

**POWER AND SOCIETY****CENTRAL ASIA:  
UNIVERSAL DEMOCRACY,  
NATIONAL DEMOCRACY,  
OR ENLIGHTENED AUTHORITARIANISM?**

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The apologists of authoritarian regimes in the newly independent states have spent fifteen years of sovereign development creating and spreading the myth of so-called enlightened authoritarianism as the most desirable and implementable political model (principle) for these states. This conception has been surfacing more and more frequently in political discourse recently. It looks like a product of the crisis that hit the political research of democratization issues in the post-Soviet (particularly Central Asian) countries. We can say very provisionally that the democratic rhetoric in the newly independent states has passed through three stages:

- (1) resolute statements about the democratic choice when these states gained their sovereignty;

- (2) talk about the possibility of an exclusively national democratic model;
- (3) acceptance of enlightened authoritarianism as the most appropriate political system.

These are mainly conceptual issues to be discussed from the conceptual point of view: the crisis in political research is caused by the domination of political short-term considerations and a politically motivated apology over the rigorously scholarly and critical approach.

Below I shall use the term “democratic constructionism” instead of the widely used concept “democratic construction” to separate the practical process of developing democracy as a political system from the theoretical process of creating an adapted concept of democracy.

## A Course Toward Democracy

For obvious reasons, at the initial stages of the post-Soviet reforms, the Central Asian countries proceeded from natural political idealism; the Soviet totalitarian system was denounced to the accompaniment of statements of a resolute democratic choice coming from the very top. By saying this, the new heads of newly independent states were confirming their legitimacy. The democratic romanticism of the early period was not overburdened with conceptual left or right biases. The democratic sentiments were largely prepared by the policy of “perestroika, openness, and new thinking” of the last Soviet leaders. Mikhail Gorbachev opened the valves that had been suppressing the political activity of the masses and sowed the seeds of democratic culture and people’s democratic behavior.

The currently observed “*search for democracy*” and “*intrigues of autocracy*” are rooted in perestroika. The democratic euphoria of the first years of independence is responsible for the political science courses and other disciplines that appeared on the university agenda throughout the post-Soviet expanse; classical Western works on democracy and recent creative efforts of prominent scholars appeared in translation. All generations discovered the West for themselves, while students and young academics regarded Western university diplomas as their cherished dream and purpose in life. The new time was best illustrated by mass study and eager acceptance of the Western political, economic, social, and ethical standards; Western democracy was commonly accepted as a political and social ideal.

Western endowments and foundations, experts, businessmen, charities, and even missionaries rushed to the newly independent states. It was a dynamic process of mutual exchange.

On the whole, the basic universal democratic principles and institutions were successfully adapted to the political systems at the very early stage of independent development; there appeared multi-party systems, elections to legislatures (commonly called parliaments), the institution of presidency, human rights and freedoms were enforced in the constitution, democratic norms, the institution of ombudsman, membership in the U.N., the OSCE, and other international organizations, introduction of the principle under which international law dominated over national law, etc.

More than that, all the officials and leaders of the newly independent states insisted in public that nothing was more important in the transition period than studying and borrowing the democratic experience of the world’s leading democracies. At that time, all the newly independent states regularly convened international conferences, seminars, and training sessions on human rights and democracy issues, and published a huge number of documents on the same subjects. They signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Final Act of the Helsinki OCSE Conference, and many other international instruments related to democracy and human rights. By doing this, they shouldered international responsibilities in these fields.

In this way, the democracy issue gradually developed from domestic to international and became one of the necessary conditions for the effective administration of the globalization and international security processes. Director of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Adam Rotfeld has written that upgraded efficiency of international governance requires that civil society should be further developed together with internal democratization, greater civil involvement in the administration process, the rule-of-law state, and responsibility of the administrators.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See: A. Rotfeld, *Organizing Principles of Global Security*, SIPRI Yearbook 2001: Armaments, Disarmament and International Security, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001.

This idea of democracy's international dimension is generated, first and foremost, by the fact that today the weakness of states, caused by a shortage of democratic structures and their inability to cope with organized crime, international and domestic terrorism, corruption, lack of political freedoms, violations of human rights, religious and ethnic conflicts and aggressive nationalism, presents the greatest security hazard on a world scale.<sup>2</sup>

For this reason, in the 21st century, democracy should be regarded not merely as a form of governance, but also as a road leading to the peaceful coexistence of nations.<sup>3</sup> From this it follows that *the universalism of democratic constructionism was born from society's expectations, on the one hand, and the current global trends, on the other*. It was a natural process, and the only possible answer to the challenge of independence. Democracy as a value, a form of political governance, and the meaning of public relations was unquestionably accepted as the only possible course. Later, however, it became a course that depended on many conditions.

## Moving Back to the National Model

At the turn of the 2000s, however, the newly independent states gradually moved away from universalism toward the nationalist position on the issue of democracy. This can hardly be described as a scientifically rigorous idea at which political scientists arrived, not without a lot of soul-searching, during the years of independence. It was rather a sign of mounting doctrinarianism: no one has yet to come forward with a clear description of the basic and unique features of this model.

This naturally suggests the following questions: Which features of "one's own" national model are unique and absent from other countries? Which features of national democracy are borrowed from abroad? It should be said that irrespective of their support of any of the democratic constructionist schools—universalism or nationalism—academics, politicians, and ideologists have never rejected such universal values and norms of democracy as elected power, the multi-party system, the separation of powers, the free mass media, human rights and basic freedoms, etc.

In an effort to justify the need for and possibility of a national democracy model, many of the home-grown politicians and academics insist that the local social and political reality and historical-cultural heritage (or mentality, another favorite term of theirs) are creating a very specific context within the general democratic evolution.

Arthur Atanesian, a political scientist from Armenia, has demonstrated that "democratic centralism" Soviet style is the main feature of this special, "one's own," national democratic model. After years of independence, many of the CIS countries are still ruled by members of the Soviet *nomenklatura*.<sup>4</sup> They proved unable to discard the Soviet heritage and choose a road other than one leading to a revival of Soviet-style authoritarianism.

*Its specifics were expressed not so much in the unique and inimitable experience of other countries moving toward their own style of democracy and not relying on foreign patterns, as in the reproduction of that special feature of the nation and national culture that is, in fact, a stumbling block*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>3</sup> See: "The Warsaw Declaration 'Towards a Community of Democracies,'" *Polish Quarterly of International Affairs*, 27 June, 2000, pp. 24-25 (see also: *International Legal Materials*, Vol. 39, No. 6, November 2000, pp. 1306-308).

<sup>4</sup> See: A. Atanesian, "Paradoxes of Democracy and Democratization Trends in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (36), 2005, p. 17.

*along this route of advance.* The clan system in Uzbekistan is a relevant example. The local ideologists and political elite have identified it as the main barrier on the road to democracy and, what is more important, as a security hazard. So far nothing has been done to remove its remnants—instead they are being preserved.

Paradoxically enough, the rhetoric of the national democracy model is designed to conceal the attempts to monopolize democracy as a system and a value. Arthur Atanesian has justly pointed out: “The post-Soviet CIS leaders are doing their best to adjust themselves to the need to carry out democratic reforms and adapt them to themselves.”<sup>5</sup> The regime went as far as appropriating the only possible interpretation of democracy and the road leading to it. In this way, we have arrived not at a national model of democracy, but rather at a national model of denying democracy. Russian political scientist Nikolai Borisov has said on this score: “The transformation of the political regime has led not to modernization of the republic’s political system, as might be expected, but to its de-modernization and archaism.”<sup>6</sup>

Research of the post-Soviet developments have revealed that the idea of national democracy in its Central Asian forms and methods serves isolationism to a much greater extent than elsewhere. This brings us to a paradox: the political system in Uzbekistan, or anywhere else in Central Asia, cannot and should not follow *the principle: national in form and democratic in content*. The form of democratic content should be democratic: more nationalism in Uzbekistan (and elsewhere in Central Asia) means less democracy.

It should be borne in mind that democracy is no longer a domestic issue—it is developing into an international-political one; it is becoming one of the indispensable conditions for effective management of globalization and international security. In Central Asia, democracy has acquired a regional dimension as well. This cannot be detected in the current discourse of democratic constructionism. Nobody has yet formulated a hypothesis of regional democracy in theoretical, let alone practical terms. This approach, however, could have brought us closer to an understanding of what is called local (regional) specifics in democratic development (if it exists at all).

Recently, nearly all the newly independent states demonstrated that they were moving away from universalism. On 8 July, 2004, the CIS countries made public their joint statement at the Vienna sitting of the OSCE permanent council, which said in particular that this inefficient organization “failed to adapt itself to the demands of the changing world.” The OSCE’s field activity was subjected to scything criticism because it allegedly was limited to “monitoring the situation in the field of human rights and democratic institutions.” It was alleged that the mission heads allow the domestic policies of the countries in which they are stationed to be “unjustifiably criticized.”<sup>7</sup>

In Uzbekistan, the offices of most of the international organizations were closed down under the pretext of their alleged involvement in destructive policies. No confirmation followed: the public was offered no convincing proof of their destructive (undermining, if democratic activities can be described as undermining) activities. This was another obvious sign of retreat from universalism in democratic constructionism.<sup>8</sup>

The above suggests that the national model was born because democratic changes slowed down, while conservatism and authoritarianism in the newly independent states came to the fore.

<sup>5</sup> See: A. Atanesian, “Paradoxes of Democracy and Democratization Trends in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (36), 2005, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> N. Borisov, “Transformation in the Political Regime in Uzbekistan: Stages and Outcome,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6 (36), 2005, p. 30.

<sup>7</sup> F. Lukianov, “Zakliuchitel’ny akt. Strany SNG prigovorili OBSE,” available at [www.centrasia .org 10/07/2004].

<sup>8</sup> For more detail, see: F. Tolipov, “The Moment of Truth: End of the Transition Period? (On the Democratic Initiative in the Central Asian States),” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 5 (35), 2005.

## Stagnation in Democratic Constructionism

Today, we can see the following trend, which derives from the previous one: a desire to formulate scientifically substantiated models and conceptions of democratic constructionism is being gradually pushed out by the widely accepted pseudo-conception of enlightened authoritarianism. Its authors seem to be convinced that “enlightened” means “democratic” in certain contexts: otherwise their conception would have denied any type of democracy. Indeed, who needs enlightened authoritarianism unless it leads to democracy?

This conception, however, squeezes the national political process into a cramped space and makes it dependent on the degree of enlightenment, level of knowledge, intellect, and goodwill of one man. It (the conception) does not guarantee and, in fact, does not demand a set of virtues for the others involved in the political process, on the one hand, and for any descendant, on the other, since it does not contain the principles of a regular rotation of people at the top. *“Enlightened authoritarianism” is a conception that preserves the status quo.* On the other hand, we can ask: “What does it mean to be enlightened?” Does it mean the educational level? If it does, most of the dictators of the distant and recent past were educated/enlightened people. In fact, practically all the authoritarian leaders and dictators at all times tried and are trying to pass for educated people aware of the nation’s hopes and needs. They repeat correct slogans at every opportunity and even enact the right laws.

It seems that the enlightened authoritarianism conception was invented to justify life presidency: such leaders pretend to symbolize stability, predictability, a balanced and consistent political course, etc. Many, however, tend to miss the fact that more often than not such regimes slip into senility, stagnation, and degradation. I am growing more and more convinced that the political resource of each and every leader is limited and is completely exhausted by the end of the first or, at best, the second term in power. This is a non-renewable resource, not only because the leader’s enlightenment level gradually wanes away, but because of two important circumstances that cannot and should not be ignored:

- (1) over time, the burden of natural and unavoidable errors and blunders accumulates to reach a critical level: to err is human after all (deified leaders seem to be immune to this universal rule).
- (2) After a while people grow tired of irremovable leaders; what is more, the nation gradually becomes convinced (with good reason or not) that the leader is just too greedy or power-hungry to retreat from the scene.

Over time, suspicions go even further: people begin to suspect that the leader is a puppet kept in power by those who prefer to stay out of limelight and pursue their private interests to the detriment of the state’s national interests.

This explains why the developed democracies restrict the head of state to two terms in power and accept no excuses. It might be imagined that people in the developed democracies have much fewer reasons to be discontented with their democratic leaders and therefore have more reasons to let them stay in power longer. Opposite examples are few and far between: the best and most successful leaders have to go at the appointed time.

In 1997, Fareed Zakaria, a prominent American political scientist, wrote something that fully applies to the post-Soviet (especially Central Asian) states: “Democracy is flourishing; constitutional liberalism is not. ...It appears that many countries are settling into a form of government that mixes a substantial degree of democracy with a substantial degree of illiberalism. ...Constitutional

liberalism is about the limitation of power, democracy about its accumulation and use. For this reason, many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century liberals saw in democracy a force that could undermine liberty. ...Illiberal means are in the long run incompatible with liberal ends. ...In countries not grounded in constitutional liberalism, the rise of democracy often brings with it hyper-nationalism and war-mongering. ...While it is easy to impose elections on a country, it is more difficult to push constitutional liberalism on a society. ...Thus the problems of governance in the 21st century will likely be problems within democracy.”<sup>9</sup> It follows from the above that enlightened authoritarianism does not guarantee a shift toward liberal democracy.

In fact, a truly enlightened person will not seek authoritarian power that will place him above his subjects; he will never believe himself to be infallible, he will never indulge in limiting the freedoms of others, or in banning them altogether.

Here is what Boris Chicherin, a prominent Russian scholar, had to say at the dawn of the 20th century: “Those who imagine that a monarch will limit his power on his own initiative driven by his own magnanimity know next to nothing about human nature. Under the burden of power, he will be lured by its charm, which can easily make up for all the disadvantages. There is always the retinue whose personal interests depend on one particular person’s continued power and who are engaged in shady deals behind his back. There are numerous plausible reasons for retaining the high post: popular sentiments, the call of history, the fatherland’s alleged benefits, disintegration of the state, in short everything that is normally used to leave arbitrariness intact.”<sup>10</sup>

## **Anti-Americanism as a Political Technique of Anti-Democratism**

There are obvious attempts to use obscurantist methods (such as creating an enemy image, one of the favorite Soviet devices) to play down the equally obvious failure of democratic constructionism. Anti-Americanism has developed into a form of militant anti-democratism. In Uzbekistan, for example, all so-called analytical programs run by Takhilnom TV Channel start with cynical and caustic remarks about the United States and what pass for wise remarks about the absence of universal democratic formulas.

The recent successful and failed “color revolutions” in some of the CIS countries (Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan) triggered alarming anti-American hysterics in the newly independent states, Russia included. America is held responsible for the causes, nature, and driving forces behind these “revolutions.” Once more, hypertrophied geopolitical approaches pushed aside the new approaches to the transformation processes across the post-Soviet expanse, which barely had time to become more or less coherent.

Meanwhile, biased political scientists and journalists are busy chewing over the topic of America’s “defeat” in Central Asia very much in the vein of the classical political techniques. They have completely missed an important point: the contemporary drama caused by rejected democracy and consolidated autocracy unfolding in the newly independent states (particularly in Central Asia) has a geopolitical dimension as well. It is shown in two factors: (1) the heritage left by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Great Power and (2) the profoundly continental existence of

<sup>9</sup> F. Zakaria, “The Rise of Illiberal Democracy,” *Foreign Affairs*, November/December, 1997.

<sup>10</sup> B.N. Chicherin, “Rossia nakanune dvadtsatogo stoletia,” *Novoe vremia*, No. 4, 1990.

these nations and states. Russian academic Dmitry Furman has correctly pointed out: “The unity of the Russian continental empire was inseparable from the authoritarian nature of Russia’s political system.”<sup>11</sup>

No wonder the usual Russian imperial urge to expand (“land gathering”) has been transformed into a struggle for the post-Soviet expanse as a sphere of Russia’s domination.<sup>12</sup> “Russia’s assistance in the struggle with the opposition and the West’s impact designed to democratize and liberalize the post-Soviet regimes has become an important factor helping these regimes to survive and tying the CIS closer together in a Russian-headed ‘holy alliance’ of the presidents against the oppositions.”<sup>13</sup>

There has been a lot of talk recently about the so-called democratic intervention: Western policy designed to promote democracy in the newly independent states. Their regimes have already described this as interference in internal affairs or even as an attempt to stage revolutionary upheavals in these countries. *The presidents’ “holy alliance” is spearheaded not only against the local opposition, but also against democratic pressure from the outside.*

To my mind, America’s drive to promote democracy in the newly independent states is neutrally colored—it is merely a fact of life. We should admit that America’s history contains both light and dark pages, which is true of any world power. Neither the U.S., nor Russia, nor China, nor any other power should be demonized or idealized. From the political and especially moral points of view, the idea of support and promotion of democracy should not be a priori condemned, if it is not geopolitically biased.

In his widely read *America as a Civilization*, prominent American historian and sociologist Max Lerner pointed out that for centuries the world has looked at America in a distorted light: first through the rose-colored glasses of hope, and later through the prism of the myth about its power and wealth. For some time its image was tarnished by gangsters; later it suffered because of the political storms of the prolonged “armed armistice” period. Genuine America was lost amid fantastic images created by distorting mirrors.<sup>14</sup>

Max Lerner put practically all the American doctrines in a nutshell when he said that Americans regarded themselves not as fighters against ideologies, they considered themselves realists resolved to keep the world open to all social systems, provided that they refrain from aggression.<sup>15</sup>

The time will come when the relations between Uzbekistan and the United States normalize; I am pretty sure that our ideologists (those who fear America today and who recently praised it to the skies) will resume their praises.

## We Need New Perestroika

Today Uzbekistan needs that which awakened the Soviet people in 1985—*perestroika and new thinking*. I say this for several reasons, the main one being the striking similarity between the current sociopolitical situation in Uzbekistan and that in the Soviet Union on the eve of perestroika. Its main

<sup>11</sup> D. Furman, “Dolgiy protsess raspada Rossiyskoy imperii,” Ñollection of articles *Tsentrāl’naia Azia i Kavkaz: nasushchnye problemy*, ed. by B. Rumer, TOO East Point, Almaty, 2005, p. 57.

<sup>12</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted from: M. Lerner, *Razvitie tsivilizatsii v Amerike*, in 2 volumes, Vol. 2, Raduga Publishers, Moscow, 1992, p. 473.

<sup>15</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 741.



elements are the ideological monopoly of one party, no pluralism of opinions, and a ban on criticism; an absence of opposition; economic stagnation; empty slogans and lack of systemic effort; dogmatism and apologetics in the humanities; an enemy image, etc.

In 1985, the Soviet leaders were bold enough to admit that the state was in crisis and that its economy was stagnating. They launched unprecedented reforms. In his book published in 1988, Mikhail Gorbachev wrote: "The methods perfectly suited to extraordinary conditions resulted in slowing down socioeconomic growth under the new conditions."<sup>16</sup> This fully applies to post-Soviet Uzbekistan: the Soviet methods still applied inside the country may slow down the country's progress toward world globalization rates and progressive standards of democratic development.

The Soviet strategy of reforms had two dimensions: internal and external. Perestroika was the internal dimension, while the new thinking was addressed to the world. Perestroika Uzbekistan style could have included several serious innovations.

- First, we should initiate openness and glasnost in the political process;
- second, the time has come to assess our party system in real terms and launch reforms.
- Third, deep-cutting administrative reform is overdue: it must uproot the clan system, regionalism, and corruption.
- Fourth, it is necessary to create a social atmosphere of free and open discussion and criticism of the problems our state and society are facing.

The new thinking may also embrace several innovations:

- first, we should start the dialog with the West anew and restore the old strategic relations;
- second, the time has come to concentrate on regional integration in Central Asia;
- third, we should upgrade our status in the U.N., the OSCE, NATO, and the CIS.

Today Uzbekistan has to cope with nine practical problems and eight dilemmas of democratic construction.

The nine practical problems are as follows:

1. The crisis in the political system;
2. The absence of independent democratic mass media;
3. The crisis in the system of local self-government;
4. The threat presented by the clan system and regionalism;
5. The absence of a mechanism of public opinion polls;
6. The undeveloped mechanism of direct contacts and feedback between the state and society;
7. The abuses and corruption in the state and social structures;
8. State interference in the private business sector and market processes;
9. The gap between ideology and the people's life.

The eight conceptual dilemmas are as follows:

1. Compatibility between the secular state and Islamic culture;
2. Compatibility between Islam and democracy;

<sup>16</sup> M.S. Gorbachev, *Perestroika i novoe myshlenie dlia nashey strany i dlia vsego mira*, Political Literature Publishers, Moscow, 1988, p. 43 (English edition: M. Gorbachev, *Perestroika: New Thinking for Our Country and the World*, Perennial Library, Harper & Row, 1988).



3. Democracy or autocracy;
4. Security or democracy;
5. National or universal model;
6. Gradual or fast progress;
7. Liberalism or paternalism;
8. Modernization or traditionalism.

It is for the academic community (not only for the government) to ponder on these problems and dilemmas. I am convinced that if the academic community and the state pool their efforts to address these problems, the country will undoubtedly demonstrate an unprecedented upsurge in scholarly thought and political creativity. I regret to say that the Uzbek political scientists have not yet addressed these fundamental issues and have not yet offered novel solutions. Uzbekistan, the scholarly potential of which is the most powerful among its Central Asian neighbors, has not yet demonstrated even half the range of pluralistic opinions, or an active and open discussion of the challenging issues, which was demonstrated by Kyrgyzstan, a much weaker state, by that time. The academic communities of our neighbors have already reached higher levels of scholarly research and demonstrated pluralism of opinions and novel approaches.

Many things in Uzbekistan call for fresh approaches. How should national interests be defined? What are they? How should they be defended? How should we monitor a strategy to correct them on time? Can we justify the spoilt relations with the United States and should we restore them to normalcy? How many parties does the country need for its full-fledged democratic development? What is the correlation between religion and democracy?

Last October, Tashkent hosted an international conference on the role and importance of the Islamic factor in developing civil society. The participants from Uzbekistan mainly repeated what had been repeatedly said at the official level: in Uzbekistan, religion is separated from the state. This requires no proof, at least at the conference, which should have raised and discussed much more profound questions about the role of religion in civil society. It provides food for thought, since Islam, as a religion and a way of life, is gaining popularity.

These and other topical issues, the number of which is unlimited, call for an open and vivacious discussion. Glasnost is a serious test, which is not limited to the media—it is a way of political thinking. Some people panic when glasnost is discussed; they are convinced that a free and open discussion of the problems will trigger quarrels, squabbles, permissiveness and, in the final analysis, destabilization of the social and political situation. This is idle talk. There will always be people ready to profit from reforms and conservative and reactionary forces that will slow down the reforms and discredit their leaders. This should not be taken to mean that the reforms should be discontinued and that there should be doubts about successful democratic developments in an “Asian country.”

The hearings held in December 2006 at the PACE Political Affairs Committee devoted to Central Asia testified that the international community and Europe in particular wanted to see democratic developments in the region and Uzbekistan as its part and that they tried to assess the potential and importance of such developments.

On the whole, the West (not the East or the North) heaped a lot of criticism on the local states for the violations of human rights and their inability (read: unwillingness) to pursue democratic reforms. Such criticism could be heard, among other places, at a conference of the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development held in Tashkent on 5 May, 2003 when EBRD President Jean Lemierre pointed out that the annual meeting succeeded in placing “civil society at the core of the [development] process. It’s a major achievement,” said he, and added that the future level of EBRD cooperation with Uzbekistan would depend on Tashkent’s fulfillment of its reform commitments. He also

warned the Uzbek leaders: “We have a range of options—between moving forward and investing, and reducing our activity as we have done in other countries.”

The world community wants to see Uzbekistan a democratic country. More than that, I am absolutely convinced that the United States and other leaders of the democratic world will support the political and economic reforms in all the newly independent states. This already happened nearly 20 years ago, when the U.S. supported perestroika and went ahead with its economic support of the Soviet Union.

Our country is now in a quandary created by a dramatic combination of subjective and objective factors, in which the objective factors have made the subjective ones even more important. Indeed, the policy makers, the people who rule the state, are operating under very complicated internal and external conditions—there is no such thing as a political vacuum. The Central Asian, and the international context for that matter, in which Uzbekistan and its statehood are developing, directly affects the nature and content of political decision-making. Today, the context is far from favorable: the great power geopolitical rivalry (the so-called Great Game) in the region has reached its apogee. Waged according to the rules of the “balance of power” or the “zero sum game,” it can be described as destructive rather than constructive.

The entire region, Uzbekistan being no exception, was thrown off balance; barely begun, the democratic changes in Uzbekistan (and in its Central Asian neighbors) ground to a halt not only because of their leaders’ erroneous decisions, but also under inevitable pressure from the new world order.

In other words, the Central Asian developments affect Uzbekistan’s domestic and foreign policies as part of a wider, global, and deep-cutting process of worldwide perestroika. What we need is a kind of Yalta Conference to determine the region’s post-Cold War status. The democratic future of Uzbekistan and its neighbors should be determined as part of their new status.

### *In Lieu of a Conclusion*

The ideology of *democratic fundamentalism* goes hand in hand with the highly simplified and absolutized static model of universal democracy; the ideology of *democratic relativism* completely corresponds to the attempts to build a national democratic model, while the ideology of *democratic obscurantism* hinges on ideas of enlightened authoritarianism. The three ideologies are obviously untenable and easily refuted. The ideology of *democratic constructionism* should receive more academic attention. Regrettably, this has not yet happened, the academic community was lured away by sham scholarly hypotheses put into circulation and gaining a lot of attention.

Kyrgyz political scientist Noor Omarov rightly pointed out that deliberations about the inability of the countries trying to reform themselves to accept the Western democratic values as their own are gaining popularity across the post-Soviet expanse together with the idea of a special “Asian way.”<sup>17</sup> This was encouraged, among other things, by the “national resurrection” policy pursued by the Central Asian rulers who revived the archaic (clan included) forms of conscience when trying to set up modern administrative structures.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the state and society were enthralled by the revived “joy”—the archaic folk features—to the extent that they pushed aside democracy that allegedly comes from the outside.

The national democracy conception in the form presented by certain quasi-patriots does not hold water. We should bear in mind that the teaching of political disciplines at universities, no matter how

<sup>17</sup> See: *NOOR* (Kyrgyzstan), No. 2, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

formal and superficial, is based on Western knowledge and Western scientific methods, even though dramatic stagnation and rejection of Western democracy by those who rule the country are very much obvious.

The enlightened authoritarianism conception is likewise untenable because it distorts the very essence of the problem. Those who support it should always remember that only one step separates enlightened authoritarianism from unenlightened and will lead to a personality cult. The conclusion suggests itself that leaders should be elected and rotated—this is one of the basic principles of democracy. It is not merely a political and juridical principle—it is a moral and ethical principle that should not be patterned to fit short-term considerations.

Even if we admit that one leader or another is indeed a highly enlightened person, the enlightened authoritarianism conception is absolutely useless even as a transition model. It detracts too far from democratic constructionism and completely relies on purely subjective factors rather than on objective laws of social development.

We should always bear in mind that the search for the best possible democratic model, which has been going on throughout the entire history of democracy, never went far from the basic idea—self-reproduction of democracy as a SYSTEM that least of all depends on subjective factors. The founding fathers of the democratic SYSTEMS have always warned against the “tyranny of the majority” (to borrow a Western term), that is, the tyranny of democracy. If democracy is fraught with tyranny, we should be apprehensive of an enlightened authoritarian ruler.

The Central Asian countries possess a vast economic, resource, human, educational, scientific, and political potential; and their democratic potential is equally wide. This is what makes them different from the so-called Third World countries. We should preserve this potential—otherwise we shall find ourselves among the underdeveloped (economically and democratically) countries.

*Autocratic intrigues come to the fore where and when there is no quest for democracy.* Indeed, in the final analysis, the enlightened authoritarianism conception is inadequate because it appeared too late: the leaders of the newly independent states were democratically (as we were told) elected, while their constitutions and laws envisage universal democratic principles and norms that have nothing in common with the idea of enlightened authoritarianism.

In his Preface to the 12th French edition of *Democracy in America* (1848), Alexis de Tocqueville offered an important conclusion suggested by his observation of American democracy that the rest of the world should not slavishly copy the institutions the country has created for itself. We would be better, said the author, to figure out what suits us and what does not. We should not borrow examples—we would be better to grow wiser. If we did borrow something, we should concentrate on the principles rather than the details of their laws. The law of the French Republic might and should differ from those that governed life in the United States, yet the principles on which the legal system of the American states rested, the principles that ensured public order, the division and balance of power, genuine freedom, and sincere and profound respect for the law were absolutely indispensable for any Republic. They should be shared by all republican states; it can be predicted that where there are none, the Republic will soon die.<sup>19</sup>

This fully applies to Uzbekistan and its Central Asian neighbors.

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<sup>19</sup> See: A. de Tocqueville, *Demokratia v Amerike*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1992, p. 24.