

THE POLITICAL PROCESS IN UZBEKISTAN TODAY: TRENDS AND PROSPECTS

Nikolai BORISOV

*Ph.D. (Political Science),
lecturer at the Russian State Humanitarian University
(Moscow, Russia)*

The recent political and economic trends in the Republic of Uzbekistan reveal that the regime seems prepared to change (at the level of political statements), on the one hand, and outline the limits of possible transformations within the system, on the other.

The two-house parliament of the new convocation, the 2005 events in Andijan, the new oppositional coalition, and the presidential election of 2007, which postponed the transfer of power and any decision on the transfer mechanism, were the key factors that fully revealed the regime's nature.

In December 2004-January 2005, the country elected a two-house Oliy Majlis according to the new rules. On the eve of the general election, the country's medium business community set up the Liberal-Democratic Party with the stated aim of developing a civil society. There is every reason to believe that it was intended to replace the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan as the "leading" party to demonstrate that the country has acquired a new parliamentary majority. It formed the largest faction in the Legislative Chamber, the PDPU came second; and other seats went to several other parties likewise set up by the regime. Representatives of the district, city, and regional kengashes, together with 16 presidential appointees, formed the Senate (the parliament's upper house): the senators included prime minister deputies, chairman of the Supreme Court, state advisor to the president, foreign minister, and others,¹ which means that the Senate was a mixture of the legislative, executive, and judicial power branches.

The opposition parties were deprived of the opportunity to nominate candidates, while the lower house was placed under the control of the upper (which operated on a non-permanent basis and consisted of deputies of the local councils and members of the executive structures), thus preventing the newly elected parliament from assuming an independent political status.

¹ See: Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Appointment of Members of the Senate of Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan of 24 January, 2005, press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<http://www.press-service.uz/ru/gsection.scm?groupId=4347&contentId=5607>], 15 November, 2006.

Probably starting in 2004, the ruling elite and President Karimov spared no efforts to demonstrate that they have cut back their claims to domination in the public sphere and moved over to a pluralist structure. In January 2005, the president offered the slogan "From a strong state to a strong civil society," which implied several reforms: a more important role and more influence for the legislature, real independence of judicial power, decentralization of power, support of NGOs, liberalized criminal legislation, abolition of the death penalty, and more democratic media.² The president's speech, in which he proclaimed the above, can be described as a manifesto of democratic changes, something that even the most radical of democrats would hail. It was caused by the obvious need to strengthen, through formal renovation of the country's political system, the regime's legitimacy and to rebuff those who accused power of "authoritarian stagnation" and absence of political initiatives.

Erk and Birlik, two opposition political structures, took the speech as a signal to launch the registration procedure and run for parliament. It turned out, however, that political practice and the democratic manifesto were worlds apart. The registration applications were declined,³ while the two parties enfeebled by internal squabbles in the absence of leaders remained illegal with no chance of influencing the political process.

In 2005, another opposition coalition called Sunny Uzbekistan appeared on the political scene. Described as open to all democratic forces and working "toward a constructive dialog with the government rather than a revolution,"⁴ it chose the strategy of supporting popular spontaneous actions and expressing the interests of those involved in public protests with the aim of leading such actions some time in the future. The regime refused to enter into a dialog with the new structure: in 2006, its leaders were detained and sentenced to conditional terms in prison (seven years with a probation period of three years).⁵

P. Akhunov, one of the Birlik leaders, called on all the supporters of the democratic forces to embrace new tactics: the opposition should bury its hopes to become legalized and weaken the authoritarian regime. The opposition instead, he argued, should abandon its idea of a power struggle for the sake of constructive criticism of the government and gradual legalization that would allow it to gradually develop a civil society and fight mass poverty in Uzbekistan.

As soon as the last election campaign began, a certain Extraordinary Committee announced that the opposition Erk Party had removed itself from the territory of Uzbekistan.

This means that the democratic opposition no longer loomed on the horizon as a threat to the ruling regime.

The events of May 2005 in Andijan revealed that the regime was not ready for a dialog. The riot was suppressed at the cost of 100 to 800 lives (the deaths mainly caused by the actions of the authorities). It is impossible to assess the rioters' aims: information was limited to what the president chose to say. He informed his own country and the world that it was a terrorist-instigated riot which was guided by Islamic slogans; he blamed a certain Aqromiyya Society associated with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁶ According to other sources, this was a rally of impoverished and desperate people wishing to attract the attention of the powers that be to their situation. Experts of the Memorial

² See: *Nasha glavnaia tsel—demokratizatsia i obnovlenie obshchestva, reformirovanie i modernizatsia strany*, Report of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov at the joint sitting of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate of Oliy Majlis, press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<http://www.press-service.uz/ru/gsection.scm?groupId=4392&contentId=5689>], 15 December, 2006.

³ See: *Sredniaia Azia: Andizhanskiy stsenariy?* Collection compiled by M.M. Meyer, Moscow, 2005, p. 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁵ See: *Ibid.*, pp. 112-114; 162-163; Information Agency Regnum, available at [<http://www.regnum.ru/news/645731.html>].

⁶ See: Briefing for foreign and Uzbek journalists and members of the diplomatic corps in connection with the events in the city of Andijan, press service of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, available at [<http://www.press-service.uz/ru/gsection.scm?groupId=4392&contentId=17282>].

Human Rights Center described “the grave economic situation and complete suppression of free thinking and civil freedoms that left the nation without legal forms of protest” as the main cause of the tragic events in Andijan.⁷

In any case, the event outlined the limits of the permissible and demonstrated the ruling elite’s determination to use force, despite what they call liberalization, and in total disregard for the world community’s harshly negative response. On the one hand, the absence of internal opposition and the president’s complete control of the power-related structures made these developments possible; on the other, during the conflict, Russia probably assured the Uzbek president that it would support him. The Andijan events cut short relations between Uzbekistan and the United States; the Americans withdrew their military base from the country, while Russia became Uzbekistan’s main strategic partner, offering no critical opinions about the ruling regime.

In 2006-2007, fresh signs of possible political shifts toward polycentrism reappeared, probably because the “successor” issue had moved to the fore, while the country’s international isolation slackened.

The Constitutional Law on the Greater Role of Political Parties in the Renovation and Further Democratization of State Administration and Modernization of the Country adopted in 2007 and enacted in 2008 allowed political parties to take part in forming the Cabinet. The Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis needed a majority (made up of one or several parties), all the other factions becoming the parliamentary opposition with the right of legislative initiative (under the new law they acquired the right to put forward an alternative version of the law timed to coincide with the report of the Chamber’s corresponding committee on the same issue); the right to include their special opinions on the issues under discussion in verbatim reports of the chamber’s plenary sitting; and the right to the guaranteed participation of their members in conciliatory commissions on any bill declined by the Senate.

Under the new law the president nominates the candidate for prime minister after consultations with all the factions formed by political parties in the Legislative Chamber and deputies nominated by citizen groups. If both houses decline the candidate three times running, the president appoints an acting prime minister and disbands the parliament or one of the houses. The factions of political parties have the right to initiate resignation of the prime minister; the prime minister may be removed from his post (in this case the government should resign) if the president initiates his removal and the initiative is supported by two-thirds of the total number of deputies of both chambers. The same applies to the regional khokims (heads) and the khokim of the capital: the president nominates candidates after preliminary consultations with each of the party groups represented in the local kengashes and disbands those kengashes which fail to approve the candidate after three attempts. The kengashes, on the other hand, have no right to remove the khokims—they can merely initiate their resignation by presenting well-argued requests to the president.⁸

When speaking at the ceremony dedicated to the 14th anniversary of the Constitution of Uzbekistan, the president pointed out: “Time has come to create basic legislation that will increase the parties’ efficiency and transform them into a decisive force behind the changes in our society.” The law, continued President Karimov, “has created new possibilities for the political parties to enjoy wider rights and have a stronger impact on the legislative and executive structures and the country’s domestic and foreign policies... This law has promoted the accountability of the central and local officials and, if need be, the power structures to the public.”⁹

⁷ See: *Zaiavlenie Pravoazashchitnogo tsentra Memorial o sobytiakh 12-14 maia v Andizhane*, Memorial: International Historical, Educational, Human Rights and Charity Society, available at [<http://www.memo.ru/daytoday/5andijan1.htm>].

⁸ See: [<http://www.press-service.uz/ru/gsection.scm?groupId=4392&contentId=25811>], 20 December, 2006.

⁹ [<http://www.press-service.uz/ru/gsection.scm?groupId=4392&contentId=25811>], 23 December, 2006.

This means that the law has widened the rights of the factions formed by political parties, on the one hand, and widened the president's powers, on the other: he acquired the right to disband not only the parliament, but also the local kengashes and preserved the right to appoint and remove the prime minister. This law pursued several other aims, besides those enumerated above: it was deemed necessary to create a formal opposition out of one or several parties. In the wake of the 2005 parliamentary elections won by the Liberal-Democratic Party, the local political landscape acquired strange forms: the People's Democratic Party, which won the previous election, moved over to the opposition, while insisting on its wholehearted support of the president and his course. The law turned the "opposition" into an official opposition to the government, the head of which is nominated and/or approved by the party/parties that won the election. The ruling elite is out to make the opposition it created itself a legal entity: the parties are divided into "ruling" and "opposition" parties, since it proved impossible to achieve such differentiation in any other way in a country where the five registered parties support the president and do not strive for power.

In December 2007, the country went to the polls to elect the president. Under the Constitution, President Karimov could not run for the post (he had exhausted his terms in power), however, he was nominated by the Liberal-Democratic Party, which holds the majority of seats in the Legislative Chamber, and registered with the Central Election Commission. Significantly, no official legal comments followed and no legal interpretations of the kind offered at previous elections and referendums on President Karimov's extended term in office were suggested. In private, members of the Liberal-Democratic Party explained that under the amended Constitution, which extended the term of presidency to seven years, the president was serving his first seven-year term and could run for a second term. This supplied the post-Soviet expanse with a precedence: before that none of the heads of state had violated the Constitution without any justification. They either let the Constitutional Court interpret the Fundamental Law (this happened in Kyrgyzstan and Belarus) or resorted to amendments that introduced life presidency (Turkmenistan) or officially permitted the first president to be reelected for an unlimited number of terms (Kazakhstan). In other words, Uzbekistan was trying out an absolutely new method; the president either deemed it unnecessary to amend the Constitution, or expected to carry out the "successor" alternative; when he abandoned it for whatever reason it was too late to change anything.

The December elections differed from the previous ones: first, more than two candidates ran for the highest office; second, three of the four registered candidates were nominated by political parties in line with what the president said about the greater role of parties in the political process. The People's Democratic Party nominated the leader of its faction in the Legislative Chamber, Asliddin Rustamov (not the party leader, Latif Guliamov); the Social-Democratic Adolat Party nominated its head, deputy speaker of the Legislative Chamber Ms. Dilrom Tashmukhamedova; Akmal Saidov, another deputy of the Legislative Chamber, head of the Committee for Democratic Institutions, NGOs and Self-Government Bodies, and director of the National Human Rights Center, was nominated by a citizen group. Several other non-party people also wanted to run for the highest post: economist D. Shosolimov, A. Tojiboy ugli, employed in food processing, A. Shaymardanov, an ecologist, V. Galkin, a specialist in electric power supply, A. Aliev, who works in the humanities field, and others. The specific features of the Uzbek election laws did not give seven independent candidates enough time to present their documents. To be registered, they had to collect about 800 thousand signatures (5 percent of the total number of voters), an impossibly large number. Only those supported by the state stood a chance of running for president—all the others were weeded out. The candidates of two registered parties (Milliy tiklanish and Fidokorlar) were also left out in the cold: they failed to gather the required number of signatures.

Those who ran for the presidency together with Karimov cannot be described as opposition candidates, since all the parties support the president. The fact that the Samarkand clan and the Tashkent

clan nominated two candidates each, Karimov and Rustamov from the former and Tashmukhamedova and Saidov from the latter, looks significant. The same can be said of the fact that the third key clan (Ferghana) preferred to stay away from the elections because its members probably mistrusted the president. This time the Liberal-Democratic Party, the country's youngest, moved ahead to replace the People's Democratic Party as the ruling party (by ruling we mean the party that won the parliamentary majority): entrusted with the task of nominating the incumbent as a presidential candidate, it became Uzbekistan's main political party. This time the list of candidates looked impressive enough: candidates from the large parties; a self-appointed candidate, a woman (for the first time in Uzbekistan), and an "official" human rights activist. The 2007 election was much more alternative and representative than the election in 2000.

The results were predictable. According to official figures supplied by the Central Election Commission,¹⁰ 14,765,444 (90.6 percent) out of a total of 16,297,400 registered voters came to the polls. Islam Karimov received 88.1 percent; A. Rustamov, 3.17 percent; D. Tashmukhamedova, 2.94 percent, and A. Saidov, 2.85 percent. President Karimov received nearly 4 percent less than at the previous election in 2000. The other candidates gained fewer votes than the number of signatures they collected. Formally, the election was more competitive than before, but the president's rivals proved too timid. Their campaigns were subdued, therefore most of the voters remained ignorant of their names, let alone their programs. The 90.6 percent turnout cannot but arouse doubts: even according to the official data, about 2 million citizens of Uzbekistan (12 percent of the voters) live and work abroad (the actual number is even higher).

The election assessments in Uzbekistan were also easily predictable: President Karimov pointed out: "The election of the president of Uzbekistan on a multi-party and alternative basis, in which a candidate nominated by a citizen group also ran shows that the country has become a democratic state ruled by law with an election system that completely corresponds to international regulations." The head of the Central Election Commission said: "The election was conducted according to national election legislation which corresponds to all the international regulations and standards." S. Lebedev, head of the CIS Executive Committee, declared: "The CIS observer mission describes the presidential election as free, open, and transparent." The OSCE observer mission stated: "The election was conducted in a highly controlled political situation and left no breathing space for true opposition."¹¹

Thus, President Karimov extended his term in office until 2014 in disregard of the Constitution, which did not remove the successor issue from the agenda—it merely postponed it. Transfer of power is the most painful issue for all authoritarian regimes: the leader cannot merely step aside, since his further security is not guaranteed. His position is especially precarious if power is mixed with property: those around him who control economic resources want to perpetrate their grip on power and wealth, while those who lost much under the present leader are burning for revenge. For obvious reasons, the ruling elite want to remain in power for an indefinitely long period. Before the presidential election in Uzbekistan, Central Asia knew of two versions of power change: either by force (Kyrgyzstan) or by death (Turkmenistan). It remains to be seen whether the Uzbek novelty becomes the third.

In the last three years Tashkent has obviously turned away from Washington to stay closer to Moscow: it left GUUAM (a political-economic organization of Georgia, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova), joined the EurAsEC, and restored its membership in the CSTO, in which Russia plays first fiddle. In the EurAsEC, Uzbekistan received 15 percent of votes (on a par with Kazakhstan and Belarus); Russia preserved its 40 percent, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan received 7.5 percent each.

¹⁰ [Uza.uz <http://uza.uz/ru/politics/1785/>], 30 December, 2007.

¹¹ *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 25 December, 2007.

By joining the EurAsEC, Uzbekistan gained access to the markets of the three leaders (Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). The EurAsEC also means visa-free trips for the members' citizens, Uzbek diplomats accepted in all the EurAsEC countries, and coordinated contacts with the WTO, OSCE, and other international organizations. On the other hand, Uzbekistan's membership considerably widened the organization's position and the common market.

In March 2006, the parliament of Uzbekistan ratified the Treaty on Allied Relations between the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation, which marked another important step toward the country's foreign policy orientation toward Russia. The President of Uzbekistan described the treaty as unprecedented.¹² "The treaty is an important landmark on the road toward regional stability, security, and threat prevention," said he at a press conference. Art 3 of the Treaty says: "In the event of a situation that one of the sides regards as a threat to peace or infringement on its security interests, as well as a threat of aggression against one of the sides, they shall immediately enact a mechanism of consultations to coordinate their positions and practical measures designed to settle the situation." The Treaty is also related to closer cooperation on the international scene and contacts in the trade and economic, scientific-technical, social, cultural, and other spheres. The local newspapers paid particular attention to the fact that "an objective and impartial assessment of the terrorist acts carried out in Andijan last year shows that Russia has assumed a clear position and shares its political approaches with Uzbekistan."

The anti-terrorist military exercises of the Uzbek and Russian military, described as a purely anti-terrorist measure, were a great success. Sergey Ivanov, first deputy prime minister of Russia, declared that the heads of both countries demonstrated political will to develop military cooperation in the practical sphere. The country's strategic orientation toward Russia worsened Uzbekistan's relations with the United States still further. The American leaders stepped up their criticism of President Karimov's human rights record and the Andijan events and even recommended introducing sanctions against the republic. To restore its international image and acquire a reliable ally in its confrontation with the West and the domestic opposition, the ruling elite of Uzbekistan turned to those international organizations in which Russia played the leading role. This means that Uzbekistan's membership in the Russia-dominated economic and military alliances was due to political rather than other considerations, which made Russia (along with China) a foreign guarantor of the republic's regime headed by President Karimov.

The political situation in Uzbekistan may be regarded as stable. The following can be described as the most important political events: the recent presidential election that allowed the ruling elite and the president to remain in power, as well as demonstrate the regime's "liberalization" in the form of the laws on the greater role of political parties, abolition of the death penalty, and milder criminal legislation. These superficial measures did not, and could not, change the country's political system; this was impossible in the context of the unconstitutional extension of Islam Karimov's power. The division of the political parties (all of which were accountable to the political elite) into ruling and oppositional did nothing to create a competitive party system, even though the party system per se was a great step forward and away from the clan system; the latter, however, remains dominant.

So far the regime is not threatened either outside or inside the country; the opposition parties have finally recognized that victory is impossible; the leaders of the newly established Sunny Uzbekistan Party are in prison, some of the leaders of the Islamic opposition were exterminated, while the mass media (electronic media included) and NGOs are striving for survival under fierce pressure. Fully aware of the futility of the sanctions, the country's Western partners are prepared to lift them in exchange for certain superficial concessions. None of the Western leaders came forward

¹² In July 2006, the sides exchanged ratification instruments, which meant that the Treaty was enacted.

with an official statement about the illegitimate nature of President Karimov's new term in power. It seems that both inside and outside the country, he appears to be the only leader capable of preserving stability in the republic. Indeed, social discontent caused by climbing prices for all foodstuffs and food shortages can be described as the only threat to the country's stability either today or in the future. In 2007, public discontent developed into a series of rallies; it may remain limited to local actions similar to what took place in Andijan, especially if Russia, Uzbekistan's strategic partner, helps to defuse the crisis.

The transfer of power issue will loom high throughout Karimov's new presidential term. I have written above that Uzbekistan may come up with a new method of power transfer that its neighbors (with the exception of Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan) might be willing to borrow.

At the turn of the 2000s, the following were described as the economic priorities: the state's trimmed presence in the economy, stronger guarantees against illegal interference of the controlling structures in economic activities, liberalization of the currency market, and structural readjustment of the economic sphere based on private initiative and medium and small businesses.¹³ Land lease was moved to the fore in agriculture. Under President Karimov's decree, farmers could lease landed plots for a period of up to fifty years with the right to inherit them during the lease.¹⁴ Farmers retained the right they enjoyed under Soviet power to use the land as a lifelong possession that could be bequeathed. The state remained in the agrarian sector: those who rent land have to sign agreements with the organizations that buy their products, the prices for which are determined by the state, while the district and regional power structures interfere in the election and removal of the heads of cooperatives.¹⁵ The old practice of extensive agriculture is responsible for the continued growth of agricultural output, as well as for degradation of the land fund. The sector that produced a quarter of the republic's GDP has to survive on 5 percent of the investments,¹⁶ which speaks of obvious disproportions in the country's economic development.

In 2003, the government passed a decision on convertibility of the local currency (the sum), which in practice cut down the money supply and perpetrated unofficial limitations on currency operations. In a situation in which economic entities have no free access to the foreign currency market, the exchange rate, which is unrelated to supply and demand, widens the gap between the National Bank's and the black market's exchange rates. In 2002, the state tightened protectionist measures by raising import tariffs and excise duties, banning products imported by third persons, introducing certification, demanding that imported products have international certificates, and tightening up on product labeling.¹⁷ This sent the prices for imported products up and affected the exchange rate on the black market.

In recent years, the budget deficit dropped considerably together with the inflation rate, but the financial market remains undeveloped. The banking sector, together with the fairly stagnant financial and inter-bank markets, forms the core of the financial market in a country where the securities market is hardly developed, while agriculture is short of money.¹⁸

According to official sources the country's GDP grows by 3-4 percent every year, while the non-public sector is responsible for 73.3 percent of the GDP.

¹³ See: N. Sirajiddinov, "Ekonomicheskie reformy v Uzbekistane," in: *Tsentrāl'naia Azia: Sobstvenny vzgliag*, team of editors K. Safarova, K. Ridel, ed. by R. Krumm, Bishkek, 2006, p. 426.

¹⁴ See: Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Main Trends of Deepening Economic Reforms in Agriculture of 6 May, 2003, available at [<http://2004.press-service.uz/rus/documents/uk05062003.htm>].

¹⁵ See: N.A. Dobronravin, "Uzbekistan: Tsentr Tsentrāl'noy Azii—vse pod kontrolem," in: *SSSR posle raspada*, ed. by O.L. Margania, St. Petersburg, 2007, p. 397.

¹⁶ See: L. Sultanova, A. Gaisina, "Republic of Uzbekistan: Economy," in: *Central Eurasia 2006. Analytical Annual*, CA&CC Press®, Sweden, 2007, p. 298.

¹⁷ See: N. Sirajiddinov, op. cit., p. 428.

¹⁸ See: Ibid., p. 429.

Poverty, a shortage of arable land, and unemployment are the worst economic plagues. A large share of the able-bodied population still has to work in Russia and other CIS countries to be able to support their families at the lowest of levels.

The previously united Central Asian economic expanse was disrupted when the Soviet Union fell apart; the tension on the border with Turkmenistan separated the Khorezm Region and Karakalpakstan from the rest of the country: the railway that connects them with the republic's main regions goes across Turkmenistan. In 2002, the railway between Navoi and Nukus (through Uchkuduk) and the Ghazli-Nukus gas pipeline were completed, thus ending the dependence of the Khorezm Region and Karakalpakstan on Turkmenistan.¹⁹

Russia has not only preserved, but has also increased its influence on the country's economy; Uzbekistan is actively developing its cooperation with Gazprom and the leading Russian operators of mobile communication networks, which have already captured almost the entire market. With 21.7 percent of the trade turnover, Russia is Uzbekistan's main trade partner. The national holding, Uzbekneftegaz, and LUKoil and Gazprom of Russia signed several documents in the fuel and energy complex that envisaged investments of \$2.5 billion into the republic's oil and gas sector.

Uzbekistan has not yet acquired a market economy—it remains devoted to the Soviet style of economic management, which means that local businesses have to settle their problems with state structures. The problems that interfere with the development of a market economy are still acutely felt: the taxes are almost as high as the taxes in the countries with developed market economies; business remains dependent on the state; in the absence of independent courts, it is next to impossible to defend property rights; the road to the market remains blocked by numerous administrative barriers in the form of licensing, certification, registration, etc.; the state has not loosened its grip on the economy, state structures still interfere in private economic entities; the state has the final say in price formation and distribution of resources, etc. Mass unemployment and poverty remain the two most outstanding issues; the situation is steadily worsening under the impact of the high natural population growth (from 17 to 25 million in the last ten years). These problems are, in turn, giving rise to ever-increasing drug trafficking, drug production and drug pushing, huge numbers of labor emigrants, and an upsurge in organized crime. The country's leaders seem to be convinced that the state should remain prominent not only in politics, but also in the economy, that it should be able to control all forms of economic activities and sanction the emergence and activities of other entities. Economic and political entities outside state control are seen as undesirable and even dangerous. It seems that these trends will continue to prevail in the near future.

The regime is unlikely to transform itself any time soon; the question is whether the regime will change under the successor? Today, there are no political actors capable of changing the regime and mobilizing the masses: even at the height of the opposition activities, the nation remained fairly passive. If the opposition leaders return to Uzbekistan and if their parties are legalized, they will need much time to build up resources and draw the masses to their side. This means that the secular opposition presents no real threat to the regime, while the anti-terrorist structures and the CSTO collective security forces (particularly Russian) will oppose the terrorist acts of the Islamic extremists. The same forces can be used to suppress spontaneous social riots (similar to those in Andijan) by presenting them as Islamist actions. The ruling regime is facing another potential danger: a power struggle among the clans that might flare up if the regime weakens should the president fall ill or die. It is for the head of state alone to protect the country by developing a mechanism of power transfer while he is still in power. It seems that the president and his closest circle are working on this.

The limited spheres that remain beyond the control of the dominating actor can be described as a source of internal and external danger. I have in mind illegal opposition structures that dissem-

¹⁹ See: N.A. Dobronravin, *op. cit.*, p. 401.

inate literature published abroad and several human rights organizations funded from abroad. More than that, the absence of the Iron Curtain means that scores of young Uzbeks travel abroad to Europe and America to study, and return home armed with different ideas; there is no longer total censorship of the media and the Internet in particular; and there is an intelligentsia that at the best of times remains opposition-minded (this was what started anti-Soviet actions in the past). The spheres that remain outside the government's control are very narrow, their social basis is limited, therefore they can do nothing drastic to weaken the regime. This means that we should expect no radical changes in the near future.
