



**CENTRAL ASIA:  
THE SPACE OF 'SILK DEMOCRACY'.  
POLITICAL PARTIES**

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This third piece of work by the Almaty-Club group of experts starts a cycle devoted to an examination of the contemporary political development of each of the countries of the Central Asian region. For the purpose of outlining the characteristics of the democratic processes in Central Asia, the authors use the term ‘silk democracy’ and provide an explanation of this term. This work looks at the features of the party systems of the countries of Central Asia, their historical and cultural characteristics, legislative provisions, and the political realities associated with the parties and simultaneously influencing the level of their development. The work is intended for political analysts, lawyers, historians, and also the wide range of readers with an interest in matters concerning the development of the political parties and democratic processes in Central Asia as a whole.

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## INTRODUCTION

Whereas the first two works of the Almaty-Club described the characteristics of the regional development of Central Asia (CA), this work deals with an examination of the contemporary political development of each of the region's countries. The subject matter is topical because the inter-country cooperation and the prospects for regional integration are closely linked to the type and nature of the political systems and processes unfolding in the countries of the region. It is our assumption that undemocratic countries are less disposed to effective regional cooperation, even though all other prerequisites for this may be in place.

The chosen subject is extensive and multifaceted, and we have therefore decided to present it in the form of a cycle of works, united under the single title of Central Asia: the Space of Silk Democracy. The title has been chosen out of symbolic considerations, as reflecting the peculiar regional semiotics. The term Silk Road has long been in use as Central Asia's special brand or visiting card. It is so popular that it is used in a variety of contexts: the name Silk Road

is given to gas and oil pipelines, railways and motorways, new airlines, migrating populations and diplomatic relations, etc.

The expression silk democracy is used specifically to refer to a particular regional colouring in the sphere of democracy building in the specific historical, geographical, cultural and social conditions of Central Asia. But the expression is also used for describing the silky, i.e. smooth, problem-free, controlled and frequently imitative process, which is so characteristic of this region. Finally, this symbolic expression is a kind of reflection of the fact that we are constantly sliding into the field of authoritarianism as we progress along the smooth silk road to democracy, discovering for ourselves again and again the simple truth: in actual fact the road to democracy cannot be smooth and problem-free.

The collapse of the USSR at the end of the twentieth century forced the countries of CA to look for ways of building a political system that was different from the Soviet system in form and content. They failed to come up with anything unique. The ideas of democracy were well suited for the foundations of the new life in the new sovereign countries. For a certain period of time, therefore, democracy became just about the most utilised word with regard to the establishment of any reforms in all countries of the region. But, as is well-known, modern-day democracy is inconceivable without political parties. Free and competitive elections, the system of checks and balances, political pluralism and the mobilisation of the free electorate - all of this democratic construction needs parties. Against this background, the process of forming the political parties



advanced rapidly during the initial stages of the construction of the sovereign states.

A number of experts admit, however, that the new independent states of CA will soon become the object of re-Islamisation, not democratisation. In fact, approximately ten years after the collapse of the USSR, scepticism with regard to the prospects for democracy in this part of the world had already started to dominate over more optimistic opinions.

At the same time, the role of the parties in CA should not be under-estimated. Socio-political processes here are in a state of constant flux. The development of society's political self-awareness is continuing hand in hand with the desire to develop political organisations - parties. This process is progressing with varying degrees of success in the various countries of CA, in that

it is a special kind of litmus paper for the level of the development of democracy within them. And an alternative idea to democracy, more attractive and acceptable to the people, albeit at times in a formal sense, has not been proposed to this day.

We begin our cycle of works on the Space of Silk Democracy of Central Asia with an analysis of the formation, development and functioning of the political parties of the region's countries. Later on, as part of the cycle, we intend to have a look too at the issues of good governance, the development of civil society, nation building, etc.

The work examines the features of the party systems of the CA states, the legislative norms relating to the parties, and also the parties themselves, which play a prominent role in the political system of the countries of CA.



## CHAPTER I. A CHALLENGE TO DEMOCRACY: FROM DE-PARTIZATION TO RE-PARTIZATION

The countries of CA have an almost century-old history of organised (mobilised) political activity in the form of participation in the work of the only one Communist Party, built upon the propagation of one 'correct' ideology. This has led to the formation of a political system and social relations that can be characterised as full partization, encompassing practically all strata and age groups of the population - from the brigades of young Octoberists and pioneers to the Komsomol and the Communist Party.

The Communist Party's monopoly came to an end with the implementation of Gorbachev's perestroika in 1985 and the discrediting of the party, which led to the de-partization of public awareness, which was expressed in the rejection of the infamous party affiliation and the people's free election of their political preferences. But the de-partization stage did not last long.

The gaining of independence by the former Soviet republics brought with it a hitherto

unseen re-partization: new political parties started to be created, vying against each other for power and political participation. The present stage of political development as a whole, and of party building in particular, is taking place in an era of post-modernist criticism and ideological eclecticism, which is leaving its mark on the character and identity of the parties that are being newly created.

For the countries of Central Asia the issues of party development have proven to be a serious challenge. The Silk Democracy, which is in evidence here, has exposed a whole host of conceptual and practical problems of party building, which have regional as well as purely national implications.

A lot has been written about the problems of democratic transformations in transitional societies. As a rule, attention is focused on factors such as the establishment of democratic institutions, achieving consensus amongst the political elite, and gaining trust in democracy as an effective model for building social relations in general and in democratic institutions in particular.

It should be noted that the ideological establishment of parties in CA has not been able to follow the same path as, for example, in Europe or the USA. Whereas in Western countries parties have developed predominantly around ideas of socialism and capitalism, liberalism and conservatism and, in this way, have arrived at their present-day state, in the countries of CA class antagonism has somehow remained outside the zone of political struggles, having been confined



to history, along with the Soviet period. Of greater current interest are the ideas of national rebirth, the formation of a sovereign state and of 'democracy', which is still not particularly well understood but which sounds good.

In this respect, the practice of party building has rapidly demonstrated that the parties may be new, but the methods of political struggle have in many cases remained unchanged - focusing on the acquisition of monopolies and intolerant of pluralism. At the same time, for the purpose of the political mobilisation of the population, the parties have found it difficult to put the ideological features of their programmes to use, as this mechanism was poor competition against the old instruments for mobilising the people, which in many respects were still rooted in the pre-Soviet past. What this refers to is tribalism, the clan system, regionalism, nationalism.

Moreover, whether intended or otherwise, the legislation on elections in the CA states has frequently failed to promote the development of the institution of parties. In Kyrgyzstan, for example, other organisations, such as public associations, election meetings and even the candidates themselves (so-called independents), long enjoyed the right to put candidates forward for election alongside the parties. On the one hand, this was justified, as the still undeveloped parties were unable to embrace the whole spectrum of society and it was necessary to extend access to the elections by increasing the number of subjects for nomination. On the other hand,

it led to the 'necessity' of the parties as a tool for progression to power being significantly reduced, and it was possible to participate in elections without having any party affiliations. Under these conditions, of course, the parties were unable to grow and they were not transformed into influential institutions of political participation.

But the main barrier on the road to the establishment of parties of the contemporary type in the CA states has been the tendency to intensify authoritarianism and the personalisation of state power. Authoritarianism and political pluralism are antagonistic ideas. The propensity for intensifying authoritarianism may be evident in many aspects, chiefly the reinforcement of the role of the institution of the president and the reduction of the role of parliament to that of being merely a showcase. In a feeble and amenable parliament political parties also play the part of weak political institutions, becoming an attribute that is officially necessary, but actually not all that essential for the real work.

Thus, the process of party building in CA has come up against a whole range of problems of an institutional and personal nature. In accommodating themselves to the political realities, the parties in the countries of CA have acquired their specific character on the basis of the necessity to overcome opposition from the authoritarian thrust and the inertia of public political thinking.



## CHAPTER II. THE PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM OF KAZAKHSTAN

The history of the emergence of the parties in Kazakhstan during the pre-Soviet period is closely linked to the Russian political parties and associations. There were two political parties in Kazakhstan during the pre-Soviet period, which emerged in 1917 as a result of the well-known political upheavals.

The Alash Party was established between 21 and 28 July 1917 and its organisation was finalised at the first All-Kazakh Congress, which was held in Orenburg. The leaders and proponents of Alash were ideologically close to the All-Russian Party of Cadets, of which they had previously been members. The core of the future party was a group of Kazakh cadets (constitutional democrats), headed by A. Bukeykhanov and formed in 1905. Alash received the majority of the votes and 43 deputy seats in the elections to the Constituent Assembly in November 1917. In terms of the number of votes received in the elections to the

Constituent Assembly (262,404 votes), Alash ranked eighth out of approximately 50 parties that had existed in Russia up until October 1917<sup>1</sup>.

At the second party congress in December 1917 the Alashskaya Avtonomia ('Alash Autonomy') was declared and a provisional people's Soviet was formed, under the title The Alash Horde. The subsequent victory of the Bolsheviks in the civil war led to the Alash party being wound up in March 1920, and, in spite of its recognition by the Soviet authorities in 1930, its leaders and active members suffered repressions.

The second political party, the Kazakh Socialist Party, Ush-Zhuz, was created in Omsk in October 1917. Ideologically, the party inclined to the left. It also had fewer members than Alash. Ush-Zhuz lost the elections in November 1917, failing to gain a single seat in parliament. Worthy of mention are the sharp and often cruel polemics between the two parties, which were voiced in public addresses and party newspapers. The hostilities were frequently of a personal rather than an ideological nature.

It is indicative that the Kazakh names for both parties reflected the traditional concepts of the history and structure of nomadic society<sup>2</sup>. The ensuing civil war in Russia polarised the positions of the two Kazakh parties even further and in 1918 Ush-Zhuz practically became the local ally of the Bolsheviks and were subsequently assimilated into their ranks.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tarih-begalinka.kz/ru/timetravel/page3354/>

<sup>2</sup> The name of the Alash party dates back to the legendary ancestor of the Kazakhs Alasha-Khan, and became the all-Kazakh battle cry alash. The name of the Ush-Zhuz ('Three Zhuzes') party also reflected the all-Kazakh nature of the party, and referred to the three Kazakh Zhuzes (tribal alliances).





70 years of remaining under the total domination of communist ideology and its discrediting during the late Soviet period has had a significant impact on Kazakhstan's attitude to the party and its ideology, not only on the part of former party workers but also the country's population in general. It should be noted that the CPSU in many respects assumed the role, not of a political party in the classical sense, but of a mechanism of power, under cover of the party.

Following the collapse of the USSR, society found itself in a state of some confusion: on the one hand, the CPSU had been discredited; on the other hand, freedom had been granted and, as a consequence, there was a growth in the appeal of the non-party (non-communist) status. But events have subsequently shown that there has not been any major break with the past on an ideological level. The programmes of the majority of the new parties that have emerged and their internal organisation have been structured predominantly on the model of the CPSU, now consigned to history.

In this connection, at the beginning of the 1990s the former party elite tried to adapt market institutions in an attempt to distance itself from any ideological interpretations of the reforms that had been carried out. The ideology represented specific regulation, above all for themselves. Since it was of no interest as a political phenomenon, this question was not put to the new political parties that had emerged on the political arena. In the beginning of the 1990s, the former party nomenclature formed a socialist party nonetheless, and a little later attempted to redirect it towards the values of social

democracy, but ultimately nothing came of this endeavour.

Furthermore, other political actors with different programmes started to emerge on the political arena, including parties focusing on the interests of the two ethnic groups—the Kazakhs and the Russians. However, as nationalistic undertones were clearly detected in their rhetoric, these parties started to lose their adherents and soon ceased to exist at all. Running in parallel to this was a complex process of differentiation, or of the gradual convergence and interweaving of the ideological approaches of the political parties that had remained on the party arena. Specifically, the differentiation of the parties was done along 'pro-president-opposition' lines, while the boundaries between their ideologies were rather vague, and a formal selection of the same values could be observed in many of their programmes. Their similarity left less room for the specifics of the different ideologies of the right and left wings.

The conditionally appointed second stage of party-building in Kazakhstan, 2001-2006, was marked by the active participation of economic groups in the parties' activities. Conflicts between the business elite, which were unavoidable, were reflected in the activities of the parties they supported. This was a period in which different political technologies were widely used, a period of low consensus and an absence of cooperation between the political actors. These processes led to the parties, as political institutions, being transformed chiefly into instruments of elite opposition, where business groups formed the basis of the political elite. In this



respect, all parties knew what they had to fight against, but they did not know what they wanted to contribute.

The mere inclusion of amendments in the legislation for the purpose of lowering the level of fragmentation of the political arena and increasing control over the activities of political parties made further cooperation between the business elite and the parties difficult and distanced the economic groups from politics altogether.

However, the innovations in legislation only allowed for the reinforcement of the political regime and the creation of the most favourable conditions for the appearance and domination of one political party, but in no way promoted the development of the party system as a whole. The power reforming the party landscape only created opportunities to control the parties from above and to transform them into tools for mobilising the public to support the political agenda of the president. Loyalty to the policies of the president was one of the main criteria for the emergence and activity of the parties on the political arena.

It is logical that, alongside this, the question of the ideological attainment of power becomes of current interest, the answer to which is the emergence of the Nur Otan party in 1999, representing the interests of the ruling elite and the president. The party was made up of the pro-government parties who were previously affiliated with economic groups. This element of unification could not fail to leave its mark on the internal structure of the political entity.

Hence, there still remains a high degree of conflict within the party today. Moreover, the administrative measures employed during its establishment were prioritised over the ideological platform, as a consequence of which the party members found themselves heavily dependent on the president and were deprived of all political autonomy. It is logical that the party still stands by its centrist position to this day, which is characteristic of many state-subsidised parties in the post-Soviet landscape.

It should be noted that the ruling Nur Otan party is in reality, like certain other organisations, a false construction. Officially, the party is the ruling party, presides in parliament and appears to affirm the country's government. In addition, the akims of the 16 regions of the country are also the leaders of the party's local branches. In this respect, Nur Otan is an integral part of the administrative hierarchy and in many areas resembles a neo-Soviet organisation more than a contemporary political party. Besides the party of power, on the conventional 'left' of the party arena are the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK), which supports the policies of the president, and the National Social Democratic Party (NSDP) - the party of opposition. Whereas the CPPK actively employs anti-western rhetoric, the NSDP nonetheless leans towards nationalism and patriotism in spite of its claims to be a social-democratic party. The 'right' wing is occupied by the Akzhol party, the former party of opposition, which currently supports the agenda of the president. It presents itself as a liberal party, but also attempts to participate in the formation of national-patriotic agendas,



although, in general, the party uses any theme as a pretext to attend media platforms, thereby demonstrating its readiness to consume any information going. The party is represented in parliament, its activities are carried out within the framework of existing political rules, it advocates maintaining stability and order. The two other parties - Birlik and Auyl, as far as ideology is concerned, do not particularly stand out in particular from the parties mentioned above. They support the country's president, but the difference between them is in the social groupings that they define as their electorate.

The main divide in the country's party system is the attitude to the authorities in power. The parties, and especially their leaders, may, to varying degrees, be in the opposition to the authorities, or pro-government-supervised. For example, the Communist People's Party of Kazakhstan (CPPK), which have detached itself from the old communist party in 2004, has become a totally loyal and practically pro-government-run structure. From its creation in 2002, the Akzhol party has positioned itself as the party of opposition, but in 2005 split into moderate and more radical parties. Subsequently, in then the Akzhol brand has practically become a trade mark, as the non-ideological market-political character of the party became more evident in 2011, when Azat Peruashev was made chairman of the party, having left, a few days previously, the party of the president, Nur Otan. Thus, the Akzhol party has, since the arrival of the new 'management' become absolutely entirely loyal to the authorities of the political

structure, which has allowed it to become a parliamentary party since as of 2011, formally representing the interests of the business environment, that is, occupying the right-hand side of the spectrum. In the same year the minimum threshold of 7% in the elections was 'surpassed' by another organisation loyal to the authorities - the CPPK, which thereby occupied the niche of the left-wing party. In this multi-technical construction, Nur Otan has positioned itself as a centrist party.

The current parliament in Kazakhstan is not a truly powerful and influential institution. Its abilities are limited by the far greater influence of the institution of president, which leads to an imdis-balance in the branches of the government. UnderIn conditions of a weak parliament, the parties have, accordingly, not been able to become fully functional political institutions and are essentially a peculiar kind of shared interest club. But even in conditions of a functioning parliament truncated into delegated mandates, the country's authorities have striven not to admit opposition politicians within its their walls and have systematically marginalised the parties in opposition to them – Alga (was never registered), the CPK, Nagyz Akzhol, which were either closed down or disbanded. All this has led to the total number of actors on the party arena being gradually reduced, and the number of parties participating in the parliamentary elections is decreasing accordingly. For example, six parties participated in the snap parliamentary elections held on 20 March 2016, whilst seven parties participated in the previous elections in 2012 and 2012, and in 2004 - 10 parties and blocs took part in 2004.



The most important issue for any political party in Kazakhstan is its attitude towards the government in power<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://newskaz.ru/politics/20150428/7929019.html>;  
[http://rus.azattyq.org/a/parlament\\_elections\\_kosarev\\_kosanov\\_tsik/24452752.html?page=8](http://rus.azattyq.org/a/parlament_elections_kosarev_kosanov_tsik/24452752.html?page=8)



Worthy of particular mention are examples of moves by former members of Nur Otan to the functioning parties of opposition, such as Bulat Abilov, who became the leader of a number of opposition organisations, and ex-parliamentary speaker and Nur Otan deputy Zharmakhan Tuyakbai who became the leader of the NSPD.

The parties of Kazakhstan are practically 'chieftain-style' political structures. The classic model of right/left and centre in the country's political system is tentative. The emergence of parties and their evolution in Kazakhstan is in many respects a personalised process. Ideological differences are symbolic and not fundamental. Although the parties positioning themselves as opposition parties - the Communist Party of Kazakhstan (CPK), which closed down in 2015, and the National Social Democratic Party (NSDP) - may formally rank among the parties of the left, ideological aspects do not play a crucial role for them. Of greater importance are who heads these structures and their positioning in respect of the government. The phenomenon of communist parties in the post-Soviet states is generally identical, their viability is based on the ways of the past and depends on an objectively decreasing electorate - people nostalgic for a bygone era.

In general, ideological indifference is clearly demonstrated by the fact that the majority of the political parties have symbolic names: Nur Otan (Light of the Fatherland), Ak Zhol (Bright Path), Birlik (Unity), Auyl, Azat (Freedom), and also the former parties: Alga (Ahead), Asar (Peace to all), Adilet (Justice).

In this context, the formation of the parties in Kazakhstan is analogous to the political process

in Kyrgyzstan, where the parties are structured according to similar principles and the ideological basis is not definitive. Accordingly, the mobilisation of the population at elections is based not on conceptual principles but on loyalty/opposition, sympathies/antipathies. Just as in Kyrgyzstan, the presidential Nur Otan uses administrative resources on a large scale, and it is no accident that most of its members are public-sector workers.

The political parties of Kazakhstan make up the lower chamber of the national parliament (the Majilis) through a proportional system of elections according to party lists. Of the 107 deputies of the lower chamber, 98 are elected from party lists; the remaining 9 mandates are a quota of the Assembly of People of Kazakhstan - a consultative body subordinate to the president. Seven political parties were officially registered in Kazakhstan at the beginning of 2016: five of which are loyal to the government (Nur Otan, Akzhol, the CPPK, Birlik and Auyl), and two are opposition parties - Azat and the NSDP. By comparison, there were 19 registered parties in 2002.

It should be noted that the majority of the parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan were held early and Western observers, above all the ODIHR and the OSCE, did not recognise them as compliant with democratic criteria. Opposition parties and politicians participating in them regularly noticed extensive breaches, characteristic of many post-Soviet countries.

According to the law, 'the number of citizens in lists initiating the creation of political parties should not be fewer than one thousand persons representing two thirds of the regions, a city of national status and the capital city. The



total number of persons constituting a political party, as indicated in the lists, should not be fewer than 40,000 party members representing the structural subdivisions (branches and representative offices) of the party in all regions, city of national status and the capital city, with no fewer than 600 party members in each of them<sup>4</sup>. According to the unamended version of the law on political parties, no fewer than 50,000 members and no fewer than 700 members in each structural subdivision were required between 2002 and 2009.

Against the background of informational and administrative inequality and resource potential, the parties of the opposition have been forced out to the periphery of the country's political system and, under the current political system, they stand little chance of success. The parties' potential is appreciably limited by the legal and political frameworks and, under existing norms, they have practically been assigned a decorative role. Officially, the ruling Nur Otan party has become a supplementary, ineffective mechanism in the country's vertical administrative power structure with its own bureaucratic hierarchy, and has become in many ways an advisory organisation under the president's administration, imitating a collective leadership.

The parties of Kazakhstan do not carry out the functions they are intended to carry out a priori in society and the political system of the country, hence the public's disappointment in their effectiveness as a mechanism for representation. Nur Otan's declarations of almost a million party members should certainly

not delude anyone. This figure is notional and is, in many respects, the result not of the party's political popularity but of its possession of administrative resources.

Political behaviour and the stance of the public have had an impact on the party's weakness. One of the features of the development of the post-totalitarian society is the fact that the public, on the one hand, has no trust in the political elite but, paradoxically, follows it nonetheless, without demanding any rational explanations for the decisions that have been made. This phenomenon is clearly evident in Kazakhstan and, along with the nature of the political relationships formed within the country, has an influence on the nature of the political leadership.

In this respect, little difference is observed in both the type of leadership within state structures and the type of leadership in party organisations. In particular, the following criteria of the format of the leadership in Kazakhstan are evident: a strict vertical power structure, discipline of governance, the presentation of a strong, heroic leader, a protector, champion, and a culture of tolerance prevails. Consequently, the social, economic and political spheres are structured in such a way that the livelihood and development of the people and of society in general appear to be directly dependent on the elite or a political leader.

Such a structure of society presupposes that the leader is highly valued and the political elite enjoy a dominating position. A specific

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<sup>4</sup> [http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc\\_id=1032141#pos=143;-236](http://online.zakon.kz/Document/?doc_id=1032141#pos=143;-236)



model of the strategy of the party leaders can be observed in the political practice of Kazakhstan. It is a striving to define policy, which demonstrates faith in the leader's knowing precisely how to react to all challenges of development. This strategy is characteristic of the country's leader. Accordingly, the party leaders strive to attain state posts and to maintain their dominant status, but in so doing they have no idea how to implement the party's programmes or form relationships with the population.

Moreover, there is no concept in the leadership model that exists in Kazakhstan that the leader should be the guarantor of rights and personal freedoms, the guarantor of pluralism and, at the same time, the practice of collective leadership is not used. There has only been one attempt at introducing collective leadership in Kazakh party practice, and this was the Akzhol party in the mid-2000s, but it ended in the splitting of the organisation. The idea that collective leadership would be impossible had become rooted in political culture itself, for a number of reasons, and

the failure of the opposition structures to join forces and show a united front is an indicator of the absence of serious changes in political attitudes and approaches to the question of leadership in these organisations.

Thus, in spite of formal ideological definitiveness, the parties of Kazakhstan at present focus on current and topical political trends rather than the development of ideological values. The parties' discourses concentrate mainly on social problems. The parties' objective is cooperation with the organs of power, as a result of which the ideological side to the programmes is not the crucial or decisive aspect. Differences are only observed in the interpretation of the events that have taken place in the country and their re-translation to the public. These differences also determine the level of appeal of their programmes to various social groups. Hence there is no fully-fledged political competition, and the political parties function as electoral parties, participating in election campaigns merely for the legitimisation of the current regime.



### CHAPTER III. THE PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM OF KYRGYZSTAN

The emergence and development of the parties in modern-day Kyrgyzstan dates back to the beginning of the twentieth century. Amongst the first organisations with a political slant are Alash, Bukara, Shu-ro-i-Islamia and Turan. The party members were generally few in number and the parties were poorly organised. As a result of the weak social basis that supported them, the parties' influence on political processes was limited. After Soviet power was consolidated in Kyrgyzstan, all the above-mentioned parties were gradually broken up and banned. Thus the period in which parties were created and developed at the beginning of the twentieth century was short-lived and did not exert any significant influence on the generation and development of the political parties of modern-day Kyrgyzstan. It is worth noting that, at the same time, the political organisations at the beginning of the century had a beneficial influence on the formation of a number of visible public figures, as well as the very concept of nation-building - A. Sydykov, I. Aidarbekov, I. Arabayev, who became prominent personalities on the social horizon of that time.

Setting aside the Soviet period and the creation and domination of the single ideological and administrative machine that went by the name of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, we cannot ignore the fact that it has left its mark on the formation of the contemporary political parties. Attempts to create systems with a similar hierarchy - the Pioneers, the Komsomol and the Senior Communists - still haunt the political parties of the Kyrgyz Republic, in particular those that at certain periods became the dominating parties, absorbing and subjugating other political organisations. The majority of the political figures of independent Kyrgyzstan were originally members of the CPSU. They have played an important role in the nation and state-building process of present-day Kyrgyzstan.

The contemporary processes in Kyrgyzstan for the formation of organisations that have subsequently grown into parties date back to the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, when such socio-political movements as Asab and Ashar emerged. They were structured on opposition sentiments and movements to seize land in the vicinity of the capital, then the city of Frunze. They have since grown into political parties that enjoy considerable support by the public both in the regions and in the capital itself. In 1991 the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK) was created, which included the Social Democrats of Kyrgyzstan, Asaba, Memorial, etc., around 30 organisations in total. Following the fall of the communist Soviet Union, the DMK set itself the task of developing democratic processes in society and consolidating Kyrgyzstan's independence. As a result of differences of opinions on how the movement should be developed further by





its leaders, the DMK subsequently split up into several organisations, hence the emergence of the Erkin Kyrgyzstan, Asaba and AtaMeken political parties. The DMK was transformed into a political party, retaining its previous name.

On 21 June 1991 the Democratic Party of Erkin Kyrgyzstan (ErK) was registered. This marked the beginning of the official existence of political parties in the Kyrgyz Republic (disregarding the existence of the Communist Party). Whereas the DMK was essentially the first wide-ranging political movement, Erkin Kyrgyzstan was the first political party in the country that possessed all the necessary formal characteristics.

Over two hundred political parties have been registered in Kyrgyzstan up to the present date, and the process for the creation of new parties will, in all probability, continue.

In general, all parties of Kyrgyzstan adhere to democratic principles in their activities, in accordance with their statute documents. Their aims and objectives are similar in many respects. Practically all parties consider their objective to be the democratisation of society and the creation of reliable tools for social welfare. It is obvious that not all political parties have as yet been structured at an ideological, political and organisational level. Besides, this cannot be expected of organisations that only came into existence a few years ago. They have frequently been created to lend support to one or several personalities, and not for the expression and protection of the interests of any section of society or on a specific ideological basis.

In practice, the point of view of the leader in determining the strategic direction of the party's activity is of prime importance and, ultimately, it is this point of view that is put into practice. Initiatives coming from the bottom are seldom implemented, especially those that oppose the party's leaders. In this connection, even activities of the party that are 'democratic' by definition and in orientation do not have a totally realistic democratic structure. It is extremely difficult to make and, more importantly, implement decisions in such intra-party relationships. Parties known for one or two strong leaders, in practice, become phantoms once these figures depart; they have an outer shell but are empty inside.

Most of the parties that emerged during the first years of Kyrgyzstan's independence have at least one member who was already a member of parliament, and are therefore similar to the elite or intra-parliamentary parties. The party leader in the party headquarters and the member of parliament from the party were often one and the same person, and therefore had no need to work out ways of working together.

There are practically no so-called mass parties in Kyrgyzstan. The Communist Party may have had a claim to the name 'mass' at the beginning of the country's independence, but the inability (or lack of will) of its leaders to maintain their organisational potential and consequently to defend the ideas of communism has led to the marginalisation of this organisation. Although the Communist Party has officially remained one of the largest in terms of the number of its members, in fact it has ceased to play any appreciable role in the country.



The catch-all parties in the West are a response to the modern-day political system with a mobilised electorate, the administration of which is difficult for technical reasons and in which communication with the electors is via the media. In spite of the fact that there are certain peripheral areas that TV broadcasting does not reach, practically all parties in Kyrgyzstan organise their work according to the 'catch-all' principle. In addition, a feature also of the majority of the parties is their 'chieftain' essence, where the role of the leader is decisive. Most of the parties that have ever made their way into parliament were created on the 'catch-all' principle: Ar Namys, My Country, Ata-Meken, Republic, Ak-zhol, Alga Kyrgyzstan, Atazhurt, the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK), Onuguu, Kyrgyzstan, Bir bol, etc. Parties established on religious grounds are banned in Kyrgyzstan. Parties with a nationalistic leaning are also prohibited, but organisations indirectly expressing such views have emerged from time to time and are still active. One of the most well-known of these is the Asaba party, which has never concealed its orientation towards promoting the rights, above all, of the dominant ethnic group, the Kyrgyz. However, in spite of the external appeal of nationalist slogans and the ability to quickly mobilise large parts of the electorate, this party has never once made it through to parliament. Perhaps because nationalism is not in fact a particularly attractive political platform, or because the leadership qualities of the Asabists leave a lot to be desired, but most probably for a whole host of reasons, this party has not been able to find its place in the echelons of power of Kyrgyzstan.

The Zaman-dash-Sovremennik party is another example of the limited appeal of the 'nationalist

platform'. This party originally positioned itself as a party defending the rights of Kyrgyz migrants abroad. It has gradually been transformed into a party with, if not radical then clearly visible, nationalistic leanings. One of the cornerstones of its election campaign in 2015 was, for example, its publication of a 'Code for the Kyrgyz', which paid special attention to traditions and their importance for the country's population.

Prior to the parliamentary elections in 2015 this party, which already had its representatives in a great many local organs of power including Bishkek, was viewed as one of those competing for a place in the national parliament. In practice, however, it did not even come close to being allocated a deputy's seat in the Jogorku Kenesh. In fairness, it should be noted that the reason for this was not only, or perhaps not as much, the party's nationalistic propensities as the lack of agreement within the party and the absence of the necessary leadership. At any rate, parties whose positioning is explicitly nationalistic have to this day failed to receive the necessary support of the electorate at elections.

An essential factor for the development or, on the contrary, the deceleration of the healthy growth of the parties and the party system in Kyrgyzstan has always been the problem of the falsification of election results. Under both the first president, A. Akayev, and the second president, K. Bakiyev, the state authorities have invested a great deal of effort into ensuring that political parties loyal to them make it into parliament.

After the 'revolution' of 2010 the process of party building was given an additional impetus for development by the extended role



of the parliament and greater transparency at elections. However, alongside improvements in the state of affairs in the form of the increased transparency of the election process and greater fairness in votes counting, other problems became apparent in the formation of Kyrgyzstan's party system.

Bribery of the electorate in one form or other has existed under all political regimes in modern-day Kyrgyzstan. However, its scale has increased considerably in the period following the second revolution in 2010. In a situation where the state authorities have loosened their 'iron' grip and have not gone down the path of falsifying the parliamentary elections to any significant degree, other important social groups have attempted to grasp the process for themselves. These are clannish oligarchic groups and also criminal groups. Both possess considerable organisational and financial resources, and as soon as the government loosened its grip (after the tragic events of 2010) they immediately rushed to fill the resulting niche. Many political parties that have got into parliament have frequently used the money of those guilty of corruption and representatives of the criminal world. Positions on party lists were sold for sums of money that were considerable for Kyrgyzstan. A number of observers believe that the higher positions in the lists of the leading parties cost between 100,000 and 500,000 US dollars.

The problem of bribing voters was not even resolved during the parliamentary elections in 2015. And although this time state power was not as weak as after the revolution in 2010, bribery of the electorate has also been widely practised by almost all the political parties that

have got into parliament. Such a state of affairs has created a long-term threat of the formation of an oligarchic parliament in Kyrgyzstan, which will have a propensity for populist policies intended to play on the mood of the people, but the true purpose of which will ultimately be the protection of the narrowly corporate interests of clans and oligarchs, and not the interests of society as a whole.

Naturally, the legislative framework and, above all, the constitutional provisions and the provisions of electoral law have a significant impact on the formation of political parties and the party system in Kyrgyzstan.

The Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic was adopted on 5 May 1993. As a result of referenda held in 1994, 1996, 1998, 2003, 2007 and 2010, there have been numerous amendments and additions to it subsequently. The frequent editing of the Constitution can mainly be explained by an insufficiently balanced system of checks and balances, which has led, and still leads, to a conflict of interests of the branches of the government. As the institution of political parties in the republic has been in the initial stage of its development, the parties, and hence also their ideas and world view in this struggle, have not played a major role in the process of changing the Constitution. Conflicts have predominantly been of a personal nature and have flared up on account of government mandates, and not ideological disagreements. It should also be noted that disputes that have arisen on the subject of power and the anti-popular policies of A. Akayev and then K. Bakiyev, have on two occasions been outside the constitutional field and led to an early change of power (2005 and 2010).



Passions in Kyrgyzstan's Jogorku Kenesh become seriously heated, sometimes boiling over into direct confrontations between the parties<sup>5</sup>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.gazeta.kg/news/kyrgyzstan/25179-ring-zhogorku-kenesha.html>;  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNyxUfm1Wc>



The country's electoral legislation has considerable influence over the development of the political parties and the party system. It sets the 'rules of the game', which stipulate how parties may participate in elections, how the votes of the electors are counted and how places in the country's legislative body are determined, and they consequently define possible courses of action by the parties in their main area of focus- the struggle for power. On 29 May 1999 the Code on Elections in the Kyrgyz Republic (Electoral Code) was adopted in the country. The Electoral Code initially granted the right to nominate candidates to political parties, electoral blocs and voters at their place of work, service, study or residence, and also to individuals through self-nomination.

Thus, the parties were subjects with the right to nominate their own candidates at elections. The same right was also held by electoral blocs that, according to the definition of the Electoral Code, were a voluntary association of two or more political parties for joint participation in elections. This extension of the list of those that had the right to nominate appeared to be logical at the initial stage of the development of the constitutional system of the Kyrgyz Republic. Against a background of weakly structured parties and a lack of determination on the part of a significant proportion of the population with respect to their political inclinations, the legislator presented an opportunity for as broad a segment of the population as possible to express their will.

Subsequently, however, this norm started to have a two-fold influence on the development

of the parties. On the one hand, granting the right to nominate candidates at elections not only to parties but also to other subjects provided an opportunity for all individuals to express their will and nominate their representatives for participation in elections. On the other hand, such a state of affairs, with an undeveloped political system, placed the parties on the level of other subjects with the right to nominate. And this in turn rendered meaningless that the parties were quite unnecessary in the process of the struggle for power. There arose the legitimate question – why nominate candidates to elections by means of holding expensive party congresses and conferences if the same can be done without resorting to such complicated procedures and by just assembling a group of voter selectors at their place of residence, study or work? A lot of candidates at the parliamentary elections held in 1995, 2000 and 2005 were nominated in this way, at assemblies of the electorate or by means of self-nomination, not by the parties. Another impediment to limiting factor for the development of the parties was the majority system of election, which had existed in Kyrgyzstan up until 2007. In the majority system elections were held according to single-mandate constituencies, where the more important factor thing was not the candidate's party affiliation, but his personal qualities - his ability to convince, his belonging affiliation to the area, possession of great financial prospects means, etc.

For a country with an undeveloped party system, this served as a brake, or a peculiar kind of 'freezing' of the party in a situation where it existed officially, but there was practically no need for them it as a tools for attaining power.



In 2000, as part of a special experiment, norms were introduced, according to which the Legislative Assembly Jogorku Kenesh was elected under a mixed system. According to this system, 45 deputies of the Legislative Assembly were elected from single-mandate constituencies in accordance with the majority system of absolute majority, and 15 deputies were elected from a single electoral constituency according to a proportional system on the basis of party lists. In these conditions the parties significantly escalated their political activity with the aim of attracting as high a number of voters as possible. The deputies elected according to the proportional system from the parties, as the remarks of their colleagues confirm, were positively distinguished by their position, discipline and dedication to national interests.

However, instead of increasing the number of deputies elected from the political parties according to the proportional principle, or simply adopting the 100% principle of forming the parliament according to the proportional principle on the basis of the party lists, the electoral legislation was subsequently amended.

The parliamentary elections of 2005 were held in accordance with a different system, specifically the old majority system with single-mandate constituencies. And it was only in 2007 that the Jogorku Kenesh first started to be formed according to the proportional principle, which instantly gave a strong impetus to the party building as a whole.

Furthermore, the ideological party base still remains poorly articulated and in many respects retains of a formal nature, where the protection of practical interests of political and economic groups are simply disguised by putting forward a few formal ideological programmes. An analysis of the programmes, and of the aims and objectives that the parties set themselves allows the conclusion to be drawn that all parties support reforms of a democratic leaning and the creation of conditions for the successful development of the economy. The Party of Unity of Kyrgyzstan, for example, indicated that it is a political organisation that unites the citizens of the state through the common idea of creating a democratic state governed by the rule of law and founded on the primary right of the individual, civil accord, the vigorous continuation of economic reforms and the building of a socially oriented economy<sup>6</sup>.

The principal aim of the Ar Namys party was to provide a decent way of life for the people of Kyrgyzstan by creating a democratic state governed by the rule of law and to secure realistic conditions for the free economic, political and spiritual development of society<sup>7</sup>. The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan sees its strategic task in building a genuinely democratic society governed by the rule of law with a high standard of living, on the basis of the assimilation and use of the best aspects of socialist and capitalist systems<sup>8</sup>. We could continue citing excerpts from the parties' programmes but they will all be similar. The Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan alone makes ambiguous mention of its adherence to the ideas of socialism and sees in them the panacea to all problems. Absolutely all political parties are

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. The Political Parties of Kyrgyzstan/Reference Comp. T. R. Ibraimov, G. T. Isakova - B. 2000. - P.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. P. 22

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. P. 112



committed to the principles of law and respect for the Constitution in their activity.

The statutes and programmes of the majority of the parties refer to the difficult economic situation in Kyrgyzstan, and the parties' aims and objectives provide for the implementation of what the specific political organisations consider to be the necessary measures to overcome this crisis.

Practically all parties indicate that they intend to nominate their own candidates and participate in the elections to bodies of legislative power and local autonomy. No party registered with the Ministry of Justice of the Kyrgyz Republic makes reference, either directly or indirectly, to the possibility of unconstitutional methods of vying for power. All parties express their respect for the law and their intention to participate in the political struggle only by legal means.

The creation of parties in Western countries was associated with periods of considerable social reformations and the formation of a new configuration of social forces and interests. In Kyrgyzstan the structuring of the different strata of society is not all that consistent and is accompanied by the accumulation of divisions. Here the models of the political process are far from taking shape and a structuring is in progress of groups founded on social, property, linguistic, ethnic and other parameters. The different social strata, classes, political elites, regional, confessional and national groups endeavour to express their needs through specific organisations of a political persuasion that are capable of acting in new conditions.

At the same time, simultaneous and at times non-systematic reforms in the economic, political,

social and other spheres of the country's life have been placed on people's shoulders like a heavy burden, preventing them from concentrating on the issues of political self-identity. Most of the population is occupied instead with matters of physical survival and everyday financial problems.

And the parties, for their part, are poor at articulating the interests of the people, that is, are poor at recognising, formulating and expressing them, which prompts distrust in them. This is explained by the fact that the civil society is insufficiently developed, unable to determine their place in society, whether they are individuals or groups and organisations. Because of the growing differentiation of society and the continuing formation of its different groups, people do not have the time to adapt their needs to their position in society and, consequently, to recognise, express and defend their interests.

Many rank-and-file members are disappointed with the lack of conceptual principles and ideologies within the parties, who, in their striving to seize on the interests of all strata of society with the aim of securing their votes, lose their individuality and appeal, in which they are no different from other parties, apart from their leaders.

The parties' social base reflects the segmented and unstructured nature of society. Hence, for example, two socialist parties exist simultaneously in Kyrgyzstan - the Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan and the Ata-Meken Social Democratic Party. Yet their discourse, ideological basis, personal composition (to a large extent businessmen) and political initiatives give little indication of their adherence to socialist ideals.



Six party factions have held seats in the Jogorku Kenesh since the elections in 2015: the CDPK, Respublika-Atazhurt, Kyrgyzstan, Bir bol, Onuguu-progress and Ata-Meken. Of these, three parties have made it to parliament for the first time: Bir bol, Onuguu and Kyrgyzstan, and another party, Respublika-Atazhurt, created as a result of the amalgamation of two parties, got into the JK a second time. Veteran of the party movement, the Ata-Meken party only just collected the requisite number of votes to be admitted to parliament, while the CDPK got in chiefly thanks to the fact that it was considered the party of power and had the substantial, albeit unofficial, backing of the government (president). During the election campaign all four 'young' parliamentary parties focused on their considerable financial resources, used extensively costly political technology and are regarded by society as the parties of the oligarchs, as the core deputies from these parties are prominent businessmen and former civil servants.

It may be stated that the parties of the Kyrgyz Republic are at the stage of formation and, hence, are experiencing the difficulties and problems that are typical for organisations that have newly emerged, are still in formation and are not yet firmly established. The social, economic and national problems inherent in the whole of society are directly extended to the formation and development of the institution of parties. Trust in these political institutions is still low. Their activation, social mobilisation and raising

of public interest are restricted to periods of pre-election campaigning<sup>9</sup>.

At the same time, the socio-political changes in Kyrgyzstan, as well as the acquisition of independence and the necessity to construct a new democratic regime, have inevitably led to the strengthening of the parties, as one of the main institutions for the representation of the public interests, cooperation with the state and a democratic instrument for the struggle for power. The most recent amendments to the Constitution, adopting elements of a parliamentary republic, have made a great impact on the development of the party system in the country. The introduction of the proportional electoral system has made the parties the only institution that has the right to nominate candidates to national parliament. The parties are now regarded as truly necessary institutions for participation in political life, admission to power and its retention.

Hence, alongside the positive changes associated with the development of the parties and the party system, problems have emerged and/or continue to emerge in respect, not so much of the parties as such, as of the insufficiently high level of political culture of the population, the low level of political leadership and the lack of understanding of their responsibilities among the country's elite. The solution to these problems lies on many levels: economic, political, cultural, and the complexity of the problems presupposes the complexity of their solutions.

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<sup>9</sup> Annual sociological research - The Mood of the Country. Survey of the inhabitants of Kyrgyzstan 7-20 March 2016. The research was carried out by Doctor Raza Alisauskine from the market research and public opinion organisation Baltic Surveys/The Gallup Organization on the instruction of the International Republican Institute. The survey was carried out by SIAR Research and Consulting.





## CHAPTER IV. THE PARTIES AND THE PARTY SYSTEM OF TAJIKISTAN

The multi-party system of Tajikistan is undergoing a difficult stage in its development. The country's party system currently consists of 7 political parties: The Agrarian Party of Tajikistan (APT), the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), the Communist Party of Tajikistan (CPT), the People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDPT), the Party of Economic Reform (PERT), the Socialist Party of Tajikistan (SPT), and the Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan (SDPT).

The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan is the ruling party, its leader is the country's president, and many highly-placed government civil servants are also members. Of the six political parties only the SDPT carries out any blatantly oppositional activities, promoting an alternative position on the various socio-political problems of the country's development. The activities of the remaining five political parties (APT, DPT, CPT, PERT and SPT) are basically characterised by their loyalty to the government and, accordingly, the government's loyalty to them.

One of the main obstacles to the empowerment of the political parties of Tajikistan is the majority proportional electoral system, according to which, of 63 persons - the total number of deputies of the Majlis Namoyandagon (the lower chamber of the national parliament) - only 22 persons (one third) are elected from the party list, and the other 41 (two-thirds) - from the single-mandate electoral constituencies. In these 41 single-mandate electoral constituencies, pre-election debates are held during parliamentary (and local authority) elections, for the most part not between representatives of the political parties but between prominent officials from local communities (at times with a mandate from a political party).

In Tajikistan direct national elections are held to the highest government post (the post of president), to the lower chamber of the national parliament (mainly according to the party list), local organs of representative power (regional, city and district majlises of national representatives) and organs of local autonomy (deputies of the jamoats). Direct elections of heads of executive power (regional, city and district representatives) are not held.

In considering the normative and legal framework for the functioning of the political parties, account must be taken of the consequences of the civil war, which have left an indelible mark on legislation. A new Constitution of Tajikistan was drawn up, discussed by the nation and then adopted during the course of the civil war of 1992-1997 (on 6 November 1994). The new Constitution prevented the further fragmentation of the Tajik state system, brought democratic values to society and also contributed to the reinforcement of centripetal



tendencies in the socio-political life of the country.

The signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord between the government and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) on 27 June 1997 raised the politico-ideological struggle between the different political parties of the country to the level of parliament. All political parties had to withdraw their armed groups and undergo state registration. The DPT and the Islamic Rebirth Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) were registered with the Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan, and their armed units were included in the Tajikistan army. At the same time the newly created National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), which was made up of equal numbers of representatives of the government and the former UTO, devised a Concept for the Post-Conflict Reconstruction and Development of Tajikistan. The general provisions of the new Tajikistan Law On Political Parties were also drawn up by the Commission.

In drawing up these provisions, the main subject of discussion was the question of whether private religious organisations would be allowed to receive the status of political party. The protracted debate on this matter slowed down the process of post-conflict reconstruction in Tajikistan, and for this reason the decision was made that the Law on Political Parties of 1998 would allow the activities of the IRPT on an equal footing with the other, secular political parties. The creation of the legislative framework for the activities of the religious political party set a precedent for the coexistence and cooperation of political parties with different orientations. For a long

time (1998-2015) the Republic of Tajikistan was the only country in the post-Soviet sphere to have a legally functioning political party with an Islamic (i.e. religious) ideology. The banning of the IRPT by the Supreme Court of the Republic of Tajikistan (29 September 2015) on the written petition of the country's General Prosecutor's Office, after the leadership of this party was accused of participating in the failed military coup by General A. Nazarzoda (at the beginning of September of the same year), concluded the quarter-of-a-century saga of the struggle for the character (secular or religious) of the national statehood. There are now seven political parties remaining on the socio-political arena, all, without exception, proponents of the secular nature of the national statehood.

Most of the country's political parties prefer the American, not the European, style of activity. They generally intensify their activities during the pre-election period and it is, therefore, difficult to evaluate their ideological base. The choice of this style of functioning depends to a large extent on the lack of financial and technical resources, insufficient intellectual potential and the absence of flexibility in the political and administrative leadership of the majority of the political parties.

The political parties may be divided tentatively into left and right (on the basis of their statutes and programmes). The CPT and SPT are left-wing parties, defending, amongst other things, collective ownership, whereas the other five parties (the APT, DPT, PDPT, SCPT and the PERT) operate on the right wing of the country's political life, and advocate a market economy.



The public's perception of the political parties of Tajikistan is based not so much on their ideological component ('left-wing party', 'right-wing party' or 'centrist party') but on the personal factor of their leaders: for instance, 'the Party of Emomali Rahmon' (PDPT), 'the Party of Shabdolov' (CPT), 'the Party of Zoirov' (SDPT), 'the Party of Olimov' (PERT), etc. This fact suggests that a conservative approach to the rotation of office can be observed not only in the power structures but also in the parties' leadership (including the opposition parties). Such a state of affairs, undoubtedly, presupposes an authoritarian style of governance in practically all party organisations.

There are a great many limitations to the functioning of the political parties in the Republic of Tajikistan. Following the results of the last nation-wide referendum (May 2016), the creation of nationalist and religious parties is no longer permitted in Tajikistan.

Political parties are forbidden from creating their own party cells in the armed forces and law-enforcement bodies. Military and law-enforcement employees (public prosecutors, the police (militia), state security and tax-inspection officials, and legal and customs workers) do not have the right to be members of political parties.

Tajikistan is one of the countries that have not yet established a single Electoral Code, and for this reason the electoral process is regulated by five separate laws:

- The Law on Referenda;
- The Law on Presidential Elections;
- The Law on Elections to the Majilis Oli (national parliament);
- The Law on Elections to Local Majlisi;
- The Law on Local Autonomy, including the chapter on elections to jamoats.





The post-conflict syndrome obliges the parliamentary parties of Tajikistan to value peace in the country in all its manifestations <sup>10</sup>

Under these circumstances, the electoral process can be somewhat difficult to interpret. Elections to the national parliament traditionally coincide with local authority elections. In this connection, the Central Commission on Elections and Referenda (CCER) is only responsible for the administration of elections at national level, while the local authority elections are conducted by organs of executive power.

In the opinion of many of the parties involved in the electoral process, the problem of the

elections to the national parliament is, relatively speaking, the electoral deposit for the political parties (in an amount of 100 calculation indexes = approx. 500 US dollars) for each person included in the party list (in total, 22 persons x 500 US dollars = 11,000 US dollars). This index is significant for political parties of average means. Despite the fact that the electoral deposit is returned in the event that the candidate is successfully elected a deputy and the parties also receive state financing for carrying out election campaigns, the electoral deposit remains a problem for debate between the political parties and the government.

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<sup>10</sup> [Ehttp://nm.tj/politics/22262-zuhurov-dal-polozhitelnyuy-ocenku-godovoy-deyatelnosti-parlamenta.html](http://nm.tj/politics/22262-zuhurov-dal-polozhitelnyuy-ocenku-godovoy-deyatelnosti-parlamenta.html); <http://nz1.ru/v-mire/8591-prezident-tadzhikistana-smozhet-izbiratsya-neogranichennoe-chislo-raz.html>



According to the Law, only parties with five or more representatives in the national parliament (Majlisi Namoyandagon) have the right to create their own factions. Thus since 2000, the year of the country's transition from a convened to a professional parliament, the PDPT was the only party in Tajikistan that had a permanent faction, whilst the other parties were unable to overcome this hurdle. At the most recent parliamentary elections (March 2015) the APT was the only party able to surmount this barrier and create a parliamentary faction.

Deputy groups are also allowed to function alongside parliamentary factions. In accordance with long-established tradition, such groups are made up of non-party deputies (from the ranks of former employees of the law-enforcement bodies, courts and armed forces). Of the country's seven political parties,

the SDPT alone is not currently represented in the national parliament.

Hence, it may be concluded that, after long and difficult, and at times dramatic, transformations, Tajikistan's multi-party system has become a factor of real political life. In spite of the political and legislative difficulties, the parties and their affiliated organisations (above all, youth organisations) are gradually becoming part of the everyday socio-political life of Tajik society. For its part, society has started to distinguish, from one election to the next, between the pre-election platforms of the multi-directional political parties. In this regard, it is clear that, for the further development of the multi-party system in Tajikistan, as well as the development and enhancement of the parties' efficiency, it is essential to continue work on improving the legislative framework of the activities of the political institutions, and also the development of democratic traditions in general.



## CHAPTER V. THE PARTIES AND THE PARTYSYSTEM OF UZBEKISTAN

The process of party building in Uzbekistan, which started at the beginning of the 1990s, initially took on a, so to speak, quasi-democratic form, which was a reaction to the political emancipation brought about by Gorbachev's perestroika. On the strength of the political thaw of those years, 'proto-parties' started to appear, which had a non-communist, democratic and nationalistic leaning.

At the end of the 1980s organisations were formed such as the first opposition proto-party- the people's movement of Uzbekistan, Birlik ('Unity'), which in 1991 was registered as a political party; the Democratic Movement of Uzbekistan, Turkestan, the Free Union of the Youth of Uzbekistan, the socio-political movement Erk ('Freedom'), the women's movement Tumaris, the Movement for Democratic Reforms in Uzbekistan, and others. They became engaged in active social and political activity, and the budding democratic society actually received its first lessons in democracy. Thus, the Birlik party, for example, which was

made up of scientists, writers and cultural actors, demanded that the Uzbek language be given the status of the official state language, and advocated against the single-crop farming of cotton.

The first generation of opposition activists were people who had no experience of public service and governance. As slogans they frequently employed 'eye-catching and politicised poetic metaphors that had very little to do with reality'<sup>11</sup>.

In 1992 the Vatan Tarakkiyoti ('Progress of Society') party was formed, whose founder was a former member of the Birlik movement, the poet Usman Azim. This party advocated the ideas of liberal democracy, the market economy and human rights and freedoms, which had become popular. However, it was not able subsequently to compete effectively with the party of power.

In 1995 the Milliy Tiklanish ('National Rebirth') democratic party emerged, whose founder and Chairman of the Presidium of the Council was the famous scientist Aziz Kayumov. The ideological baggage of the parties included, in addition to democratic values and the market economy, ideas of the rebirth of the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Uzbek people.

The social democratic party Adolat ('Justice') was created in the same year. The well-known journalist Anvar Jurabayev was elected Secretary of the party's Central Council. This party was formed around the ideas of the creation of a socially-oriented market economy, the social welfare of the

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<sup>11</sup> R. Janguzhin. Some observations on the situation in the states of the Central Asian region// Central Asia and the Caucasus, 2000, No. 2, P. 181.



population, the state's key role in the economy and the equality of all forms of ownership.

The national democratic party Fidokorlar appeared in 1998. This party's ideology was similarly built on the ideas of democracy and the market economy. The similarity in their platforms, the small membership numbers and the financial frailty of the parties prompted Vatan Tarakkiyoti to unite with the Fidokorlar party in 2000.

One of the most prominent political actors since the party system was established in Uzbekistan was the poet Muhammad Solih, who founded the Erk party. In 1990 he was elected a deputy of the Supreme Council of Uzbekistan. On the initiative of the Erk party, the Supreme Council adopted the Declaration of Independence of Uzbekistan on 20 June 1990. Solih was the sole rival of the President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, at the elections in December 1991. Of the votes at the elections Solih received, according to official figures: 12.7%; according to the figures previously announced on Uzbekistan radio- 33%; according to the calculations of independent observers - the majority of the votes<sup>12</sup>.

The representatives of the opposition were subsequently subjected to pressure from the authorities and compelled to leave the country. A student demonstration of Solih's supporters following the elections was suppressed, opposition newspapers were closed down, and criminal cases were brought against the leaders of the opposition. Solih is currently the leader of the Uzbek opposition abroad.

On the initiative of M. Solih, a coalition of Uzbekistan's opposition forces Union of 13 May was established in 2009, which was made up of the Erk party and the organisations Andizhan: Justice and Rebirth and Tayanch ('Support'). On 28 May 2011, on the platform of the Union of 13 May in Berlin, the People's Movement of Uzbekistan (PMU) was established, which consisted of eight organisations representing different social groups, including communities of moderate Muslims. M. Solih was elected Chairman of the Board of Founders of the PMU by a majority of the delegates of the congress.

In November 1991 the ruling party, the Communist Party of the UzSSR, whose First Secretary was the current President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, announced the voluntary dissolution of the party and the creation in its place of the People's Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (PDPU). In essence, it was the successor to the Communist Party; and due to this fact it long remained the party with the highest number of members (350,000 at the time of its creation).

On 15 November 2003 the Founding Congress of the Movement of Entrepreneurs and Businessmen - the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan (UzLiDeP) was held. Kobilzhon Toshmatov was elected the party's President of the Executive Committee of the Political Council.

On 26 December 2004 the party participated in the elections to the legislative chamber, the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, for the first time, and to district, regional and city kengashi

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<sup>12</sup> <http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/ruwiki/344941>



(councils) of the people's deputies. The results of the votes made UzLiDeP the largest faction in the parliament, occupying 41 parliamentary seats. 1908 deputies were elected from the party to the local representative organs. The elections to the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on 27 December 2007 were won by the candidate from UzLiDeP, Islam Abduganievich Karimov.

Two years later, on 27 December 2009, UzLiDeP successfully participated in the parliamentary elections and the elections to the district, regional and city kengashi of the people's deputies. Occupying 53 parliamentary seats, the party formed the largest faction in the parliament for the second time. On this occasion, 2159 deputies were elected from the party to the local representative organs. It may be said that this party enjoyed a privileged position in the party system of Uzbekistan from the moment of its creation.

What is interesting is that, in different years, I. Karimov was elected first from the PDPU, then

From Vatan Tarakkiyoti, then Filokordar, then UzLiDeP, without actually representing or expressing the ideology or programmes of any of the parties that had nominated him for candidacy.

From the moment of its creation, UzLiDeP had already replaced four Chairmen of its Executive Committee of the Political Council, which bears witness to the instability of the senior management of the party. This not only contrasts sharply with the reports of the party's successes and repeated victories at parliamentary elections, but also indicates the lack of an authoritative leader.

There are currently four political parties in Uzbekistan: the PDPU, UzLiDeP, Adolat, Milliy Tiklanish plus one political movement - the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan (EMU). The EMU was created in August 2008, and by law was immediately given 15 seats in the lower chamber of the parliament. Whilst the fully-fledged parties have to fight for their representation in the organs of power, the EDU, of which few people are aware, has guaranteed seats in the parliament. There is no doubt of actuality of political action to address environmental problems at the highest level of state power, but the EMU, whose activity has practically been reduced to holding regular round-table meetings, has not even been able to defend the parks of the capital and other cities from the full-scale felling of centuries-old plane trees.

All in all, it is difficult to contend that the existing political parties of Uzbekistan are helping to form the country's real, fully-functional party system. Practically all of them are loyal to the government in power, and not one of them carries out any real function of opposition. President Islam Karimov himself has seriously criticised the country's political parties for the lack of any real political struggle.

Nevertheless, they perform another function, specific to Uzbekistan: that of recruiting staff. The parties serve as a unique starting platform and, at the same time, a filter through which staff are selected for government service. For all their artificiality and weakness, they all signal the importance of having a multi-party system for the development of democracy and help to shape public opinion accordingly.





The parliamentary parties of Uzbekistan at work



In his addresses, the President has repeatedly made it a condition that the creation of political parties in future ensures that the country's socio-political stability is preserved. This is the view of many, including the expert community. 'We need to break the stereotype that says that the existence of a large number of parties in society is bound to be a destabilising factor and lead to political dissension and discord. There's always a risk of this, but it doesn't pay to set it in stone, just as it doesn't pay either to think that most parties will restore democracy to society'<sup>13</sup>.

The development of the party system, including the creation of parties of opposition, requires new decisions to be made and new practices to be implemented in the sectors concerned. Thus, during the 'pre-election campaign' at the time of the last parliamentary elections in 2014, so-called tele-debates between the representatives of the parties participating in the elections were organised for the first time. Unfortunately, however, this TV show failed to make it clear what the parties' positions were on specific problems of the internal and foreign policies of the state, and the party activists limited themselves to arguments on the most general questions of how they differ from each other.

At the beginning of the 2000s, experts had identified the following problems with the development of the political parties in Uzbekistan: the durability of statist thought in the public consciousness, the absence of the tradition of public political debate, the parties'

weak ideological views and stances with respect to their programmes, the inability to initiate mechanisms for resolving social problems; the parties' small membership numbers; the parties' lack of strong leaders on a national scale<sup>14</sup>.

However, the 'party' legislation of Uzbekistan, according to formal indicators, can be described as democratic. The Law On Political Parties, adopted in 1996, has created the legal foundations necessary for the functioning of a multi-party system, reinforcing the position that none of the current parties may claim the sole right to define the policies of the state. The principle that members of the public may voluntarily join political parties on the basis of their shared opinions, interests and aims has been reinforced. The political parties have been guaranteed the right to propagate their ideas, aims and objectives, to participate in drawing up the appropriate government decisions, in the elections of organs of state power, establish their media, set up their factions in the legislative body for organising the attainment of the aims and objectives specified in their programmes.

The law prohibits the creation and activity of political parties whose aim is to forcibly change the constitutional order, who advocate against the sovereignty, integrity and security of the country and the constitutional rights and freedoms of its citizens, who propagandise war, social, national, racial and religious hostility, who infringe on the health and moral rectitude of the people; according to national and regional indicators.

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<sup>13</sup> R. Zhumayev. The Political System of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Formation and Development. - Tashkent. - 1996. - P. 49.

<sup>14</sup> B. Erashev. The Formation of the Multi-party System in Uzbekistan: Problems and Perspectives // Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 6, 2000.



In 2004 the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan On the Financing of Political Parties was adopted. It determined that the sources of financing of the political parties are: joining and membership fees, if these are provided for by the statutes of the political party; income received from business activity in accordance with the law; funds from the state budget of the Republic of Uzbekistan; donations from legal entities and citizens of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

The participation of political parties in elections to the Legislative Chamber and other representative organs of state power must be financed in accordance with established procedure and only through state funding allocated for this purpose. The financing and other material support of political parties during elections by other means is prohibited.

The amount of state funding allocated for the financing of political parties' participation in elections to the Legislative Chamber, per parliamentary candidate, is determined by the Central Electoral Commission of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

State funding for the financing of political parties' participation in elections to the Legislative Chamber is paid in accordance with the established procedure into the bank account of the political party after registration of the parliamentary candidates nominated by this party for the Legislative Chamber in an amount corresponding to the number of registered candidates.

State funding allocated for the financing of political parties' participation in elections to the Legislative Chamber should be spent by the parties on: the publication of pre-election visual campaigning aids; organising the broadcasting of public addresses by candidates for members of the Legislative Chamber on television, radio and other media; organising meetings of candidates for members of the Legislative Chamber with electors; organising the work of the agents of candidates for members of the Legislative Chamber and other assets employed for carrying out pre-election campaigning in the electoral constituencies; measures taken by the party to hold electoral campaigns.

If a political party has not received the required number of parliamentary seats in the elections to the Legislative Chamber for the creation of a faction, the state funds allocated for the financing of the political parties' participation in the elections to the Legislative Chamber must be returned to the state budget of the Republic of Uzbekistan from the funds received by the party from other sources<sup>15</sup>.

The blatant split between the formally democratic party system and the opposition, whose capacities are actually rather limited, has compelled the government to look for ways of bridging, or concealing, this gap. The government is currently preoccupied with technically creating a means of representing the 'opposition' in the government. The problem lies in the creation of a social environment for drawing on the pluralistic public awareness that claims to exist, and translating it into political terms.

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<sup>15</sup> [http://www.lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact\\_id=168377](http://www.lex.uz/pages/getpage.aspx?lact_id=168377)



The Law On Strengthening the Role of Political Parties in the Renewal and Further Democratisation of State Governance and the Modernisation of the Country, adopted in 2007, was to play a key role in the task of deepening the democratic reforms. It is the official opinion that the political parties have now become the most important tool for increasing the political and social activity of the people, for expressing the wishes and views of the population, first and foremost by implementing the electoral processes and creating both central and local bodies of state power.

Several years ago an event took place in the political process of Uzbekistan that resembled a new stage in the development of the party system. On 12 November 2010 President I. Karimov proposed during a joint session of both chambers of the parliament that amendments be introduced to the country's Constitution. According to the amendments, in the event that the President was unable to exercise his authorities, these would pass to the Chairman of the Senate, the Oliy Majlis. Moreover, the President announced that the parties achieving the highest number of seats in the parliament would have to nominate a candidate for the post of prime minister. It was also announced that it would be necessary for the Constitution to include a provision allowing for members of parliament to declare a motion of no confidence in the government.

It should be noted, however, that this was not the first time the President had advanced such 'breakthrough' initiatives. These had mainly been back in November 2006, when he proposed the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan On Strengthening the Role of Political Parties in the Renewal and Further Democratisation of State Governance and the Modernisation of the Country<sup>16</sup>.

According to this legislation, the parliament had already been accorded quite extensive powers a long time ago. In spite of this, over the last four years there has not been any real parliamentary opposition, and no particular attitude of the parliament towards the Prime Minister or the activities of the Cabinet of Ministers had been expressed, even after the election of the Oliy Majlis last year.

The President always, when speaking about democracy in general and the multi-party system and the opposition in particular, emphasises the necessity of maintaining the socio-political stability of the country. Stability has become, in a way, the government's standard, justifying the democratic stagnation. During the quarter-century period of stability, the actual opposition and multi-party system was formally put 'on display', in the Soviet fashion, as a decoration of the political system, but was never cultivated in the people themselves. Even the Erk party was an active supporter of stability in the republic, but was not rewarded for its efforts<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>16</sup> Report of the President Islam Karimov on the Solemn Assembly dedicated to the 14th Anniversary of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan. Cf: [www.uzreport.com](http://www.uzreport.com)

<sup>17</sup> B. Fahrtdinov. The Civil Movement and Parties in Uzbekistan: Development Trends and Problems // Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 5, 2002.



## CONCLUSION

Contemporary democracy presupposes the existence of effectively functioning political parties. Within conditions of the development of parliamentarism and the universal electoral law, the parties are irreplaceable instruments for the articulation, aggregation and advancement of the interests of the various strata of society. The existence of genuinely functioning parties enhances the democratic governability and legitimacy of the state, facilitating solutions to social conflicts by means of established integrative procedures, which renders the process of making socially significant decisions more open and effective, which in turn ensures the continuity and predictability of state policies.

Following the collapse of the USSR the countries of Central Asia (CA) promulgated the development of democratic institutions, including parties.

However, democratic rhetoric has not always, and in some countries not at all, been shored up by practical steps in this direction. The process of building the state and the development

of political pluralism has come up against severe opposition and tendencies to establish authoritarian power, the cornerstones of which are not law and democratic processes, conclusion but political expediency and the interests of government-sponsored groups.

It is worth mentioning here that democracy and a state governed by law have not at all been the absolute values for a significant part of the populations of the countries of CA, partly because of the novelty of these institutions and the lack of people's understanding, but, in many ways, because the place of communist ideology has been filled, to a significant degree, by archaic but far from forgotten and hence easily reproducible clannish institutions with ancestral and territorial loyalties. In addition, following the collapse of the communist structure, the so-called process of the primary accumulation of capital intensified, which has led to the practically universal spread of corruption, which is alien to a state governed by the rule of law.

But the main obstacle on the road to forming parties of the contemporary kind in the CA states is the trend of reinforcing the authoritarian nature and the personalisation of the state authorities. As a result, the phenomenon of the so-called 'silk democracy' has appeared in the countries of CA, which the authors of this work describe as, to a certain degree, an imitation democracy, controlled by the government in power, often with only an external façade, which conceals insufficient, and in some cases a total absence of, democratic content.

The creation of parties in long-standing democracies was associated with periods of considerable social reformations and the formation of a new configuration of social forces and interests. In CA the structuring of the different strata of



society is not all that consistent and is accompanied by the build-up of divisions. The process of the formation of the party system in CA countries is progressing at different rates, with different content, and in conditions of ideological eclectics.

In Uzbekistan the parties are predominantly of a formal character and do not play any essential role in the country's political system. The presence of flamboyant, charismatic party leaders is not much appreciated by the state. Moreover, there are obvious attempts to create 'system parties, controlled from the top and based on a particular ideology. Thanks to their engagement with the authorities, parties in this country have a peculiar, two-fold function: the careful inculcation of concepts of party activity in the population, and the use of party rows as a filter for the recruitment of government employees. But, in spite of its apparent consistency and appeal, this policy has been faced with the problem of its own inadequacy, which has manifested itself, specifically, in a 'paradox of opposition': officially and according to legislation, an opposition party (or faction) may be created, but it is not, and cannot be, made up of members from currently active parties.

In Tajikistan, in recent years especially, the process of party building and the development of the party system has been placed under the strict control of the president and his immediate entourage. The only party in the countries of CA officially advocating a religious ideology and enjoying relatively strong public support was recently disbanded and banned. As a result, the practice of religious re-partization, quite unique for a post-Soviet country, was discontinued, which, in turn, makes an interesting case in itself for the study and analysis of the prospects for the development of parties and of democracy in general in this region.

In Kazakhstan parties have greater freedoms and opportunities for influencing the political processes, but these too are not as yet truly independent institutions and are dependent on state power. Parties in this country are drawn towards 'chieftain-style' organisations, formally with an ideology but not attaching any great importance to it. The 'chieftain-style' character of the Kazakh parties is expressed in the fact that, in the eyes of the electorate, each party is strongly associated with a specific politician-leader. In this connection, the 'chieftain' of practically any party is obliged, to one extent or other, to express his loyalty to the supreme authority of the country.

In Kyrgyzstan parties have a greater measure of independence and ability to exert influence on the formation of political trends and projects than in the other CA countries. Here, just as in Kazakhstan, the parties are more 'chieftain-like' and not system-based (based on ideological principles). Furthermore, the parties in Kyrgyzstan, having a greater level of freedom than anywhere in CA and to some extent emerging from direct dependence on the government in power, have become dependent, to a significant degree, on corrupt and sometimes even criminal groups, which use the parties in their attempts to gain power and form oligarchic groups.

On the whole, the following problems, which have an impact on the effectiveness of their activities, are typical of the political parties of all countries of CA:

- the inadequate development of the civil society;
- the propensity of the country's leaders for authoritarian rule and the reluctance to allow the development of political pluralism;



- the parties' weak articulation, that is, the recognition, formulation and expression of their interests. As a result of the increasing differentiation of society and the emergence of multiple social strata, people are unable to adapt their own needs to their position in society, and hence express and defend them;
- the non-compliance of the process of the re-partization of social awareness with the fundamental laws of social development, which is expressed in some cases in the excessive support for a pluralistic political environment, in which only an authentic party system can develop, and in other cases an excessive vulgarisation of the ideas of pluralism, reducing the values of liberalism and democracy to the same level;
- the 'polynuclear' nature of society, i.e. the presence, according to Furnivall's theory, of various groups living within the same territory but socially distant from each other<sup>18</sup>;
- the deficiency or absence of a responsible political elite in the country;
- in many cases, the inconsistency of law making in matters of the legal institutionalisation of the parties;
- economic problems, which make it difficult to build democratic institutions and procedures;
- the corruption, growth and consolidation of oligarchic groups, for whom democratic processes, transparent and honest elections and democratically functioning political parties are not necessary.

Clearly, it will only be possible to talk about the formation and functioning of effective parties and a robust party system in each individual country of CA after several cycles of honest and free elections have been held. For honest and free elections to be held, however, it will be necessary to under-

go a defined and far from simple process of developing both power and civil society.

As matters stand now, the unwillingness of the authorities to cooperate with their opponents, observed almost everywhere in the CA states spills over into direct and indirect pressure on political opponents for the purpose of limiting their rights and excluding them from the political struggle. The forms and methods of exclusion from the political struggle are varied:

- the manipulation of legal provisions and the use of double standards, where the same provisions are applied differently, depending on the will of the authorities;
- the use of administrative resources against competitors.

The list of methods could be continued but, in essence, they remain the same - the refusal to recognise the right of opponents to an alternative point of view and the unwillingness to compete with them in accordance with democratic principles. A democratic system should, by definition, permit and even promote different points of view and the identification of problems. In situations where problems are not identified and the authorities, ignoring alternative opinions, only consider themselves correct, conflicts never go away, but their peaceful and effective resolution is a problem. The inability to engage in open political competition and resolve conflicts results in threats to society as well as the authorities themselves. For the authorities this is dangerous because, in the eyes of the public, their legitimacy is diminished, while the opposing forces, because they are unable to 'play by the rules', start to turn to illegal methods for carrying on the struggle.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. J.S. Furnivall *Colonial Policy and Practice: A Comparative Study of Burma and Netherlands India*. - Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1948. - P.304.



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## FOR NOTES

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**Central Asia:  
The 'Silk Democracy' Region.  
Political Parties.**

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