
PROBLEMS AND FUNDAMENTALS OF STABILITY IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract

The article focuses on the stability issue in the countries of Central Asia as the main obstacle to their successful development. The number of factors that influence remarkably the stability of foreign and domestic policy of the countries in the region is substantially big. These comprise the ethnic factor, the factor of Islam, the socio-economic factor, the factor of clans, the factor of the authorities and finally, the external factor. Each of them is significant in its own way, and they all are inextricably entwined. The key factor of (in-) stability in the countries of Central Asia is the relations variable between the clans and the authorities. The fundamental practical and academic novelty of the conception of the long-term stability of Central Asian countries put forward in the present article is in the idea that the core of the issue of stability and successful development of the countries of the region is concealed in the absence of equilibrium of interests of the authorities and the clans in the sphere of decision-making and implementation at the national level. The practical probability, viability and success of this system of power relations in Central Asian countries are demonstrated by the example of Kazakhstan. The author proposes to characterize it as “sociopolitical corporatism”.

Introduction

Contemporary Central Asia (CA) is a (geo)politically and (geo)economically important region. At the same time it is a rather problematic region, in which the existing and potential foci of instability reveal themselves concurrently in many dimensions, both domestic and foreign. It should be pointed out, however, that both Western and Russian scholars examine Central Asia primarily from the perspective of foreign policy. Meanwhile the majority of domestic processes of the countries of the region remain outside the scope of their interest. The objectives of the present article are as follows: (a) to trace

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domestic and foreign determinative factors of Central Asia; (b) to uncover the core of the instability problem in the region, which essentially is decisive for it, and to attempt to suggest ways of its solution. It has to be pointed out that the present article does not intend to be universal and may be viewed as a reference macro-level (macro-sociological and macro-political) framework contributing to further detailed analysis of questions and problems discussed below.

1. The problem of the regional research approach to Central Asia

The boundaries of Central Asia as an international region are extremely ill-defined. In principle, there are two ways to delineate the region to a greater or lesser extent: these are natural-geographical and politico-geographical. In their article “Middle or Central Asia”, Alekseyeva and Ivanova state the following: “As can be seen, the regional division of Asia as used in Soviet cartography of the 20th c. was largely based on the natural zoning of this large mainland with its foundations dating back to the latter half of the 19th c. At present, given the regional division of continents and their parts, cultural-civilizational and politico-geographical formations increasingly come to the fore. Frequently they do not coincide with the naturally determined boundaries or replace them”.¹ Thus since the summit of the heads of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, which took place in 1993 in Tashkent, the concept “Central Asia” has comprised the five aforementioned Asian Caspian states of the former USSR in their contemporary political borders. If the borders of the region are to be defined from the natural-geographical perspective, the term “Middle Asia” seems more appropriate as it also covers the near-border territories of the former Asiatic republics of the Soviet Union. “Historically Central Asia, as defined today, has strong cultural, political and economic ties to areas south and east of the current five states. The northern part of Afghanistan and the Xinjiang province in western China are today largely populated by groups that

¹ N.N.Alekseyeva and I.S.Ivanova, “Middle or Central Asia”, <http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20071215093042836>, 24 12 2007. The reader is also invited to consider a response article: Lazarevich K.S., “So is it *Middle* or *Central*? Zoning and geographical terminology revisited”, <<http://geo.1september.ru/articlef.php?ID=200303004>>, 22 02 2008

are closely tied to the Central Asian cultural and linguistic groups. Uighurs are for example the second largest ethnic group in Central Asia after the Uzbeks, the largest ethnic community in the region with large minority groups and political interests in all Central Asian states”.² The present article views “Central Asia” as a politico-geographical concept that subsumes Central Asian Republics of the former USSR (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan).

However, this immediately gives rise to important questions concerning the possibility of applying the regional research approach to examine the present region, since its degree of internal unity is extremely low. In principle, Central Asia may be viewed as a conglomerate of very different states. In practice Kazakhstan develops as a “managed democracy” with a liberal component. As of today, Kyrgyzstan is an islet of ex-democracy moving toward authoritarianism. In the case of Turkmenistan, the country has in its recent past a globally unique example of the personality cult of the leader, and no clarity regarding the future of the country. In principle, one might say that, under the rule of Gurbangula Berdymuhammedov, the country is slowly turning into an Uzbek- or Tajik-type regime, which are characterized by a fairly well expressed one-man authoritarian rule.

These differences are made even more apparent by the lack of interest of Central Asian countries in the development of regional cooperation.³ For example, rather than develop a single regional market capable of facilitating inclusion in global economy, the CA states resorted to harsh protectionism, which particularly affects countries that do not possess strategically important natural

² Swanström N., Cornell S. E., Tabyshalieva A., “A Strategic Conflict Analysis of Central Asia With a Focus on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan”, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, June 1, 2005, p.1, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/docs/publications/2005/SIDA_CA.pdf>, 11 02 2007. Attempts have also been made to incorporate Central Asia in the geographical and cultural frames of the *Greater Near East*, however, this position seems objectionable already based on the fact that the concept of the greater Near East is not conceptually finished and adequately developed itself. See Павловский Г. О. (Ed.), *Киргизский переворот, март-апрель* (Kyrgyz Upheaval: March-April) 2005 г., Москва: Изд-во «Европа». 2005, p. 109–113.

³ According to John Heathershaw: «In Central Asia nostalgia for the USSR and frequent proclamations in favour of cooperation and even integration contrast with practices which thwart cooperation and risk desintegration». See: Heathershaw J., “New Great Game or Same Old Ideas? Neo-sovietism and the International Politics of Imagining ‘Central Asia’” in Dusseault D., ed., *The CIS: Form or Substance?*, Finland (Aleksanteri Papers): Gummerus Printing, 2007, p. 237.

reserves, which, if sold (at least to a certain extent) could make for the insufficient development of other sectors of economy. Another relevant example illustrating insufficient regional cooperation is the problem of water management of the region and the hydro-energy sphere. The essence of the problem is in the fact that oil and gas reserves are mainly focused in the Western part of CA (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan), while water resources, which are crucial for all CA states, are located in the East (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan). As of today, the “growing” Kazakhstan would like Kyrgyzstan to produce more hydro-energy. However Uzbekistan, whose territory with respect to the sea level is located beneath Kyrgyzstan, is sceptical in this case, fearing limits on its irrigational capacities⁴. Experts forecast that in the future the water issue may grow into a global scale, and water will cost as oil does now, or even more. In this light Central Asia faces an unenviable dilemma, particularly given the fact that CA states do not seek continuous and constructive cooperation, and avoid the assistance of the international community in the resolution of this issue. This is why it is not impossible that, in the long run, water may become the reason of a military conflict in Central Asia.⁵

Therefore it is not surprising that individual scholars prefer not to regard Central Asia as an integral region, and at best view it as a geographic and partially social monolith. Rather than preserve and enhance the socioeconomic and political relations built in the times of the Soviet Union, from the outset of their independence (which essentially came as a surprise to both the population and the elite) the states of the region started to view each other as competitors and even as enemies in the pursuit of strengthening their exceptional significance. State leaders (former Secretaries General of local Communist parties),

⁴ In general, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, CA industry plunged into crisis, and agriculture had to be intensified. As a result in 1995-2000 the areas of irrigated soils in the region, Uzbekistan in particular, significantly increased. Besides agricultural needs water is of particular necessity (the same, in fact, is true of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) to grow cotton, whose sales returns constitute a major part of budget of the country (and its elites). For more information please see: «Хлопковое проклятие: разрушительная монокультура Центральной Азии» (Cotton curse: the destructive monoculture of Central Asia”), *ICG Азия, Доклад № 93, 2005*, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/library/documents/asia/central_asia/russian_translations/093_curse_of_cotton_web_rus_final.pdf>, 11 02 2007.

⁵ For more information please see: “Central Asia: Water and Conflict”, *ICG Asia Report № 34, 2002*, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?id=1440&l=1>>, 11 02 2007.

emerging politicians as well as ordinary citizens were obsessed by the idea. This is particularly true of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, each of which sought (and seeks) to become a regional leader⁶.

In any case, however, the author of the present article believes that the regional approach to the research of Central Asia is nevertheless possible. Essentially, the main problem of CA is to attain a sustainable political and socioeconomic development by means of adequate goals that take into account the specificity of the region. In the opinion of the author of this study, it is to be the starting point in finding ways out from the crisis situation, which to a greater or lesser extent is forming in the majority of countries of the region.⁷ Each one of them is unique in its own way. This is why the conception proposed in the sections that follow has to be analyzed in each case taking into consideration local specificity. However, since all internal and external factors of (in-)stability examined within the framework of the present conception regardless of their local peculiarities can be seen in each of the countries of the region taken individually, one may raise the question of their significance on the regional scale (e.g., the role and specificity of Islam in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are different, but as such this factor is relevant for the entire CA region). Their identification and problem statement should be the starting point of the analysis. This will be the basis for further presentation of the proposed stability formula, which as a whole may be regarded as being regionally universal.

2. Internal and external stability factors in Central Asia

It should be noted from the outset that the problem of regional and national stability in Central Asia is primarily of the internal nature, i.e., first of all, it depends on the actions of the leadership of the countries of the region within

⁶ In this light one must mention the Kazakh project of the Central Asia Union, which in the foreseeable future cannot have any particular perspectives. See: Майкова Г., «Центральная Азия: цена казахских интеграционных проектов», <G. Maikova “Central Asia: the price of Kazakh integration projects”, <<http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20070504031700955&mode=print>>, 09 05 2007.

⁷ To understand the extent of instability in the region suffice it to remember the Civil war in Tajikistan, the consequences of which are largely present in the country, the “Tulip Revolution” in Kazakhstan and bloody events in Uzbek Andijan.

the domestic limits. However, the role of the external factor is also significant in this case, since the geopolitical competition between various external powers (primarily between Russia, China, USA, and EU) first, in the case of its acute escalation, may turn the CA states into the hostages of the “big game” of geopolitical giants and thus contribute to domestic destabilization; and secondly, it exerts influence on integration processes in the region, which in the long-term, if successful, would contribute to its stabilization.

2.1. Russia and China as guarantors of regional stability in Central Asia

For foreign actors in Central Asia the issues of (geo)political influence (of security) and energy are of utmost importance. Meanwhile, whenever possible, Central Asian states attempt at pursuing a multi-vector foreign policy that oscillates between these external forces, but due to objective and subjective reasons they are more inclined to rapprochement with Russia and China rather than with the US and Europe.

Until recently the chances of the US to solidify in the Central Asian region were rather illusory. On the one hand, military bases in Central Asia form a strategic place of arras in several directions at the same time, such as Russia, China and Iran (and in the long term, possibly Pakistan). These are all direct geopolitical competitors of the US, and the latter is not interested in their enhancement in either global or regional scale. The Eurasian Economic Community (EEC), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁸ are essentially seeking to deunify the region and pursue a policy targeting bilateral, rather than multilateral, relations with the CA states. Besides, the US takes certain interest in the energy resources of the region, which it would like to direct in the westward direction bypassing Russia and China in order to deprive Moscow of another lever of pressure on allied Europe and to let down the economic development of China. However, reality shows that, in the course of implementing its plans

⁸ The Eurasian Economic Community subsumes Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan (the latter has suspended its membership), Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Currently in the framework of the EEC Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan are actively establishing the Tariff Union. Members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization are Armenia, Belarus, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Russia and China dominate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, other members being Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

in the region, the US faces serious obstacles (for example, the military base in Uzbekistan has been lost, while Kyrgyzstan authorities constantly demand more money for rent. Such situation is stipulated by a number of reasons. First of all, Central Asia is found essentially on the periphery of American global interests (for instance, in comparison to Near East). Due to this the US is unwilling to spend its precious resources on the “big game” in it (particularly given the grave economic crisis in the US itself) competing with Russia and China, for which the CA region is found among paramount priorities. Thus in this respect the US has no clear strategy. In their study Olga Oliker and David Shlapak from the Corporation RAND state the following: “The United States has not been particularly forthcoming with a discussion of its plans, (...) they remain amorphous (...)”⁹ Secondly, the US does not wish to interfere in the domestic jealousies of the region’s countries where the leaders of these countries attempt at entangling it (on their side, of course), nor to become a hostage of these processes. Finally, in terms of energy the significance of Central Asia particularly for the US is extremely doubtful: the resources of the region are hard to access both at present and in the long term, and even given their accessibility they would only constitute a minor part in the gigantic energy import of the US.

Certain advances in US policy with respect to Central Asia may take place after the accession of Barack Obama who intends to come to grips with the problem of Afghanistan bordering the region. He may succeed in disrupting the tentative negative tendency of “leaving”. However (a) the opportunity has largely been passed, and (b) the Administration will most likely have to bring countries of the region in contact via Moscow rather than on the mutual basis, since the fear to exasperate Russia prevents the states of Central Asia from closer ties with Western countries until those countries put forward clear proposals and guarantees that would justify the political (which also subsumes security issues) and financial (Russia is already buying Central Asian gas at the market prices) risk to damage relations with Moscow. At present neither the US nor Europe are able to provide them with such proposals and guarantees.

As for the EU, it may be said that the European Union is still on the quest for optimal model of relations with the countries of Central Asia, which, as

⁹ Oliker O., Shlapak D., „U.S. interests in Central Asia: policy priorities and military roles“, *RAND Corporation*, 2005, p. 30. <www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/2005/RAND_MG338.pdf>, 14 11 2008.

in the case of the US, essentially are on the periphery of its interests in comparison to intra-block priorities and relations with the neighbouring countries. The strategic interests of the EU in the region have not been fully defined, while principles and mechanisms of the pursued policy are not sufficiently effective. The development of energy cooperation with the countries of the region may be referred to as the main goal of the Europeans in Central Asia, besides enhancing stability by applying the strategy of “tender force” (which the European Union essentially is), as is explained by the wish of the EU to diversify its energy import and lessen dependence on resource supply from Russia (seen as a potential threat to its energy security). However Europe’s policy in this direction, as well as the plans on the implementation of the Nabucco project, face certain obstacles of general and specific nature: geopolitical heterogeneity, institutional awkwardness and excessive bureaucratization extremely complicating the process of strategic decision-making; the inability to sacrifice value (democratic) benchmarks for the sake of attaining palpable pragmatic goals, and finally, tough competition on the part of Russia and China (which are absolutely comfortable on the political arena of Central Asia) prevent the EU from acting effectively. This is why, for example, Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov (let alone Kazakhstan’s President Nursultan Nazarbayev, who keeps announcing his readiness for partnership with Russia on the basis of the conception of the Eurasian politico-economic Commonwealth) even regardless of the fact that recently Uzbekistan has “suspended” (in fact terminated) its membership in EEC substantiating this decision by dissatisfaction with the cooperation results in the framework of this organization (even though it was largely an obstacle to economic integration itself) and concurrently started again to look for ways of drawing closer to the West (in particular, it reached lifting of most sanctions imposed by the EU), during Russian President Dmitry Medvedev’s visit to Uzbekistan stated: “Uzbekistan sells gas to Russia and only to Russia, while where and how it supplies gas from there is Russia’s exclusive competence”¹⁰. This is why the Caspian gas pipe project has good chances

¹⁰ For detailed information see: Дульман П., «Эксперты расценивают договорённости о строительстве Прикаспийского газопровода как внешнеполитическую победу России» (*Experts view the agreements on the construction of Caspian gas pipe as Russia’s victory in foreign policy*), *Российская газета* (Федеральный выпуск) № 4363, 15 05 2007, <www.rg.ru/2007/05/15/experty.html>, 11 07 2007; ««Южный поток» и Прикаспийский газопровод отменяются?» (*“South Stream” and Caspian gas pipe cancelled?*), <http://www.eegas.com/gen_schem1r.htm> 12 01 2009

for being implemented, and in the long term (if need be)¹¹ the South Stream pipeline project rather than the Nabucco project.

In this way the obvious conclusion is that at present and in the future Russia and China are the main foreign forces in the region. One can safely assume that both these forces have stakes in the common regional and national stability of Central Asia.¹² This is primarily explained by the fact that both Moscow and Beijing desperately need energy resources of this region. Moscow needs them in order to re-export Central Asian gas and oil to the West, while Beijing – for further upward tendency of the country. However it is this fact that may become a precondition for their contest for Central Asia. Besides, both Russia and China may be seeking geopolitical dominance in this region which, alongside the struggle between Moscow and Beijing for its resources, may potentially destabilize it, as in this case Central Asian states would essentially become hostages of the “battle of the giants”. Nevertheless one may hazard a guess that for several reasons the conflict of interests between Russia and China in Central Asia may be averted in the long-term. First, Moscow and Beijing share the wish to oust Western competitors, primarily, the US, from the region. Secondly, with respect to China’s actions in Central Asia one should point out that so far in the region it acts without *excessive* (aggressive) activity thus seeking not to lower the boom on Russia (particularly in the spheres where its interests can be clearly seen), in order not to jeopardize cooperation with Moscow in other areas in the framework of bilateral relations. It is establishing an energy dialogue with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, but this does not affect the expansion of energy relations of these countries with Russia. Finally, unlike Russia, China virtually has no intentions for geopolitical leadership in the region due to the fact that at present it is merely unnecessary (meanwhile the CA countries view its potential leadership with far more apprehension than similar Russia’s claims, whose contribution into their development during the Soviet times has not been buried in oblivion). All it is interested in is stable energy

¹¹ «Медведев и Каримов договорились о поставках узбекского газа» (*Medvedev and Karimov agree on Uzbek gas supplies*), 23 января 2009 г., <<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=245124>>, 25 01 2009

¹² Primarily Russia’s role specifically in the domestic political processes of Central Asian countries will be discussed below. This part of the article views geopolitical competition of external forces primarily as a factor of regional stability.

import from the CA countries, while geopolitical competition with Moscow (which in the framework of CSTO essentially volunteered to become the main guarantor of regional security: recently the decision on the establishment of CSTO Rapid Reaction Force has been made¹³, which suits Beijing just fine) in this region may put the attainment of this goal at risk, while China has always been very cautious in its foreign policy and sought to avert emergence of even minor threats to the implementation of its plans (it would be quite a different matter if Moscow turned out to be absolutely incapable of playing the leading stabilizing force in CA, which is questionable).

In this way one may fairly safely state that, at least in the medium term, regional stability in Central Asia should not give rise to concern, since the probability of marked aggravation of acute geopolitical struggle between foreign forces in the region as a source of its destabilization is rather negligible both at present and in the long term. To date and likely for a long while Russia will be the guarantor of this security; and if it fails to cope with the undertaken function, which the CA countries seem not to oppose in the least, it will be overtaken by China, always careful and on the fence. The factors of domestic (in-)stability in the countries of the region are quite a different matter.

2.2. Domestic instability factors in Central Asian countries

There is a fairly big number of factors that have profound impact on the domestic stability of the countries of the region. Each of them has its own significance, and they are all inextricably entwined.

The key intra-regional instability factors in the CA states primarily have to do with the negative socioeconomic processes. The economic situation and absolute indicators of economic growth of the countries of the region look quite well, yet ordinary people do not feel the outcomes of economic progress (except for, perhaps, Kazakhstan), since the rich are becoming richer, while the status of the poor either remains the same or is even deteriorating. In this case suffice it to note that poverty level in Tajikistan constitutes 56,6%, in Kyrgyzstan – 47,6%, in Turkmenistan – 29,9%, in Kazakhstan – 27,9%,

¹³ «Медведев: военные силы ОДКБ будут не хуже НАТО» (“Medvedev: Military forces CSTO will be no worse than those of NATO”), February 04, 2009, <<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=249914>>, 05 02 2009.

in Uzbekistan – 27,5%.¹⁴ According to President of the Institute for Public Muratbek Imanaliev, “The low performance of the countries’ economies, along with the fragmented nature of integration into global economic relations, remains a serious issue”. In his opinion, the development of the CA economy is slow, unstable and unpredictable.¹⁵ Alongside specific demographic problems economic difficulties build serious pressure on the political system of the countries of the region as they generate and enhance political and religious extremism and ethnic tension.

Table 1. **Key economic indicators of CA countries**

	Per capita GDP (in thousands of US dollars)	General GDP indicators (in bn of US dollars)	Forecasts on GDP growth (in per cent)	Direct outward investments (in per cent of GDP)	Population in agriculture, industry, services (in per cent)	Inflation (in per cent)
Kazakhstan	10,4	102	8,7	25,4	32/18/50	10,8
Kyrgyzstan	2	3,5	6,5	17,2	55/15/30	6,4
Tajikistan	1,7	3,7	7,8	15	67/8/25	20
Turkmenistan	9,2	26,2	7	21,2	48/14/38	11,3
Uzbekistan	2,2	20,2	8,1	-	44/20/36	16

Source: The World Fact Book, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/tx.html>>, 02 10 2008.

The role of the factor of religious (Islamic) extremism as such should not be overestimated. In the article “The Islamic factor in CA: a hypothetic or real threat?” Oleg Sidorov states that “As a serious destabilizing force in the

¹⁴ “Macroeconomic overview: Development prospects of Central Asian region”, Analytical Centre *Avesta Research (AC)*, August 31, 2006, <http://www.avestagroup.com/lib/research/mer_310806r.pdf>, 02 10 2007

¹⁵ Imanaliev M., “Central Asia: challenges and responses”, <<http://ipp.kg/en/analysis/275-5-09-2006>>, 31-01-2007. For additional reference see also: Dowling M., Wignaraja G., “Central Asia’s Economy: Mapping Future Prospects”, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program*, 2006, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/silk_road.htm>, 11 02 2007; Миграция Л. А., «Миграция как фактор риска в сфере экономической безопасности стран Центральной Азии» (Migration as a risk factor in the sphere of economic security of the countries of Central Asia), <http://www.knyazev.org/stories/html/chang_260109.shtml> 15 01 2009

region the Islamic factor has played its role several times: in the course of the civil war in Tajikistan (1991-1992), during the Batken events in Kyrgyzstan and during invasion attempts of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) militants in Uzbekistan (1999-2000), during the aggravation of the Taliban threat (in the late 1990s), during Andijan events in Uzbekistan (2005). But generally it should be pointed out that in their nature Islam-related threats were not so much foreign as domestic, i.e., they were not brought about by foreign interference of Islamic countries, but rather a consequence of the contradictions within the domestic policy and complicated socioeconomic situation within the countries of Central Asia".¹⁶ At present one may state with fair degree of confidence that religious and extremist organizations in the countries of the region, including the IMU and Hizb Ut-Tahrir are atomistic and socially marginal due to the fact that in principle, radical Islam based on the Wahhabi doctrine has never been particularly popular in the CA states: the Sufism branch of Islam was traditionally dominant, while Islamic extremism existed exclusively due to complicated socioeconomic situation and limited foreign support.¹⁷ This allows one to state that the religious radicals would not be able to mobilize masses exclusively on the basis of their ideas. According to Murat Khadjimukhamedov, Deputy Director of Uzbek Public Opinion Centre, "One should not forget that Middle Asia is a region of ancient culture, and this is why here is a miscellany of various philosophical and other teachings. This is why the majority of people do not regard Islam as a political force, and those who speak about Islamic state are mostly engaged in politics".¹⁸ Meanwhile

¹⁶ Сидоров О., «Исламский фактор в ЦА гипотетическая или реальная угроза?», (Sidorov, O. "Islamic factor in CA: a hypothetical or real threat?" <www.gazeta.kz/art.asp?aid=73449>, 05 12 2008. For additional information please also see: Малашенко А., Олкотт М.Б., (сост.), *Ислам на постсоветском пространстве: взгляд изнутри*. (Malashenko, A. and M. B. Olcott (Eds). *Islam in the Post-Soviet space: a look from inside*) Москва (Моск Центр Карнеги): Арт-Бизнес-Центр, 2001, <<http://www.carnegie.ru/ru/pubs/books/19940107am2-full.pdf>>, 11 02 2007; De Cordier B., "Seeing demons where there are none". <http://www.thinking-east.net/site/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=141&Itemid=56> 04 11 2008.

¹⁷ In this light one could refer to: Бабаджанов Б. М., «Суфизм – альтернатива терроризму?» (Sufism – an alternative to terrorism?) <<http://www.knyazev.org/biblio/Sufism-polit.pdf> >, 03 02 2009.

¹⁸ Хаджимухамедов М., «Центраальноазиаты не жили в исламском государстве никогда» ("Central Asians have never lived in the Islamic state"), Мейер М. М. (сост.), *Средняя Азия: Андижанский сценарий?* (*Middle Asia: Andijan scenario?*), Москва Изд-во «Европа», 2005, p. 103.

the leaders of CA countries find it beneficial to exploit the issue of religious extremism, primarily in order to justify their repressive actions with respect to political opponents.

A similar situation exists in the sphere of ethnic relations.¹⁹ The history of this issue is such that the formal ethnic origin was introduced to Central Asia in the Soviet times. According to Martha B. Olcott, a long-standing researcher of the region, “eventually the question of who was who in Central Asia was resolved by Joseph Stalin. In the 1920s in a somewhat arbitrary way he cut Russian colonial acquisitions in Central Asia into five Soviet Republics. Their administrative borders were altered many times and were drawn in such a way so as to leave large groups of “Irredentists” scattered across the region. When in 1991 these republics had gained their independence, it turned out that literally millions of residents of Central Asia live outside their national states. Similarly to the majority of external observers, leaders of Central Asia feared that these national borders might be unstable. They were apprehensive of the fact that numerous claims for various territories might prompt the inherently restless local population to take up arms. Yet in reality there were virtually no interethnic collisions in Central Asia following the collapse of the Soviet Union. (...) Civil war in Tajikistan did not grow into an ethnic conflict even though it broke out due to the regional issue. Moreover, conflicts between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the southern part of Kirgizia in 1990 were effectively terminated, just as not so large conflicts between Tajiks and Kyrgyz in 1989 around the distribution of water. Despite all the speeches of leaders of Central Asia on the bellicosity of their peoples, in the early years of independence competition in the region generally proceeded in a peaceful way”.²⁰ Having traced

¹⁹ Ethnic composition of Kazakhstan is as follows: Kazakhs – 53,4 %, Russians – 30 %, Ukrainians – 3,7 %, Uzbeks – 2,5 %, Germans – 2,4 %, Uyghur – 1 %; Ethnic composition of Kyrgyzstan is as follows: Kyrgyz – 64,9 %, Uzbeks – 13,8 %, Russians – 12,5 %, Uyghur – 1 %; Ethnic composition of Tajikistan: Tajiks – 79,9 %, Uzbeks – 15,3 %, Russians – 1 %, Kyrgyz – 1 %; Ethnic composition of Turkmenistan: Turkmens – 85 %, Uzbeks – 5 %, Russians – 4 %; Ethnic composition of Uzbekistan: Uzbeks – 80 %, Russians – 5,5 %, Tajiks – 5 %, Kazakhs – 3 %, Karakalpaks – 2,5 %. See: The World Fact Book, <<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2075.html>>, 02 10 2008.

²⁰ Олкотт М. Б., *Второй шанс Центральной Азии* (A Second Chance of Central Asia), Москва: Фонд Карнеги за международный мир (Carnegie Endowment for Peace), 2005, p. 32-33, <<http://www.carnegie.ru/ru/pubs/books/>>, 11 02 2007

subsequent independent development of the countries of the region, Kathleen Collins, another famous scholar examining issues of Central Asia, states the following: “Yet, perhaps surprisingly in light of the literature’s expectations, ethnicity does not explain two major issues of the Central Asian transitions: the durability or collapse of the regimes, and the failure of democratization and the rise of authoritarianism”.²¹ In the long-term perspective the risk of conflict emergence on the basis of ethnic antipathy in Central Asia certainly persists. This is particularly true of the Ferghana Valley and its prevailing confrontation between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz. However, horizontal transnational social and economic (cross-border trade) ties as well as a long-standing tradition of peaceful coexistence have helped mitigate the problem of ethnic heterogeneity at length. In this way, to date there is essentially no threat of a major intra-national and/or inter-state conflict on ethnic grounds as such (viewed separately from other instability factors) in Central Asia. Except, perhaps, someone actively and purposefully decides to aggravate the situation in this sphere.

Being an exceptional differentiating feature of the CA countries, clan culture is a far more significant conflict factor. Issues of resource distribution and influence among the clans constantly generate covert struggle that may be superimposed on various ethnic, sub-ethnic, political and other processes.

American political and cultural scientist Frederick Starr, Head of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute at Johns Hopkins University, proposes the following classification of clans²²: clans based on blood kinship (in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan); regional clans formed on the basis of compact settlements (in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan); finally, economic (oligarchic) clans found in all coun-

²¹ Collins K., *Clan Politics and Regime Transformation in Central Asia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 57.

²² Starr F. S., “Clans, Authoritarian Rulers, and Parliaments in Central Asia“, *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program*. A Joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center, 2005, p. 7-8, <http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/silk_road.htm>, 11 02 2007. For more detailed information on clans of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan please see the following: Оленев М., «РОДЫ И КЛАНЫ СРЕДНЕЙ АЗИИ» (“Genera and clans of Central Asia”), *Генеалогия* № 5, 2006, <<http://www.whoiswho.ru/russian/Curnom/52006/klan.htm>>, 02 12 2008. For information on Kazakh clans please see: Kolsto P., *Political construction sites: nation building in Russia and the Post-Soviet states*, Colorado: Westview Press, 2000, p. 7, 47-51, 124-125.

tries of the region. The core of the latter is in the management of strategically important areas of economy and/or illegal business, particularly narcotics.²³

This classification is largely tentative: in reality, there are no clans of the aforementioned types in their “pure form”. Thus, for example, in Kyrgyzstan, kinship clans intertwine with the territorial dichotomy “North-South”, while Kazakh “Great”, “Middle” and “Little” *jüz* (hordes) are reported to prevail in the South, North-East and North-West of the country respectively. In other words, lineal clans are expressed in one or another regional way, starting from, for instance, an aul or kishlak, to a geographical region (whose boundaries do not necessarily coincide with administrative borders). However a more relevant point is of a different sort. Essentially all the so-called oligarchs of Central Asia are also representatives of blood kinship or regional clans, i.e. material identity is closely linked to the clan identity. In the countries of the region clan groups evolve depending on changes of political and economic circumstances. One should point out that, though preserving its meaningfulness, the traditional entity element is gradually losing its importance. Its relevance today is still fairly visible at the local level, with reference to the solution of certain social problems. As far as the big time politics is concerned, to the fore comes not so much the clan or generic identity as an “influence resource” in a certain environment (political, economic, criminal, mass media, etc.). In this way, clans in Central Asia are transnational oligar-

²³ Drug trafficking is an urgent problem of the region. To date Central Asia is the main trans-shipment point of drug traffic from Afghanistan. Bordering Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the Ferghana Valley may be regarded as an important junction point of the international drug trafficking system. “Drug” money is one of the sources of subsistence of local religious extremists, yet neither the only one nor the main one. This is why one cannot state with confidence that the reduction of the volume of drug trade may help cope with Islamic extremism, and vice versa. The main problem is in the fact that most influential criminal regional and international groups as well as high-ranking officials of the region are involved in drug trafficking. Should research be conducted, heads of serious people will roll, and serious interests will suffer. One could of course attempt at dealing with Afghanistan, the parent of evil, however, since the beginning of counter-terrorist operation of the USA, opium manufacture in Afghanistan has by no means decreased, and rather, has broken every imaginable record... For more information please see: Swanström N., Cornell S. E., Tabyshaliyeva A., “The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?” *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly* 4 (1), 2006, p. 37-67, <www.silkroadstudies.org/new/docs/CEF/Quarterly/February_2006/Svante_Cornell.pdf>, 11 02 2007; „Drugs and Conflict”, *ICG Asia Report* 25, 2001, <<http://www.crisisgroup.org/home/index.cfm?l=1&id=1430>>, 11 02 2007.

chic semi-criminal groups, partially related through blood kinship and/or territorial ties, attempting to influence the political life of the countries of the region by satisfying their economic interests.

In addition, the clan issue in Central Asia is complicated by the fact that in all countries of the region the presidential retinue (family and associates) acts as an independent clan-structure, while economic and political life is not primarily based on laws, but rather on informal (yet established) rules of the game (to a greater or lesser extent, – as, for example, in Kazakhstan, where President intends to introduce his country to a number of Western countries; yet still the main tendency is exactly as described). The essence of this problem is in the mentality of the leaders of the states and their political environment (including the opposition), which formed as early as in the Soviet times. The main threat for them is to lose power (as such as well as in the sense of corruption), and they do everything to preserve it, coming to a halt in the presence of any unions and repressions:²⁴

- Rejection of democratic reforms and fostering presidency institution (the majority of leaders have prolonged their tenure through referendum). A monocrat (or at best several representatives of authority), rather than the political system, becomes the guarantor of stability. The fact that a certain country has a better leader (for example, Kazakhstan, which is more progressive in terms of democratic political and liberal socio-economic reforms than Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) does not mean anything. As a rule, every personified political regime eventually faces antagonism in the form of unregulated public gatherings and speeches destabilizing the situation in the country as a whole (a typical example is a Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution"). It should also be underscored that, upon coming to power under the conditions of the deep-seated Soviet political mentality, leaders of the opposition may become new Karimovs and Akayevs (if they are not like them already) in the long run. This observation is evidenced by present-day President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev who, following the "Tulip Revolution", started intensive consolidation of his personal power.

²⁴ According to J. Heathershaw, the concepts of stability and durability of the regime are defining in the formation of the perception of a strong state in the environment of Central Asian elites as an ability of the political class to dominate over the society and attain personal wealth. See: Heathershaw J., (Note 3) p. 252-254

- Rejection of economic reforms. Former Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akayev more than anyone in the region used to take recommendations of international economic experts into consideration (leaders of other CA countries justify their autonomous economic policy by the fact that foreigners are not familiar with the specificity of the region) and essentially laid down the foundations of democracy in the country. However shortly afterwards his kinship clan and interested retinue saw that market reforms alongside democratic political transformations reduce authority's credentials and hinder accumulation of personal capital. As a result, Kyrgyzstan moved back to authoritarianism and lived through the "Tulip Revolution". To a greater or lesser extent similar logic governs the minds of other leaders of the CA countries as well. In this light the answer to the question "Why given remarkable energy resources cannot Central Asia beat poverty?" becomes obvious. It is so because the profits from export of the resources are distributed among a limited number of individuals (mostly from the president's retinue), who are by no means disposed to share them with anyone else.
- In the sphere of foreign policy hankering after power of leaders of Central Asia is revealed in an unpublicized rule: a good partner is the one who does not question president's authority and helps retain it. Andijan events may serve as an example: Russia and China kept silent, while the United States started to blame Islam Karimov's regime for being non-democratic in nature and violating of human rights (i.e., essentially they called the legitimacy of his regime into question), after which Uzbekistan's President turned his back to the US. The last example of such foreign policy may be seen in the solution of the leadership of Kyrgyzstan, which is now living through hard economic times, to deny America of further rent of the military base "Manas" in the light of a credit worth 2 bn dollars provided by Moscow. However, after the US had offered more finances for the rent, a "cosmetic repair" of the agreement took place, and the base remained at its place.²⁵ In principle, leaders of Central Asia to a

²⁵ Possibly this step of Bishkek was agreed on with Moscow, which had decided to come to terms with the USA in the light of attempts to improve bilateral relations. However, there are grounds to believe that Kyrgyzstan's last decision on the prolongation of the rent of the base has become an unpleasant surprise to Russia. See: «Парламент Киргизии одобрил реформатирование базы "Манас"» (Kirgizia's Parliament has Approved Reformatting of the Base "Manas", <<http://www.lenta.ru/news/2009/06/25/manas/>>, 25 06 2009.

greater or lesser extent, which depends on the durability of the throne, are ready to collaborate with anyone, to give the resources of the country into anyone's hands in pursuit of financial gain and an opportunity to strengthen their regime.

3. Conception of overcoming instability in Central Asian countries

It is not too complicated to distinguish factors of domestic and foreign significance for the CA region, and most analysts successfully cope with this task. However, they frequently stop at that (particularly "external" experts) facing the variety and specificity of meaningful parameters as well as absence of objective and reliable information on the region. As a result, thematic publications on Central Asia rarely filter key factors according to meaning: at best individual factors are analyzed against the context of others (for example, Islamic extremism or socioeconomic situation in the region). Very rarely do scholarly authors offer a specific comprehensive way out of the problematic situation – everything boils down to giving recommendations that are too general in nature. Usually it is stated that CA countries are generally unprepared for democratic transformations due to particular national traditions (or are unprepared at the moment, due to the operation of personified regimes with the archaic Soviet mentality and tendency for authoritarianism). The so-called "non-democratic" versions are not included here as being unsuitable *a priori*. Therefore the democratic model is presented as universal, which, in the case of central Asia, is not fully justified.

As stated above, the present research focuses on the stability issue in the countries of the region. Besides, the author of the article makes a suggestion that long-term political realities of the region should be considered. In other words, to date virtually nothing points to the fact that democratization of political regimes in the Central Asian states is possible either in the middle term or even in the long term as a *potentially* main guarantor of their stability (this cannot be stated with full confidence, and this is also partly the reason why present-day leaders of the CA states do not agree to the "democratic experi-

ment”). This should not be the final point, however. In this light Collins justly notes that: “...most scholars and practitioners of the “third wave” of democracy have focused on building democratic regimes while neglecting the fundamental issue of regime stability. (...) Studying Central Asia forces us to examine *nondemocratic trajectories* – either the rise of new autocracies, or, conversely, regime collapse. These phenomena have received surprisingly little attention in the transitions literature until recently (...).”²⁶ The present study therefore offers to the reader’s attention a conception of *nondemocratic* (at best in the form of “managed democracy”, and at worst – as a rather rigid authoritarianism) *stability* in the countries of Central Asia, however paradoxically it might seem at first sight.

3.1. The relationship variable of clans and authorities as the main stability factor in the countries of Central Asia

Moving on to the detailed presentation of the aforementioned conception, we will start by a brief reminder of the main factors of (in)stability observable in the states of the region. These are the following: the ethnic factor, the factor of Islam, the socioeconomic factor, the factor of clans, the factor of authorities, and, finally, the external factor. To be more precise, the socioeconomic factor may be regarded as the degree of dissatisfaction of the population with their socioeconomic situation, corruption and despotism of the authorities. The factor of authorities is primarily the factor of President’s personality (and his retinue, such as the family in the broad sense of the word and/or government agencies), the proneness of his standpoint to conflict and his readiness for repressions. As for the external factor, its influence on the regional (foreign policy) stability has been illustrated above. In this part of the article it should be regarded as a possibility of interference of the external forces into processes pertaining to domestic policy of the countries of the region.

Moving onto the process of generalization of the situation we can state that, in the context of domestic stability of the CA countries, the ethnic factor, the factor of Islam and the factor of socioeconomic dissatisfaction are of second-

²⁶ Collins K., (note 20) p. 2, 10.

ary importance. As has been demonstrated above, inter-ethnic tensions in the region are relatively low; the ideas of Islamic radicalism are fragmentary and unpopular in the broad masses of the population. In its turn the socio-economic factor as a source of instability may be regarded as negligible due to the fact that the political culture of the citizens of the CA countries is passive since the conditions for the emergence of the civil society were extremely unfavourable from the outset. This is primarily due to the long-term presence of these countries in nondemocratic formations, such as the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, which had had an inherent tradition of suppression of the civil initiative (let alone the issues of active citizenship related to the local – clan-traditions of social organization in Central Asia, which generally did not and do not approve of individual expression of citizenship). Secondly, it is easy to notice that virtually all republics of the Soviet Union are characterized by “a large stock” of social tolerance. Residents of Central Asian countries, who have traditionally been more conservative in their respect for the government institution than the Slavs or Caucasians, are not exception in this respect. Finally, people in the CA states are literally afraid of active expression of their civil standpoint for fear of repressions (both direct and indirect) on the part of the officials. This is why one should not expect changes from “beneath”.

Still, the three aforementioned factors complement and enhance each other, thus forming the so-called block of revolutionary potential. However, this block lacks a “catalyst”.²⁷In principle, this catalyst (revolutionary impetus) could be produced by the activities of local and particularly foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as an instrument of external influence on the situation. This is the external (to a certain extent destabilizing) factor. This is primarily true of the US and other Western countries, which up till now have used mainly non-governmental organizations as an instrument to democratize the region and promote civil society. Concurrently contacts with government agencies have been strictly limited in their aspirations to express in this way their discontent with their nondemocratic essence and pursued policy (which authorities of CA countries regard as humiliation and insult).

²⁷ The term “catalyst for revolution” was introduced by Chalmers Johnson in as early as 1966. See: Johnson C., *Revolutionary Change*, Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1966.

However, practice has shown that the role of NGOs in CA states is negligible while their activities are inefficient. As organizations aiming to foster the foundations of civil society, NGOs do not have solid resources of permanent financing due to the fact that the region is not viewed as promising in the democratic sense (a possible exception is the Kyrgyz “Tulip Revolution”). Therefore NGOs that do not receive support from various funds essentially become for-profit organizations (what runs counter to their essence). Besides, a remarkable part of the resources of NGOs operating in the CA region is spent on salaries of staff and other administrative expenses rather than initiatives centred on the formation of civil society. Finally, non-governmental organizations do not enjoy popular support in Central Asia, let alone the authorities, which regard them almost as “fifth columns”. Attitude like that eventually forces foreign NGOs to leave the CA region. With this respect Frederick Starr states the following: “On the one hand, few members of the broader public in the region consider such “civil society organizations” to be truly indigenous, as they depend almost entirely on <...> foreign-educated locals drawn mainly from the elite of the capitals. On the other hand, members of the governments, especially officials at the local level, see these foreign-sponsored groups as undermining their own authority.”²⁸

For the most part Russia influenced (and influences) the internal processes of the countries of the region by means of direct contacts with the authorities. At the same time Moscow is quite satisfied with the authoritarian regimes of these countries and is prone as far as possible to maintain *status quo*, thus slowing down possible positive changes in the CA states on the one hand, and on the other hand, functioning as a partial guarantor of stability of their regimes. Russia’s logic is approximately the following: the situation is acceptable as it is, even if the country’s regime is not fully loyal to Moscow and is prone to engage in double dealing, as, for example, Uzbekistan; if the decision is made to change something, the situation may change for the worse, therefore, attempts like that are unnecessary. The examples are not far to seek. According to Olcott, cooperation between Russia and Kyrgyzstan “was designed to help Kyrgyzstan become a managed democracy rather than the state which may be regarded as democracy following to Western standards. [...] President’s retinue

²⁸ Starr F. S., (Note 22) p. 15.

made the decision to reject technical assistance from Washington and OSCE instructors and test “managed democracy”. However, Akayev’s Russian advisors may have misadvised him, while Kyrgyz power structures, despite additional training, have failed to provide control over the broader masses”.²⁹ The suppression of an uprising in Andijan has increased Russia’s influence on Uzbekistan. While the US and other Western states hurried to assail President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov with criticism for excessive use of force against peaceful population, Russia and China supported the version of official Tashkent on “Islamists’ insurgence. As a result, Uzbekistan left the pro-Western organization GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova), resumed its membership in CSTO, and, most importantly, signed a treaty of strategic partnership with Russia, which contains an important paragraph stating that, on the basis of individual agreements, the Parties entitle each other to deploy military assets located on their territory. Since it is rather complicated to imagine that Uzbekistan might need Russia’s military assets, the only option remains: it is Tashkent that has pledged to accord Moscow the right to use in the case of necessity its military assets.³⁰ This may be done, for example, to resolve the problems of Karimov’s regime within the country. However, if Russia’s interference into Uzbekistan’s domestic policy processes is possible only in the case of utmost necessity (if only the process of delegating power in the country becomes uncontrolled and posits danger to regional stability), Emomalii Rahmon’s regime in Tajikistan, experts argue, is sustained “at the point of bayonets” of the dislocated Russian 201th Motor Rifle Division that bears the status of a military base.³¹ A number of reasons make the discussion of influence of external forces on the situation in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan unnecessary. Turkmenistan is generally a very closed and neutral country, in which the probability of social perturbations after a successful peaceful change of leadership is minimal, most likely, for many years to come. In its turn Kazakhstan is distinguished by a relatively stable development that satisfies a major part of the population. The country pursues a fairly balanced foreign policy, and in principle, all its foreign partners are happy

²⁹ ОАКОТТ М. Б., (Note 19) p. 172, 176.

³⁰ Дубнов А., «Россия возвращается в Узбекистан как инвестор и стратегический партнер» (“Russia returns to Uzbekistan as an investor and strategic partner”), <<http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=2949>>, 17 06 2007.

³¹ Collins K., (Note 20) p. 293-295.

with it. In short, there is not much need to interfere into the domestic matters of these countries, and to do so would be rather problematic (in the case of Turkmenistan – due to its protection, and in the case of Kazakhstan – due to its significance as a relatively “large” state).

Generalizing the issue of influence of the external factor on domestic policy processes of the countries of Central Asia in terms of stability, one may state that, except Russia, which does not intend to use its leverage on CA countries (which includes the possibility of limiting transit of energy resources across its territory, stiffening of migration policy toward illegal labour migrants from the countries of Central Asia region, whose income largely sustains the existence of the major part of the population of these countries, etc.) in order to destabilize them as it is not beneficial, external forces have rather restricted opportunities in the sense of direct triggering of revolutionary or stabilizing processes in the states of the region. Attempts of Western countries to influence CA through NGOs rather than direct contacts with the government agencies, at least to date have demonstrated its inefficiency. As a result, due to constant pressure from the authorities (even in the formerly relatively democratic Kyrgyzstan) and unpopularity among local population, these organizations either scale down their activities in the CA states, or show very little activity (frequently merely in order to stay). In this way, a conclusion may be made that the main factor of (in)stability in the Central Asian countries is the relations variable between the clans and the authorities. In CA states the authorities are largely a projection of the same clan interests, yet to a certain extent the authorities and clans of Central Asia are nevertheless different subjects not least of all because by becoming authorities, representatives of clan structures have to take of both interests of the clan and nationwide concerns, as this (not only the support of the clan) also stipulates their prospects to remain at their post. Moreover, the factor of the “people’s love” may be successfully exploited in the struggle within the system or clan.

3.3. The dynamics of interests of the authorities and clans in the countries of Central Asia

The balance of interests of clans and the authorities (their relations may also be influenced by external forces by supporting one of the sides in their interests) has to ultimately determine the fate of individual CA states as well as the

region as a whole. Clans could be the control factor of the protesting revolutionary potential “from beneath” (using the tools of informal influence), while the authorities – “from above” (using the so-called administrative resource). In this way the foundations for the sustainable development of the region’s countries would have been laid down. However the core of the problem is in the fact that most often neither the authorities nor the clans are prone to agree with each other and seek to destroy the opponent.

If the authority of President and his “family” wins, we will get a Turkmenian personality-based regime that remains stable while his leader is alive and is capable of ruling the country relatively efficiently (“holding it on leash”). Therefore it is notable that transfer of power in Turkmenistan proceeded relatively “quietly and peacefully”. Yet living with the hope into a “good tsar” does not constitute the basis of long-term sustainable development of the country, especially if this tsar is primarily concerned about his own well-being without giving much thought to the future of his people (until very recently entire Turkmenistan was on gas trade and did not develop advanced manufacture, largely due to the fact that a remarkable part of this profit was spent on keeping the elite of the country). Essentially, only minimal social guarantees and boundless trust of the population in the leadership of the country, most likely based on fear of falling victim to repression, save Turkmenistan from social explosion.

If the authorities turn out to be incapable of surviving a combat with competing clan structures, the outcome will be the same as the “March events” in Kyrgyzstan. There even northern clans took part in the revolution against the “North man” Askar Akayev, which could seem illogical disregarding the fact that the familial clan of presidential power had formed in the country and started to gain momentum. According to Professor Konstantin Syroyezhkin, “Finally it should be pointed out that monopoly of family power of the president and control over the economy have become a serious reason for protests both in the South and in the North, Nearly all profitable business in Kirgizia was controlled by Akayev’s relatives”³². However, having broken the system of clan compromise, President’s family clan failed to hold defensively, and competitors for power as a resource of personal gain roused the people to spontane-

³² ПАВЛОВСКИЙ Г. О. (Ed.), (note 2) p. 107.

ous revolt. Consequently the latter was back to square one (disregarding the opportunity to marauder the shops).

As for Uzbekistan, it witnesses Kyrgyz tendencies of strengthening Samarkand president and his “family” headed by Islam Karimov’s daughter Gulnora, which, naturally, prompts increasingly negative reaction of the people and competing clans (Tashkent, Ferghana, etc.). In this respect the events in Andijan may be considered as certain food for thought. Although the reasons underlying these events were not totally clear, the component of people’s dissatisfaction with the authorities was fairly obvious.

As has been said above, in Tajikistan, while totally ignoring other clans (first of all, that of Leninabad), the monopoly on President’s power, Kulob E.Rahmon, is sustained at the mercy of the Russian military, viz., the 201st Motor Rifle Division, without which the country, which has recently been balancing on the verge of economic collapse and humanitarian catastrophe, could be easily overwhelmed by another civil conflict.

However one cannot disregard the possibility of reaching a consensus between the authorities and clans in all the aforementioned countries (except for Turkmenistan, where all competitors of the authorities were exterminated at the outset of the independence period, and the authorities desperately need to more actively respond to the needs of their people). What kind of consensus it will be is a different issue, as it may have virtually nothing in common with public interests and pursue exclusively egoistic clan interests of the authorities and their competitors, who have a goal to redistribute national resources for their gain (to be more precise, their division among themselves). In one or another form the latter is taking place in Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. As a result, the socioeconomic situation in the country is deteriorating and consequently, the degree of people’s trust in authorities (level of the legitimacy of the regime) approaches its critical mark. This starts the logic mechanism of ruling favourites, which refers to gaining maximum benefit while it may be gained. In critical conditions of maximizing the “profit” all implications of consensus of interests vanish into thin air while all previously concluded agreements, if such did take place, collapse. Eventually the famous prospect of revolutionary change of power emerges and starts to loom on the political horizon.

3.3. Sociopolitical corporatism as the basis for sustainable development of Central Asian countries

In light of the above another question emerges: Can the authorities and the clans reach a consensus that would satisfy not only them, but also public interests, which essentially is the basis of stability in the state and a prerequisite for its successful development (political, economic, social and so on)? It should also be noted with this respect that, having in mind public interests of residents of Central Asian countries, it is not so much political rights and freedoms of the population that are of primary importance as people's living standards. Practice shows that so far the population of the post-Soviet space (perhaps except for the Baltic countries), including the population residing in the countries of Central Asia, values living standards as more important than political freedoms (possibly, due to the fact that the majority of the population of the former Soviet Union essentially had never had enough of these standards).

In principle, the nature of clans is such that they will *never* reject the idea of pursuing economic parasitizing "on the body of the society". The presidential "families" of Central Asian countries will hardly be any different in this respect, since it is easier to divide spheres of influence (should sole domination be impossible) and thrive successfully by robbing the country's population. However, as has been shown above, a situation like this cannot hold for long, particularly given the absence in the government of solid resources and/or foreign stability guarantees of the existing regime (moreover, foreign partners may review their preferences at any time and support political competitors). Therefore, all the authorities can do is attempt to convince the clans in the necessity of "sharing" these standards with the society itself (i.e. to concede to a fairer, socially-oriented reallocation of state resources and income), as ultimately this will satisfy the interests of all stakeholders (the authorities, the clans, the society). Of course, clans may object to such proposal; however, in the long-term perspective this would be foolish, since competition (confrontation) or maximally long exploitation of the society and the state will sooner or later result in an "unpleasant" outcome for everyone. Meanwhile a long-term "contract" with the society and the state guarantees stable well-being of the clans for years to come.

Should the clans oppose the "social agreement" proposed by the authorities, the latter will have to demonstrate all unprofitability and hopelessness of the

choice the clans have made. In this case one could use the resource of popular and administrative support. The basis for administrative support is provided by the bureaucracy, which has formed not so much on the clientele (read: clan) principles, as on the technocratic (professional) ones. It is not accidental that, for example, in Uzbekistan, “throughout the 1990s Karimov often promoted those who lacked strong clan connections, had technocratic skills and were likely to be loyal to him and to the Uzbek state.”³³ In order to ensure that professionals and patriots work in the state machine, mechanisms of training new elite have to be developed (educational programmes, internships abroad), along its “inclusion in the system” (purposive training for execution of specific responsibilities, employment guarantee) as well as retention (guarantees and prospects: financial, social, motivational, career). At the same time, to diminish alienation of authorities from the society, the dialogue between the authorities and scholarly and other intellectuals has to be set up and fixed at an institutional level (similarly to the Russian Public Chamber), the formation of which also must become one of the fundamental priorities of the national policy. In this respect Imanaliyev’s opinion sounds exhaustive: “In this light the primary (and, in my opinion, urgent) objective is assistance in the formation of political, intellectual and economic elite of Central Asia. It is absolutely clear that until mature and patriotic elite (...) has taken the matter in its hands, these states are doomed to lamentable existence (...). The formation of the elite presupposes not only awareness-raising activities and patronage, but also the establishment of a socio-class structure which is a vital condition for the development of the nation.”³⁴ The world community, if it sincerely wishes to help Central Asian countries implement their goals of successful development, should join this administrative and civil process of establishment of the efficient authorities in the states of the region.

If the regime lacks public support, at its early stages the latter needs (can) be ensured through a variety of PR awareness-raising activities and certain ac-

³³ Collins K., (note 20) p. 256, 10.

³⁴ Imanaliyev M., (note 14). One should also point out that in Central Asia there is no *system* of cultural values, nor clearly formulated national idea which would ensure sustainable and safe development of the nation and the state. In Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and, possibly, Turkmenistan, Islam could become the basis for the value system and ideology. In Kirgizia and Kazakhstan this would be a doubtful enterprise due to the fact that these countries have subsumed Islamic, Soviet, and liberal mentalities, which would make it difficult to distill a certain synthetic product.

tions with respect to “individuals seen as an obstacle on the way to successful development of the country”. However, in order to make these actions possible and avert inadmissible response of these “individuals” through impeachment and change of the existing authorities (its substitution for more compliant authorities), it has to secure the support of force structure (special services and the army). If after this the clans do not realize the benefits of the “social contract”, the state is doomed to a long-term political instability preventing it from the upward tendency in all the spheres, from economic to social.

The principally novel practical and academic value of the proposed conception of the existing and progressive stability of Central Asian countries has several main aspects. First of all, prior to this the majority of analysts (particularly Western analysts) viewed the clan factor as destructive *a priori* in the sense of stability of the development of CA countries and therefore subject to in-depth neutralization. However, the clan system is a historically traditional, fundamental element of society in Central Asia. Ignoring or its artificial liquidation (e.g., by democratization of the country, which is frequently suggested by Western scholars, or by direct repressions) will not produce any other outcome but chaos. The authorities and the clans may seek solely middle-ground solutions, which takes us to another ground-breaking aspect of the proposed conception.

For instance, unlike the majority of researchers, Collins stands the closest to the ideas put forward in the present article, yet she finished her considerations by stating that interests of clans and authorities cannot be joined into a “social pact” (primarily due to invariably egoistic nature of the clans), which in the long term would operate for the benefit of the society as well.³⁵ Notably, this essentially took place in the Soviet times and had relatively positive consequences in the light of long-term stability of the situation in CA countries. It should be acknowledged, however, that in this case there was an “external threat” from the “center” functioning as a unifying element, which to date is no longer present. Still, to illustrate practical viability of the proposed conception one may refer to such countries as (a) South-East Asia (South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan), in which the state closely cooperates with a variety of syndicates (read: clans) for the benefit of the society; (b) Russia, in which in as early as

³⁵ Collins K., (note 20) p. 54.

the times of Vladimir Putin's presidency and at his initiative a tacit agreement with oligarchic (read: clan) structures was made. The latter, fearing lest the regime should take sanctions similarly to those used against the YUKOS company and its head Michail Khodorkovsky, agreed to share the burden of social responsibility with the state. Finally, in the sense of equilibrium between the interests of authorities ("families"), clans and the society, Kazakhstan's model is a near-ideal example, as there is a correlation between consensus and economic progress and conditional liberalization of the political space. In this respect one has to give credit to the country's President Nazarbayev who, by way of compromise, managed to convince all major interest groups in the necessity to keep in mind the needs of ordinary citizens of the country while seeking personal gain (which also applies to President's "family" itself), and thus to establish Kazakhstan on the way of relatively (particularly in comparison to neighbours in the region) sustainable and successful development.

This version of the nondemocratic stability regime is difficult to define. It is not merely "managed democracy", since there is virtually no democracy in the classical sense of the word; rather, it is an informal regime of arrangement of stakeholders (the authorities and the clans) prevails which, if need be, may acquire a certain institutional status on the basis of some appointments or legal acts. The simplest way out is as follows: one should use the term "consensus" and/or "equilibrium". However the author of this article suggests that the defined system of power relations should be characterized as "sociopolitical corporatism" and perceives it as contribution to the development of corporatism theory. The theory of corporatism, which is a peculiar synthesis of elite and pluralistic approaches, mainly (traditionally) focuses on the relations within the triangle state – employers – trade unions, and settles primarily economic issues.³⁶ However, as some researchers of corporatism maintain, the model and terminology of corporatism relations may be successfully applied to the sphere of handling sociopolitical issues.³⁷

³⁶ Thus, for example, Alan Cawson has defined corporatism as "a specific socio-political process in which organizations representing monopolistic functional interests engaged in political exchange with state agencies over public policy outputs which involves those organizations in a role which combines interest representation and policy implementation through delegated self-enforcement". See: Cawson A., *Corporatism and Political Theory*, London: Blackwell, 1986, p. 38.

³⁷ On the development of the corporatism theory see: Molina O., Rhodes M., "Corporatism: The Past, Present, and Future of a Concept", *Annual Review of Political Science* № 5, 2002, p. 305–331.

Conclusions

Central Asia is a region that has great economic (primarily in terms of energy) and strategic significance on the Eurasian scale. However, the large number of both domestic and foreign potential centers of instability prevents the countries of this region from settling down to a course of sustainable political and socioeconomic development.

One may state with a fair degree of confidence that at least in the medium term, regional stability in Central Asia should not give rise to concern, since the probability of marked aggravation of acute geopolitical struggle between external forces in the region as a source of its destabilization is rather negligible both at present and in the long term. To date and likely for a long while Russia will be the guarantor of this security; and, if it fails to cope with the role it has assumed, which CA countries seem not to oppose in the least, it will most likely be overtaken by China. The factors of domestic (in-) stability in the countries of the region are quite a different matter. These are the following: the ethnic factor, the factor of Islam, the socioeconomic factor, the factor of clans, the factor of authorities, and, finally, the external factor.

The first three factors complement and enhance each other, thus forming the so-called block of revolutionary potential. However, this block lacks a “catalyst”, which could be provided by interference of an external force. Generalizing the issue of influence of the external factor on domestic policy processes of the countries of Central Asia in terms of stability, one may state that, except Russia, which does not intend to use its leverage on CA countries in order to destabilize them as it is not beneficial, external forces have rather limited opportunities in the sense of direct triggering of revolutionary or stabilizing processes in the states of the region. The attempts of Western countries to exert influence on the situation in CA through NGOs rather than direct contacts with government agencies of the countries of the region, at least to date have not proved efficient. In this way, a conclusion should be made that the main factor of (in)stability in the Central Asian countries is the relations variable between the clans and the authorities.

The principally novel practical and academic value of the proposed conception of the existing and progressive stability of Central Asian countries rests on the idea that the essence of the problem of sustainable and successful develop-

ment of CA countries is in the lack of equilibrium between the interests of the authorities and the clans in the sphere of making decisions of national (social) significance and their implementation. Unlike the majority of researchers of the stability issue in Central Asia (which are not many), Collins has come to grips with the ideas proposed in this work, but concluded by stating that interests of the clans and the authorities cannot (primarily due to invariably egoistic nature of clans) be joined into a “social pact”, which in the long term would also benefit the society. In principle, the essence of clans is such that they will *never* give up the idea of seeking economic parasitizing “on the body of the society” (attempts at changing the self-interested nature of the clans, including external forces, is a pointless and blemish endeavour). It can hardly be expected from the presidential “families” of CA countries either. However, as has been demonstrated above, a situation like that cannot last for long. Correspondingly, the authorities can only attempt to convince the clans by all means available in the necessity to “share” with the society the living standards of the latter, as ultimately this will satisfy the interests of all stakeholders – the authorities, the clans, and the society (if the clans do not eventually realize all the benefits of a “social pact”, the state is doomed to long-term political instability preventing the upward tendency of the country in all the spheres, from economic to social).

This version of the nondemocratic stability regime, whose practical viability is evidenced by Kazakhstan’s example, can hardly be defined. The simplest way out is as follows: one should use the term “consensus” and/or “equilibrium”. However, the author suggests that the system of power relations as defined in the present article should be characterized as “sociopolitical corporatism”. With appropriate adjustments to local specificity, this system is to guarantee any and all Central Asian countries sustainable (stable) and successful development.