economic aid to Kyrgyzstan in steadily increasing volumes.

In Kyrgyzstan, the press was much freer than anywhere else in the region; in 1994, however, censorship was restored. Two opposition newspapers, which criticized the president, were closed; several others were brought to court.²³

On the whole, 4.5 million people living in the republic approved of the president's democratic initiatives, even though they regarded him as a weak person ill-suited for presidency in a country plagued by problems.

The clan structure, family ties, and personal power of the president, who controlled politics and the economy, interfered with the democratic processes in all the countries of the region. This inevitably fortified authoritarianism and made democracy impossible.

The 96.2 percent of the votes in favor of the president's longer term in power cast at the 1994 referendum initiated by the president was a direct outcome of the trends described above. The Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan, contrary to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic and the Law of the Kyrgyz Republic on Referendum in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan of 1991, confirmed the referendum's legitimacy.²⁴

In 1995, Akaev carried the presidential elections with 72.4 percent of the votes cast.²⁵ The world community and the OSCE were in two minds: officially the state followed the declared democratic principles, while in fact it refused to respect human rights and infringed on the freedom of political parties, civil society and the media. There were positive changes, but Kyrgyzstan failed to observe some of the OSCE rules related to the democratic nature of elections or remedy the negative trends identified earlier at the parliamentary election.

In 1998, the Constitutional Court of Kyrgyzstan ruled that Akaev could run for president for a third time; in 2000, 74.45 percent of the voters elected him president for five more years.²⁶ "In 29% of precinct vote counts observed, precinct result protocols were prepared in pencil or PEC members signed blank protocols."²⁷ Later the Office of the Prosecutor General of Kyrgyzstan pointed out that

²⁰ See: A. Akaev, "Central Asia's Democratic Alternative," *Demokratizatsiya*, No. 2 (1), 1994, p. 14.

²¹ K. Collins, *Clan Politics and Regime Transition in Central Asia*, Cambridge, New York, 2006, p. 177.

²² See: Yu.V. Bosin, "Supporting Democracy in the Former Soviet Union: Why the Impact of US Assistance Has Been Below Expectations," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, 2012, p. 4.

²³ See: Y. Bingol, "Nationalism and Democracy in Post-Communist Central Asia," *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2004, p. 50.

²⁴ See: "Generalnaia prokuratura Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki otnositelno obrashcheniy byvshikh sudey konstitutsionnogo suda Respubliki zaiavliaet sleduiushchee..." Generalnaia prokuratura Kyrgyzskoy Respubliki, available at [http://www.prokuror.kg/index.php?option=com_newscatalog&view=article&id=126&Itemid=149&lang=ru], 2 October, 2013.

²⁵ See: K. Collins, op. cit., p. 236.

²⁶ See: *Kyrgyz Republic Presidential Elections*, 29 October, 2000, OSCE/ODIHR Final Report, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Warsaw, 16 January, 2001, p. 14, available at [<http://www.osce.org/odhr/elections/kyrgyzstan/15802>], 20 August, 2013.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 13.

the Constitutional Court had grossly violated the Constitution by allowing the president run for presidency for a third time.

“The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens in many areas, but serious problems remained. The Government limited citizens’ ability to change their government, and there were serious irregularities in the October constitutional referendum. There were credible reports of police abuse and brutality. Prison conditions are very poor, and there were some cases of arbitrary arrest and detention.”²⁸

According to Richard Hoagland, who served as Ambassador of the United States to Kyrgyzstan, by the mid-2000s, civil society in the Kyrgyz Republic had become more developed than in any of the other Central Asian countries. This explains why Kyrgyzstan alone contested the results of the parliamentary elections, even though between December 2004 and March 2005 Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan had also elected their parliaments. The opposition, which wanted to remove the authoritarian regime, and the United States, which wanted weaker Russian influence in the region by unbalancing the Russia-China-India triangle and strengthening the democratic traditions in Kyrgyzstan, were satisfied with the Tulip Revolution, which unseated Akaev.²⁹

The opposition and Kurmanbek Bakiyev, whom the Tulip Revolution made president, stood no chance of remaining in power: in 2010, popular unrest, known as the “revolution of the yellow tulips,” overturned the new and even more corrupt and more authoritarian regime. For the first time in history, a Color Revolution was caused by sociopolitical transformations in the state and the intolerably high corruption level rather than by the election results.³⁰

Uzbekistan

Uzbekistan is another of the newly independent countries that tried its hand at democratization. “Uzbekistan held a referendum on independence and its first direct, contested presidential elections on 29 December, 1991. According to the republic’s Central Election Commission, over 98 percent of voters cast ballots for independence, and—more important—86 percent voted for Islam Karimov as president.”³¹

In August 1991, that is as soon as the republic became independent, the U.S. established diplomatic relations with Uzbekistan and supported its sovereignty and independence; in 1992, it opened its embassy in Tashkent.

It took the sides some time to arrive at fairly active cooperation: the Uzbek leaders resolutely rejected Washington’s attempts to influence its domestic policy through the embassy. President Karimov repeatedly criticized American diplomats who maintained contacts with the opposition and supplied Washington with unreliable information.³²

²⁸ *Kyrgyz Republic Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, U.S. Department of State, The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 26 February, 1999, available at [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/kyrgyzre.html], 24 August, 2013.

²⁹ See: D.V. Dorofeyev, op. cit., p. 52.

³⁰ See: “Gosdep SShA: revoliutsia v Kirgizii—sledstvie korruptsii, a ne borby Ameriki i Rossii,” *Novosti v mire*, 28 May, 2010, available at [<http://www.newsru.com/world/28may2010/kirg.html>], 7 December, 2013.

³¹ *The Referendum on Independence and Presidential Election in Uzbekistan: 29 December, 1991: Tashkent and Samarkand, Uzbekistan*, United States, Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, The Commission, 1992, p. 1.

³² See: A.A. Trynkov, “Otnosheniya mezhdru Uzbekistanom i SShA,” in: *Uzbekistan: obretienie novogo oblika*, Vol. 2, ed. by E.M. Kozhokin, Rossiyskiy institut strategicheskikh issledovaniy, Moscow, 1998, p. 226.

The visit of U.S. Defense Minister William Perry to Uzbekistan in April 1995 marked a turning point in the relations between Washington and Tashkent. The American pointed to the strategic importance of Uzbekistan, supported the course toward democratization, and described the country as an “island of stability.”³³

When speaking at the opening ceremony of the Soros Foundation Information Center, Sharon Weiss, Deputy American Ambassador to Uzbekistan, hinted that her country was prepared to help Uzbekistan to become a society of equal citizens with equal opportunities.

Very soon after that, President Clinton and President Karimov met in Washington. The American president pointed out that his country was determined to cooperate with Uzbekistan on a broad range of issues. He specified that because of Uzbekistan’s key role in the region, the two countries would cooperate not only in the economic, but also in the political sphere.³⁴ It should be said, however, that President Karimov came to the United States as a guest of several big American companies, not on the president’s invitation.

In August 1996, speaking in front of the parliament, Karimov pointed out that democracy was his aim, that the country needed an opposition, and that the state was gradually moving away from authoritarian methods of governance.³⁵

In 1996, the public opinion poll conducted by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems registered that 43 percent of the polled were satisfied with the parliament.³⁶ Later, when in 1997 and 1998 the small business sector shrank by 70 percent, the share of people satisfied with the government dropped accordingly. Continued authoritarian rule undermined the democratic initiatives; President Karimov discontinued the democratic reforms allegedly to fight terrorism. Since half of the republic’s population had hailed the democratic reforms, the people disapproved of the reverse movement; freedom of speech and freedom of the press remained limited. According to an international human rights organization, over 7,000 people who openly disagreed with the government were sent to prison.³⁷

Despite the fact that the Constitution described Uzbekistan as a democratic state and despite the efforts undertaken in 1998 to convince the world community that the country was actively moving toward democracy, the U.S. Department of State wrote in its 1998 report: “Uzbekistan is an authoritarian state with limited civil rights... In practice President Islam Karimov and the centralized executive branch that serves him dominate political life. The executive branch dominates the Oliy Majlis (Parliament)... Police and NSS forces used torture, harassment, illegal searches, and wiretaps... The Government severely limits freedom of speech and the press. A new law increases government oversight of the media. Although the Constitution expressly prohibits it, press censorship continues and the Government sharply restricts citizens’ access to foreign media. The Government limits freedom of assembly and association. The Government continues to ban unauthorized public meetings and demonstrations. The Government also continues to deny registration to independent political parties as well as to other groups that might be critical of the Government. For example, the Government denied registration to the Human Rights Society of Uzbekistan (HRSU), citing technical deficiencies in its application... The Government limits freedom of religion.”³⁸

³³ F.S. Starr, “Making Eurasia Stable,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 1, January/February 1996, pp. 80-92.

³⁴ See: A.A. Trynkov, op. cit., p. 288.

³⁵ See: Ibid., p. 229.

³⁶ See: “Uzbek Opposition Figures Urge Caution on U.S. Support for Karimov,” *Eurasianet*, 27 March, 2002, available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/civilsociety/articles/eav032702.shtml>], 11 August, 2013.

³⁷ See: B. Tursunov, *Security and Stability in Uzbekistan: Challenges, Threats and Solutions*, Defense Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Center, 1998, p. 2.

³⁸ *Uzbekistan Country Report on Human Rights Practices for 1998*, U.S. Department of State, The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 26 February, 1999, available at [http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/1998_hrp_report/uzbekist.html], 14 September 2013.

“Since the 1994 parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan, the legislative framework for the election of deputies to the Oliy Majlis [in 1999] was improved. However, further improvements are necessary to meet OSCE commitments. In particular, the law on the Elections for the Oliy Majlis, the law on the Central Election Commission, the law on political parties, and the laws regulating the functioning of the mass media should be reviewed.”³⁹

“Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, the government allowed the U.S. and Germany to station their troops in Uzbekistan, hoping to gain international recognition and financial support. International pressure on Uzbekistan to commence political and economic reforms was insufficient and inconsistent... In 2002, the regime permitted a leading human rights group to register, announced amnesties for political prisoners, and increased its participation in international organizations... This positive trend was halted in late 2003 after the Rose Revolution in Georgia. The government tightened control over institutions that might have been able to contribute to a Velvet Revolution in Uzbekistan. International organizations were required to re-register, leading to the closure of the Open Society Institute in Tashkent.”⁴⁰

In March 2002, the U.S. and Uzbekistan signed a Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework, which envisaged certain measures to ensure “consistent implementation of democratic and market reforms in Uzbekistan.” In May 2003, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) formulated several demands expected to improve the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. Tashkent did nothing at all to comply, which shows that the Central Asian regimes’ understanding of what is expected of them and the ambitious plans of the West, which wants real changes, are worlds apart.

Conclusion

The newly independent states across the post-Soviet space opted for their own roads of development and their own domestic and foreign policies. Today, it has become abundantly clear that this is a hard road to hoe. The pro-Western vector of foreign policy brought Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan into the camp of democratic states. For several reasons (political, economic, and social), their first attempts were not successful. The international community continues to view them as Soviet successor states, yet slowly but surely their formal legal basis and its implementation are gradually moving them closer to democracy.

As independent states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan adopted constitutions that described them as democratic states that have respect for and observe basic human rights and freedoms; they passed laws on the freedom of speech and the freedom of association.

The United States recognized their independence as soon as the Soviet Union ceased to exist and opened its diplomatic missions in all of them. This launched active bilateral cooperation with each of the three countries stipulated by their consistent democratization.

The domestic and foreign policies of the newly independent states differed from country to country. Kazakhstan, which remained under strong Russian influence until the default of 1998, which limited Russia’s economic impact, invigorated its economic contacts with the United States and, as a result, its movement toward democracy.

³⁹ *Republic of Uzbekistan Election of Deputies to the Oliy Majlis (Parliament)*, 5 & 19 December, 1999, OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Assessment Mission, Final Report, available at [<http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/uzbekistan/14770>].

⁴⁰ *Uzbekistan Country Report*, BTI 2010, available at [http://www.bti-project.de/uploads/tx_jpdownloads/BTI_2010_Uzbekistan.pdf], 10 December, 2013.

President Akaev of Kyrgyzstan, who spoke about his country as the bulwark of democracy in the region, relied on American governmental and nongovernmental aid to strengthen democratic traditions in the country, despite the fairly influential Soviet apparatchiks in the corridors of power and the still lingering Soviet mentality.

Uzbekistan was the last of the Central Asian countries to establish diplomatic relations with the United States. Active cooperation began in the mid-1990s only to end together with the democratic initiatives cut short by President Karimov.

In the early years of the 21st century, democracy in Central Asia was further developed and consolidated, a process encouraged by the wave of Color Revolutions in the post-Soviet space. Central Asia was part of these dramatic developments, sure evidence of its recently acquired democratic traditions. The local people, no longer citizens of an authoritarian state, are moving toward a society capable of protecting its civil position and democratically opposing all the infringements on human rights.

Despite the far from easy task of formulating the priorities of their domestic and foreign policies, three countries out of five—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan—have gone further than their neighbors toward democracy, even though so far they cannot be described as democratic states in the true sense of the word.
