

## NATION-BUILDING

## POLITICAL COMPETITION IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS: OBJECTIVES, MEANS, AND MECHANISMS

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### *Introduction*

Political competition in the newly independent states as an academic problem has acquired a new dimension under the impact of the recent developments in North Africa and West Asia.

A large number of academic writings examine the development of political competition in Japan, India, and Turkey,<sup>1</sup> while *Central Asia and the Caucasus*<sup>2</sup> plays an important role in analyz-

ing the same problem in the post-Communist countries.

Here I have analyzed the political competition processes underway in the domestic policy

<sup>1</sup> See: R. Fulle, *Political Competition in India*, Sweet Briar College, Virginia, 1969, 120 pp.; Kap Yun Lee, *Political Competition and the Party System in Japan*, Yale University, Yale, 1984, 139 pp.; P. Bernholz, R. Vaubel, *Political Competition, Innovation and Growth in the History of Asian Civilizations*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, Camberley, Northampton, 2004, 225 pp.

<sup>2</sup> See: E. Ertysbaev, "Nekotorye aspekty prezident-skoj izbiratelnoy kampanii v Kazakhstane (oktyabr-dekabr 1998 g.)," *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1 (2), 1999;

E. Ismailov, "Vlast i oppozitsia nakanune i v period prezidentskoj izbiratelnoy kampanii na Kavkaze," *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1 (2), 1999; I. Antadze, "Parlamentskie vybory v Gruzii," *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 5 (6), 1999; V. Mesamed, "Demokratia i plyuralizm v musulmanskih regionakh byvshego Sovetskogo Soyuza. K itogam konferentsii, organizovannoy Tsentrom rossiiskikh i vos-tochnoevropeyskikh issledovaniy im. Cummingsa pri Tel-Avivskom universitete," *Tsentralnaya Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 1 (7), 2000; A. Saidmuradov, "Uzbekistan: Political Parties on the Eve of the Parliamentary Elections," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (29), 2004; V. Dolidze, "Political Parties and Party Development in Georgia," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 2 (32), 2005; K. Borispolets, "Elections in Central Asian States: Political Rivalry in a Transitional Society," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 1 (37), 2006.

of the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries starting in 2009, the year Barack Obama became president of the United States.

In 1975, Republican President Gerald Ford (1974-1977) assessed the chances of Western democracies in their rivalry with Marxism (particularly in the regions bordering on Soviet Central Asia and the Transcaucasus) as “military competition must be controlled. Political competition must be restrained.”<sup>3</sup>

Said at the height of détente, four years later this formula lost its meaning when the Soviet Union, after capturing President Amin’s residence by storm, invaded Afghanistan during the Democratic Administration of President Carter (1977-1981). This radically changed the situation in Central Asia along with the approaches to political competition.

President Carter and the key figures of his administration (Zbigniew Brzezinski in particular) were very impressed by the book *To Build a Castle* by Vladimir Bukovsky, a prominent Soviet dissident, published in 1978 and similar works which appeared at approximately the same time.

The Democrats developed their approaches under President Clinton (1993-2001) when “new” Russia (still a big player in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus) under President Yeltsin and some other countries (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, and Tajikistan) were facing the need to develop perestroika and achieve a political consensus at home.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> G. Ford, Address in Helsinki before the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, 1 August, 1975 [www.usa-presidents.info/speeches/helsinki.html].

<sup>4</sup> See: “Vybrannye mesta iz peregovora Borisa Yeltsina i Williama J. Clintona,” *Rossia v globalnoy politike*, 20 December, 2010, available at [www.globalaffairs.ru].

In 2009, the annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices, which appeared in the first year of Barack Obama’s presidency, touched upon the social and political situation in some of the post-Soviet states (Russia and Uzbekistan among others) and described the stimuli which could have added vigor to political competition:

1. Opposition parties;
2. Alternative candidates to state posts;
3. Access to the media;
4. Free political campaigns;
5. Removal of administrative barriers for all involved in election campaigns, etc.<sup>5</sup>

Later, in April 2009, speaking at the Turkish parliament, President Obama pointed out that “democracy cannot be static”; he also spoke about a “vibrant civil society” and “enduring commitment to the rule of law”<sup>6</sup> (probably intending to stress the advantages of the American political methods as compared with the peaceful methods of dealing with social conflicts in Muslim countries).

In June 2009, speaking at Cairo University, Barack Obama went even further by calling for “legitimate workings of the political process,”<sup>7</sup> having in mind political competition in West Asia and North Africa, among other places.

<sup>5</sup> See: *2009 Human Rights Report: Russia; 2009 Human Rights Report: Uzbekistan*, available at [http://www.state.gov].

<sup>6</sup> B. Obama, *Remarks to the Turkish Parliament*, Turkish Grand National Assembly Complex, Ankara, Turkey, 6 April, 2009, available at [www.whitehouse.gov].

<sup>7</sup> B. Obama, *Remarks at Cairo University*, Egypt, 4 June, 2009, available at [www.america.gov].

## I. The Fundamental Definitions of Political Competition: Content, Indices, Types, and Levels in the Post-Communist Context

Why did the political competition issue come to the fore under Obama rather than earlier, under President Clinton?

This is all very simple: during the first post-Communist decade, the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics still remembered the total domination of the Communist ideology represented by the C.P.S.U. The inertia of a strong government allowed many of the CIS presidents (particularly in the transition period) to cooperate with the parliamentary parties without becoming directly involved with the parties' functioning. Party contradictions (inevitable in any country) provided the rulers of the newly independent states with a chance to play arbiter. Robert Kocharyan, former prime minister (1997) and former president (1998-2008) of Armenia, said in this connection: "It's impossible to be a player and a referee on the field of political competition at the same time."<sup>8</sup>

(In December 2010, President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan, whose conservatism is explained by his post, suggested that "healthy competition" should be distinguished from "intrigues"<sup>9</sup>; he probably wanted to say that the level of political culture in his country should be raised.<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, one tends to agree with those sociologists who write that political competition boils down to intrigues, that is, playing a game and scoring points.<sup>11</sup>)

It would be wrong to say that it was Russia alone, during the eight years of Putin's presidency (otherwise called "vertical dictatorship"), that planted conservative ideas about political competition in the CIS countries.

On 8 July, 2000, President Putin warned the Federal Assembly that "a strong government is interested in strong rivals" and "only in conditions of political competition is it possible to hold a serious dialog on the development of our state."<sup>12</sup> In December 2001, however, he deemed it necessary to say: "It must be truly healthy competition and not a fruitless struggle that weakens the state system and undermines the authority of the state."<sup>13</sup>

Finally, in May 2004, Putin specified his ideas about unfair political competition as stemming from the desire to use it for personal gain, illegal funding of political parties, and the creation of a black market of voting technology and lobbying. (He described "the dreary monotony of party programs"<sup>14</sup> as one of the reasons for the slack political competition. He meant to say that the ruling elite, which formally accepts political competition, wanted to keep it in check. Under Putin, political activity moved away from competition to a hierarchy.)

Members of the so-called non-systemic opposition in the CIS countries (in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus in particular) and the expert community offered their own opinions about the best model of political competition. Their somewhat spontaneous nature is explained by the events in Georgia in November 2003 and Ukraine in November-December 2004.

It should be said that political scientists have noticed that greater political competition and straightforward rules of the political process increase the risk of a Color Revolution. (The new ruling elites in Ukraine and Georgia were against destructive interpretations of political competition. Victor Yushchenko insisted that political competition should be kept within the Constitution to avoid

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Kocharian describes the necessity for fair political competition at the 2012 elections as "imperative," 7 February, 2011 (see: Information Agency "Mediamax," available at [mediamax.am]).

<sup>9</sup> S. Sargsyan, *Statement on the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Republican Party of Armenia*, available at [president.am].

<sup>10</sup> See: "Prezident Armenii zayavil, chto ne predyavlaya ultimatum glave koalitsionnoy partii," 18 December, 2010, available at [newsarmenia.ru].

<sup>11</sup> See, for example: V. Fedorov, "Politicheskaya sistema stanovitsya bolee ustoychivoy, konkurentnoy i uprugoy. Ona ne idet v raznos," 15 March, 2010, available at [www.liberty.ru].

<sup>12</sup> V. Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, 8 July, 2000, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

<sup>13</sup> V. Putin, *Speech at the Founding Congress of Yedinstvo i Otechestvo (Unity and Motherland) Party*, 1 December, 2001, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

<sup>14</sup> V. Putin, *Annual Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation*, 26 May, 2004, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

damaging democracy; it should aim at “ideas and programs” and “seek compromises rather than confrontation.”<sup>15</sup>)

The public became gradually convinced that political competition, first, strengthens the political system; second, needs an independent legislature, independent media, and proper funding of the political parties to function; and third, and most important, makes the election process more democratic and adds variety to the forms of political mobilization and public control methods.

The events of March 2005 in Kyrgyzstan put the interaction between political competition and government efficiency on the agenda. According to political scientists, in practically all the CIS countries power relations, related to specific people rather than legal regulations, are mainly informal; this explains the unwelcome trends in political competition.

Brice Bueno de Mesquita and George W. Downs of New York University, who analyzed the experience of China and the Mid-Eastern and CIS countries, pointed out that effective political competition calls for “strategic coordination” between the people and the government, “disseminating information, recruiting and organizing party members, selecting leaders, raising funds and holding meetings and demonstrations”<sup>16</sup> being the main forms of such cooperation.

(It was in September 1995 that President of Uzbekistan Karimov spoke for the first time about the need for political competition as part of a larger phenomenon of the new society—social competition with which “the traditional values of the Uzbek people should be harmonized.”<sup>17</sup>)

In his later speeches, the president of Uzbekistan called for competition of opinions and ideas, as well as rivalry among parties (April 1999), and for disputes among all sorts of sociopolitical forces (July 1999). President Karimov expected that his country would achieve real political competition by early 2001.<sup>18</sup> In August 2002 he spoke about competition in the information sphere.)

The Andijan events of May 2005 in Uzbekistan brought to light the special role the intelligentsia (creative, academic, etc.) has to play in political competition. Many of the prominent political scientists of Uzbekistan described it as a buffer of sorts between the religious part of society and the secular political elite. All studies of political competition concentrate on the main actors; so far religion, relations between confessions, and reproduction of extremism have remained on the back burner.

The “extremes” of political competition bring to mind the problem of its level. Central Asian and South Caucasian political scientists rely on a conception suggested by Gabriel A. Almond, a prominent American politologist, who proceeded from the quantitative support of radicalism, liberalism, and conservatism. In developing societies, the correlation is 45:25:30.<sup>19</sup> It should be said that the Muslim republics of the CIS describe religious movements as radical.

At that time, the Western democracies and expert community regarded Kazakhstan, a multi-confessional country with secular public and political practices, as the best example of the “secular state-political competition” pattern. U.S. Ambassador to Kazakhstan John Ordway called on the government of Kazakhstan to stimulate political competition and suggested that the opposition should move closer to the people. He believed that the social and economic problems should be identified, while the people should become involved in the political processes on a greater scale.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>15</sup> V. Yushchenko, “Otvét na krízis v Ukraíne dolžen byt zhestkim,” 4 April, 2007, available at [www.president.gov.ua].

<sup>16</sup> B. Mesquita, G. Downs, “An Open Economy, a Closed Society,” *The New York Times*, 17 August, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> I.A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan na poroge XXI veka: ugrozy bezopasnosti, uslovia i garantii progressa*, 1997, available at [www.press-service.uz].

<sup>18</sup> See: I.A. Karimov, “Po puti demokraticeskogo razvítia. Interview rabotnikam sredstv massovoy informatsii v svyazi s vsenarodnym referendumom,” 27 January, 2002, available at [www.press-service.uz].

<sup>19</sup> See: G. Almond, G. Powell, R. Dalton, K. Strom, *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*, Boston, 1974.

<sup>20</sup> See: J. Ordway, “Interview gazete *Vremya*,” 31 January, 2006, available at [Russian.kazakhstan.usembassy.gov].

The people at the helm responded positively to these suggestions. In November 2006, President Nazarbaev said the following in one of his speeches: "Political competition is primarily a competition of ideas" (this resonates with Victor Yushchenko's "political competition concentrates on ideas").

President Nazarbaev clearly indicated that only a party capable of "formulating the most efficient development strategy" could aspire to lead Kazakhstan society.<sup>21</sup>

The above suggests that it was in 1999-2000 that the leaders of the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics started talking about the need to encourage political competition.

Significantly, it is believed, and not infrequently, that political competition boils down to rivalry among the principal actors (strong, including opposition, parties) and partly the media, which produces the necessary ideas, "methods, and ways to achieve prosperity."<sup>22</sup>

Today, the leaders of the Color Revolutions are, likewise, calling for healthy and constructive competition with due account for the mentality, religiosity, and culture of the local people.

## II. Joint Responsibility for Anti-crisis Programs. Competitive Ideas or Alternative Projects?

We should always bear in mind that political competition aims at capturing, holding, and using political power. Any analyst should never forget that as long as there is a powerful administrative resource (that is, "excessive" influence of the people at the top on political decision-making), many people will strive for power who seek illegal gains rather than democracy and the free market. (Social scientists point out that there is a reverse process: a non-competitive political milieu creates, multiplies, and reproduces the administrative resource.<sup>23</sup>)

The roles played by power and the administrative resource in political competition cannot be comprehended without taking into account the elite (formal, informal, counter-elite, situational elite, etc.) as an important actor.

The people at the helm in the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics (with the exception of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan) declared, at least at the initial stages, that they intended to reproduce a high-quality elite (using "personnel training," "personnel policy," and other similar terms), having in mind a formal (nomenklatura) elite which, for obvious reasons, did not need political competition.

The attitude toward the elite as an actor in political competition is best illustrated by the way it is treated in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, two of the largest Central Asian republics.

The leaders of Uzbekistan accept the fact that outside the republic there is an interchangeable old (C.P.S.U.) and new (intellectual) elite.<sup>24</sup> Inside the country this division is not acceptable.

Nursultan Nazarbaev sees the elite as a group of people (leaders) of different generations; they possess considerable intellectual potential, behave responsibly, and are prepared to deal with socially

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<sup>21</sup> N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na VII syezde Grazhdanskoy partii Kazakhstana," 10 November, 2006, available at [www.akorda.kz].

<sup>22</sup> Interview by Dmitry Medvedev to Chinese Central Television (CCTV). 12 April, 2011, available at [www.kremlin.ru].

<sup>23</sup> See: R.M. Nureev, "Ekonomicheskie sub'ekty postsovetskoy Rossii," *Mir Rossii*, No. 3, 2001.

<sup>24</sup> See: I.A. Karimov, "My vse zainteresovany v mire i stabilnosti," 4 May, 2001; "Nikto ne smozhet svernut nas s izbrannogo puti," 25 May, 2005; "Kontseptsia dalneyshhego uglublenia demokraticeskikh reform i formirovaniya grazhdanskogo obshchestva v strane," 12 November, 2011, available at [www.press-service.uz].

important issues. The elite should have a conservative wing, while its stability largely depends on the emergence of a middle class.<sup>25</sup>

The formal (*nomenklatura*) and informal (criminal among other things) elites of the Central Asian and South Caucasian states are still very vulnerable, partly because the West has not yet decided how to treat them.

Some political scientists, such as Igor Yurgens, frequently talk about the appointed formal elite and describe it as thoroughly corrupt, bureaucratic, and, in many respects, pro-Russian. The expert community does not exclude the possibility that a Westernized elite (now potential leaders with no top posts) might come to power in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus, which will make political competition more efficient.

In 2006-2008, there were serious attempts in Uzbekistan to enlarge the legal field for the counter-elite and parliamentary opposition. In Kazakhstan, too, much was done to draw the systemic opposition (leaders of the Communist Party among others) into forming the power structures.

It should be said that the counter-elite (constructive systemic opposition as the bulwark of liberalism of the intellectuals) finds it hard to function in the present conditions.

Until the August 2008 crisis, corruption in the *nomenklatura* elite was more or less effectively kept in check by political competition. This was what political analyst and mathematician Georgy Satarov, a former Yeltsin aide, wrote in June 2006.

In July 2008, President Medvedev spoke about political competition as an anti-corruption measure. It should be said that the problem of corruption (or rather its corporate form) became even more obvious at the beginning of the crisis as one of the factors triggering the crisis.<sup>26</sup>

On the whole, before the world financial and economic crisis, the world treated political competition as an anti-corruption mechanism differently than it does today. An analysis of numerous publications has revealed that the high fuel prices made some countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia) convinced that rapid GDP growth was achievable even if political competition was fairly weak and that all that was needed was anti-corruption measures designed to meet the "planned indices."

It was said, at the same time, that inadequate political competition would slow down economic growth, while the restrictions imposed on development of the expert community would deprive politicians of academic support. Warnings of this type came from the Center for Strategic Studies set up in 1999 under the Government of Russia and the Institute of Economics, RAS, the history of which goes back to 1930.

An analysis of President Nazarbaev's two speeches delivered at two forums of the National Democratic Party Nur Otan held in early and late 2008 (on the very eve of the world crisis) offers a graphic picture of the effective connection between anti-corruption efforts and political modernization. The president talked about involving the regional branches of the ruling party in combating corruption, the party's territorial branches initiating the dismissal of top officials in bureaucratic and law-enforcement structures involved in corruption scandals, and the drafting of the Ten Crushing Blows at Corruption program.<sup>27</sup> At the Anti-corruption Forum of the NDP Nur Otan, he sounded even more determined; he spoke about the need to teach the nation to be intolerant of corruption.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> See: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Doklad na pyatoy sessii Assamblei narodov Kazakhstana," 21 January, 1999; "Vystuplenie na XII sessii Assamblei narodov Kazakhstana," 24 October, 2006; "Lektisia v 'Nazarbaev-Universitete,'" 7 December, 2010, available at [www.akorda.kz].

<sup>26</sup> See: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na Antikorrupsionnom forumе NDP 'Nur Otan,'" 6 November, 2008, available at [www.akorda.kz].

<sup>27</sup> See: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na rasshirennom zasedanii Politsoveta NDP 'Nur Otan,'" 17 January, 2008, available at [www.akorda.kz].

<sup>28</sup> See: N.A. Nazarbaev, "Vystuplenie na Antikorrupsionnom forumе NDP 'Nur Otan,'" 6 November, 2008, available at [www.akorda.kz].

On the eve of and during the world financial and economic crisis, there was a lot of discussion about what civil society, its institutions, and political parties could offer: competitive ideas or alternative projects. It was decided that the former was more likely.

In the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries, the state and society proved unable, in the crisis situation, to arrive at effective anti-crisis programs born by political competition and interaction of different views and ideas, which, as Nino Burjanadze put it, "could be accepted by the people."<sup>29</sup> Combined, such programs could have helped the people in power to share responsibility and achieve an acceptable social-economic strategy.

Outstanding American economist and Nobel Prize winner Douglass North was quite right when he wrote in 2006 that political competition was closely connected with economic competition and that "sustaining competitive democracy is possible only in the presence of economic competition and the emergence of sophisticated economic organizations."<sup>30</sup> This explains the paradoxical impotence of political parties, public institutions, and civil society at times of greatest social tension.

This means that slack economic competition was responsible for equally weak political competition. (I have already written that the leaders of Uzbekistan proceeded from the "social competition = economic competition = political competition" formula, which confirms that political competition can only develop in a favorable economic milieu.)

### III. Will the State Help the Municipalities to Become the Rostrum for Young Opposition Members?

To borrow an idea from Igor Yurgens, we can say that in the post-Soviet expanse the world financial and economic crisis created a social pact of sorts between the state and society, which was prepared to turn a blind eye to limited political competition in exchange for better social conditions. At the same time, the state repeatedly stressed its willingness to encourage this competition.<sup>31</sup>

During the crisis, however, the informal and situational elites of Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus regarded the state not only as "the main vehicle of anti-crisis programs."

There are many reasons why the elites should avoid confrontation with state power; the opposition needs it for the following reasons:

1. To attach a state status to its ideals and interests;
2. To make them part of the legal system;
3. To realize them through the mechanisms of executive power.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> N. Burjanadze, "Zhenskoe litso gruzinskoy politiki," 22 January, 2011, available at [vlasti.net].

<sup>30</sup> D. North, J. Wallis, B. Weingast, "A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History," National Bureau of Economic Research Working Paper Series, available at [www.nber.org].

<sup>31</sup> Significantly, on 23 October, 2010 First Deputy Head of RF Presidential Administration Vladislav Surkov said that if a political system became self-contained it degraded; the worst thing that might happen to the ruling party was to remain alone on the Olympus outside the reach of critics and immune to problems.

<sup>32</sup> See: Yu.A. Nisnevich, "Rol konkurentsii v obespechenii sotsialno-politicheskoy stabilnosti i podavlenii korrupsii," *Vestnik Rossiiskogo universiteta druzhby narodov*. Seria: Politologia, No. 3, 2009, pp. 3-17. Yuly Nisnevich, Doctor of Political Science, Professor, Director of the Institute of Problems of Liberal Development, State Duma deputy in 1993-1995.

Election campaigns give the most adequate idea of the state of political competition, which makes us wonder what new measures have been offered in this sphere? It was suggested, in particular, that the scope of those involved in politics be broadened in the near future, while in the more distant future, there are plans to carry out a technological revolution in the election system and improve voting technology with the help of electronic innovations.

These approaches were tested during the 2011 presidential election in Kazakhstan; Ermuhamet Ertysbaev, aide of the President of Kazakhstan, admitted that the government had helped second-rate rivals register who could address at least some of the problems of socioeconomic modernization.<sup>33</sup>

The results of the election in Azerbaijan late in 2010 allowed the republic's leaders to speak about much clearer trends toward fighting for the ideas and opinions voiced by the political opponents.<sup>34</sup>

According to American officials, the people of Turkmenistan want a better "quality of elections, competition in election, and development of local governance."<sup>35</sup> This is directly related to political competition.

Brought down to the municipal level, political competition can acquire more vigor, a fact amply confirmed by the pre-term municipal elections in Georgia held on 30 May, 2010, on the initiative of President Saakashvili, along with the first direct election of the mayor of Tbilisi.

After positively assessing the consultations between the ruling majority and the opposition, President Saakashvili went on to say: "I call on the Parties to become more interested in the people's problems and to speak to them."<sup>36</sup>

On 28 February, 2011, he told the parliamentary majority that "all of us should be closer to our electorate (this primarily concerns the regional deputies)."<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, despite the obviously developing political competition in Georgia, the political process there is still dominated by clear and seemingly immutable "rules of the game" accepted by all the parties.

In the last two years, the political competition relations between the ruling majority and the opposition have been changing a lot:

1. The role and functions of the ruling party are being revised.
2. The ideas of a balanced representation of several parties alternating at the helm are being discussed.
3. The parliamentary opposition has become the "parliament's orderly."
4. Some non-parliamentary parties are involved in constructive efforts (by strengthening their governing bodies by means of influential bureaucrats).
5. Political competition is intensifying because different political parties are being drawn into it.

Competition among the actors (as a by-product of political competition), as well as among the political parties, is of immense importance.

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<sup>33</sup> See: E. Ertysbaev, "Vybory v Kazakhstane de facto stanut referendumom," 25 March, 2011, *RIA "Novosti,"* available at [www.rian.ru].

<sup>34</sup> See: I. Aliev, "Rech na pervom zasedanii Milli Mejlisa Azerbaidzhanskoy Respubliki," 29 November, 2010, available at [www.president.az].

<sup>35</sup> R. Boucher, *Turkmenistan-U.S. Relations*, Ashghabad, Turkmenistan, 16 April, 2009, available at [turkmenistan.usembassy.gov].

<sup>36</sup> "President of Georgia Estimates Initiated Consultations with Opposition and Majority Positively," 11 November, 2010, available at [www.president.gov.ge].

<sup>37</sup> "The President of Georgia Met the Parliamentary Majority," 28 February, 2011 [www.president.gov.ge].



The description of political life in Russia as a “dreary audition”<sup>38</sup> is fully applicable to Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus; the only difference is that in these regions those who “dropped out” of active politics cannot come back because, after all, party-building is but part of political competition and vice versa.

The following is needed to accelerate party development:

1. Political culture should be upgraded so that political aggression is not taken for political competition.
2. The mechanisms of rotation of party leaders should be de-blocked.
3. The new elite should be drawn into competition inside parties and among parties to improve personnel selection.
4. So-called vertical lifts should start functioning, along with opposition to kleptocratic trends, incessant personnel rotation, etc.

I have already written that political competition cannot be separated from economic competition; the new elite is born of greater attention to the middle class. China’s experience has demonstrated that it is not enough to merely transfer the rules and customs of one civilization (Western, in this case) to different conditions (post-Soviet, Asian, Muslim, etc.); political competition in a “well-fed society” is very different from that in a “society of paupers.”

What is needed is painstaking work to ensure the interests of businessmen, farmers, and owners of intellectual property. In Kazakhstan, some prominent officials have pointed out that systemic opposition should receive financial support, that the country needs a party of businessmen to compete with NDP Nur Otan (to separate the government and business) and fight corruption, and that a two-party political system should be created.<sup>39</sup> This obviously deserves the attention of Kazakhstan’s neighbors and their expert communities in particular.

Analysts have agreed that the attempts to build political parties on a professional basis (the Agrarian Party of Kazakhstan, for example) can hardly be called successful; they say that a full-fledged multiparty system needs a lot of time to emerge and that political and corporate interests should be kept apart. (Significantly, the leaders of Azerbaijan agree that “business requires political support.”<sup>40</sup>)

Political competition and radicalism and extremism are interconnected; in some of the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries the methods used to oppose these threats are being revised; it is also said that political outsiders should draft their own constructive alternative projects.<sup>41</sup>

Some think that the intelligentsia serves as a buffer between the radical part of society and the secular political elite; it should be said in this connection that if and when religious extremists are no longer demonized and if and when all restraints on political competition in any Muslim country are lifted, the state and society will acquire several more or less moderate Islamic movements instead of one aggressively extremist trend (Egypt has amply confirmed this), which will greatly improve the confessional situation.

The events in Ukraine in 1994-2005 confirm that, in the absence of political competition, the country is not immune to catastrophic developments (especially during a regime change) which will inevitably push the country back.

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<sup>38</sup> G. Pavlovsky, “Strelba po srednemy klassu. Vzryv i posledstvia,” 26 January, 2011, *Russky zhurnal*, available at [www.russ.ru].

<sup>39</sup> See: E. Ertysbaev, “Revolutsia sverkh?” 11 April, 2011, *Megapolis*, available at [megapolis.kz].

<sup>40</sup> I. Aliev, *Rech na vstreche s predstavitel'yami Gazakhskogo rayona*, 9 February, 2011, available at [www.presidentr.az].

<sup>41</sup> See, for example: H. Babaoglu, “Logical End of Political Radicalism or ‘Democracy’ Game of Anarchists Completed,” 8 April, 2011, *Yeni Azərbaycan Partiyası*, available at [www.yap.org.az]; Hikmet Babaoglu is Editor of *Yeni Azərbaycan*, the newspaper of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party.

Talking about Kyrgyzstan, we must agree that in an Asian country with somewhat subdued Muslim traditions, a secular past, and an unstable government, excessively active political competition (related to the parliamentary regime) is another threatening factor.

### *By Way of a Conclusion: The Westminster Space*

It turned out that election of the head of government from among the leaders of parties with the majority of seats in the parliament proved to be the trickiest element of the Westminster system for introducing into Central Asia and Southern Caucasus. The same can be said about an efficient multi-party system, two-chamber parliament, and a vigorous parliamentary opposition. Despite all the talk in the Central Asian and South Caucasian countries about their intention to identify leadership potential in the ruling parties and even their obvious penchant for imitation democracy,<sup>42</sup> they are not yet ready for deep-cutting Westminster reforms. So far, the political parties and civil institutions have been unable to offer alternative blueprints for the reforms.

Meanwhile, alternative blueprints are the main product of political competition inside the country; they become possible in the conditions of a free market, economic freedom, propriety rights, rising prosperity, etc. In the absence of political competition, the government remains the only ruler on which the nation depends for its prosperity; this breeds indifference to the political process and high-tech achievements.

Today, certain specific suggestions about how to enliven public and political life in the Central Asian and South Caucasian republics have been made, including:

1. Stabilizing the legal field of party-building.
2. Increasing the demand for efficient parties, especially in the opposition and right wing.
3. Transferring party competition to the local representative bodies of power.
4. Ensuring transparent elections of heads of local administrations.
5. Improving election laws, etc.

The above might stir up political competition, while these measures should be implemented by analytical structures and political parties.

I, in turn, would like to see a time when a grant-based system for funding analytical state structures will stir up competition among the non-state structures, when joint and open consortiums of state and non-state structures appear, and when legally justified JVs with foreign partners become a reality along with cases when the state officially cuts down grants to failed official structures, etc.

We cannot exclude the possibility that the political market might be crammed with “fast moving consumer goods” based on vague formulas such as “accelerate democratic reforms at a fast pace,” “ensure close relations with the West,” “expose the intrigues of Russian imperialism in every way possible,” “return to the true sources of national history,” “de-Stalinize all spheres of life,” etc. Any of these slogans will be subjected to a severe test when the party that campaigned with it comes to power.

Hillary Clinton has rightly pointed out that “competition in the idea market is as important as the competition in the economic market.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> R. Coalson, “The Gun is Hanging on the Wall,” *The Moscow Times*, 10 January, 2008. Robert Coalson is a Russian analyst for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty based in Prague.

<sup>43</sup> H. Clinton, “Remarks. Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia,” 14 October, 2009, available at [www.state.gov].

Respect for knowledge and ideas and their treatment as a commodity and capital, as well as free exchange of them, form the cornerstone of effective political competition. Effective competition on the domestic political scene hinges on the attitude to alternative projects as one of the most important aspects of intellectual property.

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