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# **AUTHORITARIANISM IN TAJIKISTAN AND TURKMENISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPEAN UNION<sup>1</sup>**

## **Characteristic features of political systems of Central Asia**

After nearly three decades of the independence from the Soviet Union, five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) are distinguishable by their authoritarian systems. Hopes and expectations that, after 1991, these countries would follow a path of rapid modernization and democratization haven't been fulfilled. In fact, they are far from, even partially, meeting the criteria defined by Huntington as follows: (1) previous "democratic experience"; (2) scope of political freedoms prior to transformation, (3) nature of the previous political system (4) scope of the social acceptance towards the ongoing transformation (Huntington, 1995:41).

The road to democracy is a long one for the region of Central Asia in general, though inspecting the level of centralization, the concentration of power and the use of the means of coercion one might notice a few differences between the five countries. For instance, the most authoritarian systems are currently to be found in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, albeit in case of the last one, a few cautious economic and political reforms implemented in 2016 have somewhat softened the repressive nature

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of the local dictatorship. By contrast, economic and political reforms implemented in Kazakhstan have not widened the scope of civil liberties. It might seem that the most crucial political changes have taken place in Kyrgyzstan, where during rampant protests two presidents were successfully dismissed and new elections took place; however, this country may not be considered as representative for the region since it lacks political continuum characteristic to the area.

The region of Central Asia as a whole, as well as its single components, share the same historical experience (reaching even to the times preceding the Soviet period), hence many socio-cultural similarities between the countries. In the political systems of each of the five republics, an executive body plays a crucial role. The president, as well as his entourage, plays a dominant role both formally and informally. Tadeusz Bodio and Tadeusz Mołdawa have stressed that in the “current struggle between authoritarianism and democracy so far the first is winning the struggle. It is the result of oriental political culture, which is characterized by tribalism and clan structure, peculiar psychology, and attachment to traditional values with regard to the lifestyle and religion, but also it is an outcome of the conservatism of the power elites combined with their detached attitude to democracy, even in its controlled and limited form” (Bodio, 2007: 16).

Tribalism is common among the republics of Central Asia; according to Tadeusz Bodio, it heavily influences the political sphere and it is an important point of reference for the Central Asian political elites. (Bodio, Jakubowski, Wierzbiski, 2007: 148).

## **Obstacles in the process of democratization**

The path to independence was quite peculiar in Central Asia. Political elites were not prepared for this instance and a dynamic development of the situation turned out to be a tremendous surprise for them. The unexpected independence of the country meant a number of problems from the economic, financial or political ones to a risk of the escalation of ethnic or clan conflicts. Therefore, in these new conditions, the leaders focused primarily on the consolidation of power and avoidance of territorial disintegration in the newly formed countries.

Central Asia has been divided into five republics already in the Soviet period, thus beginning the strenuous process of state-building. By the end of the 1980s, the political elites in Central Asia were subordinated to the central decision-making body located in Moscow on the one hand, on the other, they tried to retain their political and economic influence by the means of clan loyalty. Prior to 1991, none of the countries that would later become the aforementioned republics has had any experience with the modern democratic institutions, political pluralism or the rule of law. Gaining independence meant gaining an opportunity to promote liberal democracy for the USA and European Union, which was allowed by these states at the price of extensive EU assistance programmes. Simultaneously, Russia could not pursue an active policy in the 1990s due to its own internal problems, and China was focused primarily on regulating its own borders and matters concerning its security at the time. From the onset of the twentieth-first century, however, Russia and China are more active in Central Asia – to the extent that they do not leave many opportunities for the Western countries to be active. As it has been stressed by Alexander Cooley, political elites of the Central Asia – fearing ‘colour’ revolutions and emulating Russia – have imposed stricter laws concerning non-governmental organizations (which were subsidised by foreign bodies) among which the organisations whose task was to monitor elections were especially targeted (Cooley, 2015: 4).

A number of analysts agree that the first decade of independence was presenting the biggest opportunities for supporting political liberalization in the states of Central Asia. Moreover, in that period elites were interested in the help offered by Western countries and cooperation with them. However, the help which was offered did not meet the expectations of the elites which resulted in a disappointment with EU and the USA, though, more extensive help would most probably have been wasted considering the high rate of corruption in the region. In the policy of the USA after 2001, the region of Central Asia has been primarily considered as a logistical base for the ISAF mission in Afghanistan and, after 2014, has lost its geostrategic value (Fiedler, 2016: 226-230).

Not only was the power structure in the region solidified and the authoritarian neighbors have started to play a bigger role in the local politics, additionally, the Western model of liberal democracy has lost its attractiveness or, one might even say, found itself in crisis. Promotion of democracy using military interventions and long lasting destabilization of Afghanistan and Iraq have undermined the concept of democratization, which became syn-

onymous with the aforementioned military interventions and destabilization of these countries. Another important factor was the economic crisis of 2008. It was seen as a result of the liberal economic governance, which led to the necessity of governmental interventions and extensive financial rescue programmes.

At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, policy-makers of Central Asia realized that authoritarianism in the form found in China and Russia might lead to modernization and economic growth. Moreover, these two authoritarian neighboring states have been of vital importance to the reinforcement of the local governments in Central Asia. Both Moscow, as well as Peking, found it crucial to maintain the status quo and stability in this region. Besides, the help which they offered was not conditional; its aim was to support the existing elites of the region.

### **Tajikistan as a closed authoritarian system**

The independence of Tajikistan had been announced on 9 September 1991. As such, Tajikistan had formally remained a part of the Soviet Union until 26th of December 1991; it is also necessary to remember that, similarly to other republics of Central Asia, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was not met with enthusiasm in the country. Level of dependency on Moscow of all the states of Central Asia had been progressively increasing throughout the entire twentieth century and had led to a number of civilizational problems which had to be solved by the affected states as soon as the Soviet Union had collapsed.

Tajikistan was the first out of the five Central Asian states where the outburst of religious, social, economic and national animosities which had been hidden for years had turned into a domestic war about the political and social shape of the emerging state. In this conflict, lasting five years, over a hundred thousand people died; one in five inhabitants of Tajikistan left the country; not to mention the material losses which have been estimated at 7 billion USD at the exchange rate of the time (Bodio, 2002:26).

Throughout the entire period of the Soviet rule in Tajikistan, the enclaves of the Muslim tradition had been maintained, which the secular power haven't managed to eradicate despite its many attempts to do so (including the implementation of repressive policies such as, for instance, forced dis-

placements) (Lang, 2002: 151). As a result of drastic deterioration in economic and social standards, many loosely knit political factions strived towards national and religious revival. At the end of the 1980s, a couple of significant social movements of different views about the future of Tajikistan existed in the country. The movement connected with the national revival (Rastochez) was aiming to restore the national culture and language, respect towards the human and civil rights, and to begin long-term economic reforms (Lang, 2002: 151). The movement of Taji Democrats was drawing upon democratic values and human rights while simultaneously opposing the political monopoly of the Communist party. Progressively, the Tajik Democratic Party (DPT) became the most prominent political power in the country. Representatives of the religious revival movement, which gave the foundation for creation of the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, were initially radical and supported the creation of an Islamic state (most probably because of the activity of informal Sufi groups); however, later they have adopted postulates of a long-term organic work (Lang, 2002: 154).

In 1991, the first presidential elections were announced and they were won by a candidate coming from *nomenklatura*, Rachmon Nabijew (formerly the first secretary of the Communist Tajik Party from 1982-1985) supported by the Leninabad and Kulab clan. The newly elected president, despite his previous declarations, has openly pursued the elimination of his opposition from the political sphere (Lang, 2002:156). An attempt to violently suppress the protests of the opposition in Dushanbe was not successful and due to an increasing social dissatisfaction, the president dismissed the prime-minister, S. Kenjayew, and accepted demands of the opposition, with whom a new coalition government was formed. Despite such a vital change in circumstances, the newly formed government was not in control of the situation in the country; at the same time, the political rivalry between parties moved to the province where troops organized by prominent clans organized militias. Over time, the pro-communist forces formed the Popular Front of Tajikistan and the opposition was reduced to IRP as remaining political factions continued to lose their supporters.

In September 1992, the president, R. Nabiyeu, resigned and after a couple of months, the Supreme Soviet (Lang, 2002: 161) passed an amendment which has turned Tajikistan into a parliamentary republic, where the head Chairman of the Supreme Soviet would be the head of the country. In 1994, President's office was reinstated, and the elections of 6th of November were won with 58% of votes by E. Rahmon the residing head Chairman of the

Supreme Soviet, previously connected with. The parliamentary elections of 1995 were another stage in the process of consolidation of the presidential power. As a result of the boycott of the elections by the opposition, «the composition of the Parliament reflected a cross-section of the groups which formed the pillars of power» (Land, 2002:167).

The opposition, gathered around IRP, was pushed into a deep defensive, retreating to Afghanistan. S. A. Nuri became the leader of the newly formed United Tajik Opposition. In 1996, after the fifth round of negotiations and significant contributions from the Kremlin, Uzbekistan, and ONZ mission, the National Reconciliation Commission was established, with S.A Nuri as its leader. After additional rounds of negotiations (there were eight rounds in total), on 27 June 1997, the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan was signed in Moscow. Naturally, the situation in the country was still far from being stable but in the following years, the country succeeded to establish a new Electoral Code, bicameral parliamentary system, as well as it managed to legalize religious political parties and lengthen the presidential term from 5 to 7 years (Lang, 2002: 178).

The modern form of government in Tajikistan is based on the Constitution of 6 September 1994, which was adopted in a national referendum. Political system of Tajikistan is based on a tripartite division of power comprised of the legislative authorities performed by the bicameral parliament (Majlisi Oli), whose cadence lasts 5 years; executive authorities – the president and government; and judiciary, comprised of the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court, High Commercial Court and district courts (Załęski, Ismailov, 2002: 255). Due to a significant amount of power resting in the hands of the president, this political system can be accurately called ‘presidential’. As a result of the changes adopted in the referendum of 26 September 1999, the position of a president has been significantly reinforced as he became the head of both, the legislative and executive authorities. One of the most substantial prerogatives of the president is the right to declare a state of emergency or Martial Law (the president is also the head of the armed forces), besides that he can also use armed forces in order to fulfil international obligations; has legislative initiative, signs and administers laws adopted by the Parliament; has a right to veto; coordinates the work of the supreme legislative and executive state authorities; has the right to appoint and dismiss the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister; appoints Chief Prosecutor; nominates in Majlisi Mili (Lower House) a candidate for the post of a Chair-

man and members of the Constitutional Court, Supreme Court and High Commercial Court, and at the request of the Council of the Judiciary he can appoint arbiters in District Courts. Additionally, the president must not be held politically liable and is guaranteed immunity (Załęski, Ismailov, 2002: 248-250).

The major factor in the political scene of Tajikistan is clanism (Jakubowski, Szaripov, 2002: 258). Social movements and political parties are usually comprised of the members of certain clans. Political forces in Tajikistan are dispersed and there is not much known about them due to lack of any transparency on behalf of the country, even with regard to the outcomes of official elections. According to international observers, since 1992 none of the elections in Tajikistan have been evaluated as free or fairly conducted. Currently, the major political forces in Tajikistan are:

1. The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan, the most powerful political group in the country from which the power elites have originated, including E. Rahmon; it is connected with the clan of Kulyab. PDPT strives to acquire the status of a national party, with the ultimate aim of building a stable, democratic, secular country; it dissociates itself from internationalistic visions despite a communistic background of its leaders. In the parliamentary elections of 2015, the party has won 51 out of 63 seats in the parliament.
2. The Communist Party of Tajikistan has been formed already in 1929. In the period when Tajikistan was one of the republics of the Soviet Union, CPT was a part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The party leaders have been leaning towards the concept of rebuilding the Soviet Union; since Tajikistan have gained the independence the party have declined in importance. The party is supported by peasants, workers and in certain intellectual circles. In the elections of 2015, it has won two seats in the parliament.
3. The Social Democratic Party – registered in March 1999 and suspended a couple of months later, which resulted in the inability to present a candidate in the presidential elections. It was registered again in December 2002. The party's leader is Rahmatullo Zoirov. The Social Democratic Party was one of few opposition groups to boycott the presidential elections of 2006 and 2013. Currently outside of the Parliament.
4. The Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, suspended at the moment. Until 2015 it was the only legal religious party in Tajikistan. IRPT have been founded in 1990 and it has been striving toward rejuvena-

tion of religious and national traditions by means of implementation of the fundamentals of Islam in the life of the Muslims. The leader of the movement, S. A. Nuri, died in 2006. The party boycotted the presidential elections of 2006. In the elections of 2015 it didn't cross the electoral threshold of 5% and hence did not enter the parliament

5. The Democratic Party, founded in 1990, suspended between 1993 and 1999. Like IRPT and SDP, it boycotted the elections of 2006. After the end of the civil war, some of its members held government posts. In the Parliamentary elections of 2015, the party has won one seat.
6. The Socialist Party of Tajikistan, founded in June 1996. In 1999, the leader of the party, Safareli Kenjayev was murdered in Dunshabe. From 2004 onwards the party has divided into two formations, both of which claim the rights to use its official name. Abdhalim Ghafarov is the leader of the pro-governmental part. In 2015, SPT won one seat in the parliament.
7. The Agrarian Party - with Amir Burievich Qaroqulov as the leader, won five mandates in the elections of 2015.
8. The Party of Economic Reforms of Tajikistan won 3 mandates in 2015 elections.

The report of the organization Freedom House declares that Tajikistan remains the poorest country of the post-soviet Eurasia, which is in large part dependent on the money sent to the country by the Tajik people working in Russia. Tajik government actively works on introducing restrictions on freedom of expression, access to information and activity of NGOs (Nations in Transit..., 2015: 642). Despite the changes which are aimed to facilitate business, corruption and nepotism continue to be major problems and nothing suggest that this situation is about to change in the nearest future.

## **Turkmenistan: from the cult of personality to pragmatism**

27 October 1991, Turkmenistan gained the independence from the Soviet Union, turning into a sovereign state able to pursue independent internal and external policies. One of the challenges was to decide on the country's new form of the government. Despite the fact that the constitution which had been approved by the parliament on 18 May 1992 included, from the legal perspective, all the principles characteristic for the democratic countries, in reality, the power was entirely in the hands of the president, Sapar-

myrata Niyazov. Hence, the national sovereignty, separation of power, the rule of law, political pluralism or the fact that the country is formally called a republic are nothing more than empty words. The constitution itself assigns a very strong constitutional position to the president, which is further strengthened in practice, resulting in Turkmenistan being an authoritarian state (Wojtaszczyk, 2005: 296-298). The theoreticians of undemocratic regimes – Slavomír Horák and Jan Šír – stress that the rule of S. Niyazov was in many ways approximated the ideals of totalitarianism. Therefore, it doesn't come as a surprise that it is Turkmenistan out of all of the five republics of Central Asia formed after the dissolution of the Soviet Union that is regarded as the most authoritarian one (Sabol, 2010: 175).

President Saparmyrat Nyýazow, who had ruled the country for 15 years – from 1991 until his death in 2006 – alone and with a firm hand and in a truly regal fashion. Throughout this period, he was continuously building and reinforcing his authoritarian rule adopting the title of Turkmenbashi, meaning 'Father of the Turkmen'. This period was characterized by his personality cult – according to many researchers comparable to the kind of the cult surrounding, for instance, sultans or Stalin – which at the same time constituted the centre of an ideology, or even the a religion, being introduced by his autocratic rule (Spechler, 2008: 104; Sabol, 2010: 175). Its expressions, which might appear as both amusing and frightening to inhabitants of Europe were and still are to be found in many elements of the then and modern Turkmenistan. His title, 'Turkmenbashi' is ubiquitous in the public spaces – for instance, it appears in the names of towns – the biggest of which is the city of Turkmenbashi (formerly known as Krasnovodsk) located on the Türkmenbaşy Gulf, a bay of the Caspian Sea; he has also changed the names of the months, for example, Ýanwar (January) have also become – unsurprisingly – 'Turkmenbashi'; also a vast number infrastructural projects or institutions is named after him. Apart from the most obvious example of the month of January, the remaining months and days of the week were also changed with the names connected to the person of S. Niyazov and his penchants<sup>2</sup> (Harding, 2008; Turkmen go, 2008). Moreover, a number of statues of the president were erected across the country, the most impressive of which was a 12 meter high, gold-plated statue of Niyazov

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the month of April – Gurbansoltan – is derived from the name of Niyazov's mother; May – Magtymguly – is named after Niyazov's favorite poet, and September – Ruhnama – is named after his own book, the spiritual guide of the Turkmen (Abazov, 2005 : 33-34).

– his figure rotating so the leader would always face the sun – topping the Monument of Neutrality. The arch has been moved to the suburbs by a decree of the next president, Gurnaguly Berimuhamedow (Turkmen Leader, 2010; Turkmenistan, 2010). Furthermore, a vital element of the education in the time of Niyazov's reign was knowledge of *Ruhnama* – a book written by the president, which was basically a combination of his autobiography, revisionist history, selected poems, and moralisms. This work, as it is stressed by Slavomír Horák, have been regarded as a foundation of the unique religion of the Turkmen, the prophet of which was no other than Türkmenbashi himself. *Ruhnama* became an integral part of the system of education in Turkmenistan and ‘just like Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, Qaddafi's *Green Book* or Khomeini's *Velayat-e Faqih*, the book was supposed to serve as a political pamphlet but additionally, *Ruhnama* was also supposed to provide mentorship and become a moral and spiritual guidance for all the Turkmen” (2005: 313-314). It was also a substantial premise of the president's book that it would bring back the Turkmen nationalism and national pride, together with the country's tradition and culture lost in the Soviet times using revisionist history. Another fascinating example of the personality cult surrounding Türkmenbaşy were the efforts concentrated at legitimizing his power by connecting it to the country's history and religion. Between 1996-1999 much of the Turkmen researchers were engaged in the projects whose objectives were to find a genealogical link between Niyazov and Mahomet and Alexander the Great (see also: Horak, 2005: 309-312).

Turkmenistan's authoritarianism during the rule of Niyazov was also reflected in political pluralism, or rather lack thereof, and in the way in which political elites functioned. Already in the period when Turkmenistan was gaining its independence, Turkmenbashi was a key political figure in the country. He was the Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Turkmen SSR and the president of the Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republic. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union on 16 December 1991, the Communist Party was replaced by its successor, the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan whose leader was Niyazov himself, and a large part of elites was comprised of the post-Soviet *nomenklatura*. Despite the initial opening of Turkmenistan to the formation of different political parties, this direction was almost immediately abandoned and the political space became entirely subordinated to DPT. In fact, the period of Niyazov's rule was monocentric, and other political factions, formed by activists previously associated with the Soviet elites, lacked grassroots support. During the rule of

Turkmenbashi, even social organizations were state-owned, and the ruling class would be setting their objectives and control them (Zasada, Jakubowski: 2005: 317-322; 327-328). It doesn't mean that the country lacked any grassroots movements opposing the authoritarian rule; however, they were spontaneous, rare and small in numbers - protests of 1995 and 2002 were examples thereof (Pannier, 2002).

The strong position of the president, his cult, national mythology created by Turkmenbashi (for example in *Ruhnama*) all find its reflection in characteristic features of the Turkmen elites. Moreover, tribalism, underdeveloped consciousness of the country's culture and traditions were all unfavorable elements acting against the stability of independent Turkmenistan. The figure of a strong leader, "father of the Turkmen", who wasn't aligned to any of the tribes, who was raised in an orphanage, was used to reconcile different interest of various clans. However, in reality, the most important role was played by elites from the tribe Teke, others were largely marginalized. It resulted, for instance, in the fact that the leaders of the Jomud tribes supported confederation (see also: Bodio, 2005: 331-360).

The features characterizing the rule of Turkmenbashi were continuous violations of human rights. International Organizations dealing with the problem, such as Freedom House, Amnesty International, and Human Rights Watch have considered Turkmenistan to be one of the most oppressive countries in the world. They repeatedly stressed that the country was breaching freedom and violates human rights (Freedom, 2018; World Report, 2007: 430-435; Amnesty, 2007: 264-265). In their reports, the organizations drew attention to the lack of the freedom of media, of speech, of the free movement, of association as well as no fair judicial system paired with the state's use of torture, ethnic and religious persecutions, indoctrination, invigilation, corruption and lack of respect of proprietorship (Freedom, 2018; World Report, 2007: 430-435; Amnesty, 2007: 264-265).

Death of Turkmenbashi has definitely contributed to the opening of a new chapter in the history of Turkmenistan, though it did not lead to the transformation of the political system or democratization of the country. The presidential duties were performed by Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow – unlawfully at first and legitimized in the fraudulent elections. After the initial period of his presidency, after the stabilization of his own position by changing the constitution, among other activities, Gurbanguly continues the policy of his predecessor. Even though Turkmenistan under the president presents itself as more opened in the sphere of the international relations,

it doesn't concern itself with any serious internal reforms (see also: Horák, Šír: 2009). Though initial claims and activities of G. Berdimuhamedow were promising and the shift towards democracy was hoped for when, for instance, he allowed for the existence of the internet cafes with the access to uncensored internet or when certain presidential prerogatives had been limited, the reality have verified all the hopes<sup>3</sup> (Turkmenistan Restricts, 2007; Vershinin, 2007; Deibert, Palfrey, Rohozinski, Zittrain, 2010: 240-245). Similarly with the human rights issues or political pluralism. In 2013, a newly formed party, The Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, ran in the Parliamentary elections next to the DPT<sup>4</sup>; however, it is a party loyal to the president and constitutes a sort of satellite party of the DPT<sup>5</sup> (Rights, 2013). Turkmenistan continues to be viewed as one of the most oppressive countries in the world by the aforementioned organizations dealing with human rights. If it comes to the freedom of media, Reporters without Borders have ranked the country on 178<sup>th</sup> position out of a total of 180 in the *World Press Freedom Index* report of 2018. It is followed only by Eritrea and North Korea

What characterizes the autocracy of G. Berdimuhamedow is a gradual obliteration of the cult of Turkmenbashi. It is reflected in activities such as replacing statues, returning to the old names in the calendar and a slow decrease in the presence of the portraits, names or titles of the former president in public spaces, diminishing the significance of this figure in the educational system and replacing old elites. These activities are self-serving, however, since G. Berdimuhamedow aims to replace the cult of Turkmenbashi with the one of his own (*see also*: Horák, Šír, 2009: 32-43). The title which given to the president, Arkadag, meaning "guardian" or "protector" (Horák, Polese, 2016: 170), or building of monumental, golden statues in his honor (Walker, 2015) are all a symptomatic expression of the phenomenon.

Hence, it is noticeable that despite the new president, the authoritarian regime of Turkmenistan is unchallenged, the country remains one of the most oppressive states on a global scale, and activities including structural changes, reforms or elections are only superficial and their character is propagandistic as the entire power rests with the hands of one person. It also seems that the hope which was for a long time associated with Turkmenistan opening up on the international stage and how it could impact the democ-

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<sup>3</sup> In fact, the internet access is strictly limited and controlled in Turkmenistan

<sup>4</sup> Thereby challenging the one-party system of Turkmenistan

<sup>5</sup> There are also representatives of various organizations sitting in the Parliament, all of which are loyal to the president, however.

ratization of the country. In the face of economic problems in the country, president G. Berdimuhamedow was left with no other choice but to break with the isolationist policy and seek cooperation with other countries, especially as he had envisioned Turkmenistan in the role of the trading hub on the New Silk Road. The issue of internal policies remains unaffected

## **Conclusions**

There are various internal and external factors influencing the stability of the Central Asian regimes. Internal factors include historical background, and the way in which the sovereignty has been attained, as well as the countries' lack of any previous democratic experience. Thus in those states, democracy is perceived as anarchy and a threat which might result in destabilization or straight outbreak of conflict, hence political elites consider that alteration of the existing rules through decentralization, for instance, would mean a total chaos. If it comes to external factors, one should consider the authoritarian neighbors of the countries, namely Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkey. Both, Russian and Chinese systems are considered there as models of a functional modern authoritarian rule. For years, solutions taken from the Russian system have been introduced in individual countries – close cultural ties with Russia are also not without importance.

Following challenges are threatening stability in the region: (1) The stability being dependent on abilities of political leaders, while institutions continue to play a minor role and are subordinated to the decision-making center; (2) Insufficient modernization of the country and its economic backwardness resulting in various tensions; (3) High levels of corruption, squandering of state resources and exclusion of other social and political groups from the decision-making processes; (4) The risk of financial dependency on China and Russia

Apart from Kyrgyzstan, where the change of president occurred due to a failure in reforms and discontent of large social groups, in the rest of the cases, the leaders introduce gradual, top-down reforms concerned mainly with economic and investment issues.

Currently, UE is faced with a challenging task of promoting civil society and political liberalization as the political elites tend not to treat the democratization as an advantageous, on the contrary - they perceive it as a gate-

way too conflicts and destabilization, especially if there is nothing cementing the political life together in the form of a president. Moreover, a very modest package of the Union's assistance programmes and a limited engagement thereof in general together with its requirements regarding the human rights and civil liberties add up to a negative assessment of the EU. Policy-makers of the EU are facing a task of an utmost importance, namely, to define the goals of new strategies towards the region of Central Asia and thus supporting the efforts aiming to mitigate the repressive character of the power therein and its modernization, the latter already taking place in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

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