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Uzbekistan's transformation: Strategies and perspectives

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SWP Research Paper

Andrea Schmitz

Uzbekistan's Transformation

Strategies and Perspectives

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik
German Institute for
International and Security Affairs

SWP Research Paper 12
September 2020, Berlin

- The presidential transition in Uzbekistan represents a novel development in the post-Soviet space. Regime insider Shavkat Mirziyoyev has succeeded in initiating change without provoking destabilisation. His reform programme aims to liberalise the economy and society while leaving the political system largely untouched.
- Implementation is centrally controlled and managed, in line with the country's long history of state planning. Uzbeks accept painful adjustments in the expectation of a rising standard of living. And the economic reforms are rapidly creating incontrovertible facts on the ground.
- Uzbekistan has also made significant moves towards political liberalisation, but remains an authoritarian state whose institutional framework and presidential system are not up for discussion. Rather than democratisation, the outcome of the transformation is more likely to be "enlightened authoritarianism" backed by an alliance of old and new elites.
- Nevertheless, there are good reasons for Germany and Europe to support the reforms. Priority should be placed on the areas most relevant for fostering an open society: promoting political competition, encouraging open debate, fostering independent public engagement and enabling genuine participation.

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Uzbekistan's Transformation: Strategies and Perspectives

Since President Shavkat Mirziyoyev succeeded Islom Karimov in December 2016 Uzbekistan has presented the image of a state under renewal. Initial doubts that the new leader would really pursue a course out of post-Soviet stagnation have been swept away. After two decades of economic and political isolation under Karimov, Mirziyoyev immediately launched reforms designed to prepare the ground for economic liberalisation, attract outside investment to develop untapped economic potential, and bring Uzbekistan up to the level of developed countries. Transformation to a market economy, modernisation of the administration and liberalisation of society are the overarching goals of the state development programme. President Mirziyoyev, who presents himself as the reformer personified, tirelessly underlines the strategic importance of the reforms and rallies support for the project.

In every respect, the transition in Uzbekistan represents a novelty in the post-Soviet space: The scenario of a peaceful succession by a regime insider promising fundamental political change had been regarded as extremely unlikely. Power struggles within the elites and public unrest had been regarded as more plausible (as in the "colour revolutions" in Georgia 2003, Kyrgyzstan 2005, and the Ukrainian "Euromaidan" of 2013), or a new leader continuing the old political course (Azerbaijan 2003, Turkmenistan 2006 and Kazakhstan 2019).

This raises the question of the objectives and durability of the Uzbek transition. The reform programme laid out in the Development Strategy for 2017 to 2021 is so comprehensive and ambitious that implementation would appear to require a mobilisation of all relevant actors. Many of the proposed policy measures are in fact designed to anchor the reform concept within the elites and across society, and to ensure that the changes are irreversible. Three strategically relevant areas can be identified: reorganising the security apparatus, modernising cadres and governance, and mobilising society. Foreign policy also plays a decisive role for the success of the reform project.

There were several candidates to succeed Karimov, whose policies had greatly benefitted large sections of the elites. It was by no means certain that they would support the new course set by his successor. It was therefore central for Mirziyoyev to create a loyal inner circle and to secure his position through institutional measures and strategic appointments. While public resistance to the new president was not expected, unconditional support for his reform agenda was not either. Large sections of society had found an accommodation with Karimov's "Uzbek development model" — not necessarily to their disadvantage. The economic and monetary reforms rapidly set in motion by Mirziyoyev demand painful adjustments from many Uzbeks. In return the government promises greater prosperity through economic development, more accountability and better access to public services. Society is also expected to participate actively in the national renewal. Under the new official doctrine the state is expected to serve the people — and in return the nation is expected to serve the great reform project, whose implementation is as always centrally controlled and managed.

Mirziyoyev's new social contract is a tall order for a society unaccustomed to being asked its opinion, a nation that had learned that political engagement was dangerous. Yet the state reform policy has been a success. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, the insistence of the calls for reform create pressure to show results and generate visible change from which many parties benefit. This makes the reform project *credible*. Secondly, the pace of implementation carries along those who are wary of change but find themselves without a choice, so there is apparently *no alternative* to the reform project. Thirdly, the project's grand narrative is not new. Mirziyoyev's predecessor and the Soviet-era leaders before him also propagated modernisation through radical change and mobilisation of all available resources as the road to a better future. The concept driving the reforms is thus *familiar*.

The head of state's drive for reforms and national reinvention — framed by prominent and lavishly staged historical commemorations and identity-affirming presentations — also generates international confidence in Uzbekistan. This is directly reflected in growing commitments of foreign investment and loans, whose significance for the implementation of the reforms cannot be overstated. The Uzbek Development Strategy itself and its commitment to liberal values are not least responses to the expectations of international donors, who value sustainability and tie their support to good governance. Important signals on human rights demonstrate that the Uzbek leadership has taken on board central aspects of the Western model. But there is also strong resistance. Uzbekistan remains an authoritarian state with a presidential system, whose institutional base is not up for discussion. Authoritarian practices and attitudes continue to determine the behaviour of relevant actors. Especially where conflicts and crises occur, it is apparent that the past — which the new leadership is so keen to bury — is far from dead.

For Germany and Europe, the "simultaneity of the non-simultaneous" (Ernst Bloch) that characterises the Uzbek reform moment offers multiple openings for cooperation. In principle this applies to all areas of the reform agenda. But the most difficult and delicate — and also most pressing — aspect relates to the authoritarian complex: the institutions, attitudes and behaviours that continue to enable abuses of power. Encouraging reflection on these issues should therefore form a consistent theme running through all cooperation.

The Reformer and His Programme

An Insider Takes the Reins

Replacing a dictator is always a fraught affair. Removal by popular vote is not an option, so unless they die in office authoritarian rulers tend to be driven from power, whether by members of their own inner circle or by mass protests. Unrest is almost always associated with violence, while a resignation forced by regime insiders need not necessarily require a coup; internal compromise is also a plausible route. What both variants share in common is that they rarely lead to any substantive change in policy. Authoritarian rule is merely renewed.[1]

In the case of Uzbekistan observers had long assumed that President Karimov's dictatorship would inevitably end in violence — or a new dictatorship.[2] Uzbekistan's political stability was regarded as a product of repression by the security organs, in a dissatisfied and mobilisable society. The elites were thought to be riven by bitter power struggles between strategic groups, including the widely feared intelligence service. Whoever won the internal struggle to succeed Karimov would definitely be the product of a compromise that secured the country's repressive, authoritarian course.

A political insider did indeed succeed to the presidency in December 2016. But Shavkat Mirziyoyev immediately subverted expectations in several important respects. The transition was smooth: any conflicts within the elites remained discreetly veiled and the new head of state immediately set about mobilising the population for a set of policies designed to liberalise the economy and society and put an end to repression. This represents such a stark contrast to his predecessor that doubts over the genuineness of Mirziyoyev's reforms certainly appeared justified.[3] It quickly became apparent, however, that his commitment was more than mere lip service; the new head of state appeared to be serious about change.

One reason why Mirziyoyev can so credibly embody the reformer might be that his own political career began in an earlier period of transition. It was in 1990, when the dissolution of the Soviet Union was already under way, that he moved from academia to politics. When he was elected to the Supreme Soviet of the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR) in February 1990 he was thirty-three years old, a doctor of engineering and vice-rector at the Tashkent Institute of Irrigation and Melioration. Shortly thereafter the Soviet elected Islom Karimov, who had been First Secretary of the Uzbek Communist Party since 1989, to the newly created position of President of the Uzbek SSR.[4] Karimov declared Uzbekistan independent immediately after the August 1991 coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, and was elected president in December 1991.

From here on Mirziyoyev's career was tied to the rule of Karimov, who was granted sweeping powers by the new constitution adopted in December 1992.[5]

1 Andrea Kendall-Taylor and Erica Frantz, "How Autocracies Fall", *Washington Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (2014): 35—47 (42).

2 Andrew Stroehlein, "Why Uzbekistan Matters", *CNN*, 18 October 2011, https://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2011/10/18/why-uzbekistan-matters/; Johannes Dell, "Lifeless Uzbek Election Hides Power Struggle", *BBC*, 27 March 2015, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31798756; Abdujalil Abdurasulov, "Intrigue and Power Games as Uzbek Leader Ails", *BBC*, 1 September 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37241645 (all accessed 30 June 2020).

3 Abdujalil Abdurasulov, "After Karimov: How Does the Transition of Power Look in Uzbekistan?" *BBC*, 13 October 2016, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37608869 (accessed 30 June 2020).

4 Supreme Soviet of the Usbek SSR introduced this new position in March 1990; Nikolaj A. Borisov, *Prezidenstvo na postsovetskom prostranstve: protsessy genezisa i transformatsiy* [The office of president in the post-Soviet space: Processes of genesis and transformation] (Moscow, 2018), 32 ff.

5 *Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan*, http://www.ksu.uz/en/page/index/id/7 (accessed 30 June 2020).

In 1992 Mirziyoyev was appointed to the local administration in Tashkent, where he served in executive functions until 1996. His responsibilities expanded considerably in 1996 when he was appointed as governor of Jizzakh region (until 2001) and later Samarkand region (2001 to 2003). In December 2003 he was nominated as prime minister by President Karimov and confirmed by parliament. He was reappointed three times in succession, most recently in 2015. Mirziyoyev's unusually long tenure as head of government, with special responsibility for agriculture and regional development,[6] may be regarded as an indication that he had secured a solid foothold in Karimov's inner circle, numbering among his closest confidants. Anecdotal reports back up this assertion.[7]

A new start emerging from the shadows of the past.

After Karimov's death, which was officially announced in early September 2016, the experienced and well connected Mirziyoyev was quickly seen as one of the most likely successors.[8] Speculation became fact on 8 September when the chairman of the senate, Nigmatilla Yuldashev (who, under Article 96 of the constitution, should actually have assumed the president's responsibilities until an election could be held), proposed the more experienced Mirziyoyev as interim president. Both chambers of parliament followed his recommendation, citing the need to preserve stability and public order.[9] This indicates how concerned the relevant strategic groups were to ensure a smooth transition, which is never a certainty even in a consolidated autocracy.

The outcome of the presidential election on 4 December 2016 was predictable. Mirziyoyev received 88.6 percent to defeat three other candidates. Although the election was accompanied by numerous irregularities,[10] these are unlikely to have significantly swayed the outcome. Under Uzbek electoral law each candidate had been nominated by one of the four political parties represented in parliament at the time — whose programmes were almost identical. The election campaign was correspondingly tame, but did offer Mirziyoyev broad scope to exploit the administrative resources available to him as interim president,[11] and to publicise his programme.

The latter essentially linked two apparently mutually exclusive concepts: a commitment to preserve Karimov's political legacy and determination to proceed with urgently needed reforms. The demonstrative promise of continuity, which was reiterated in all the new leader's early speeches,[12] was directed towards all those who had made themselves very comfortable under Karimov and were less than enthusiastic about the prospect of change. When Mirziyoyev underlined that his reform policies would adhere to his predecessor's "Uzbek development model" he was letting the doubters know that they could trust him as Karimov's political heir.

Soon after taking office, Mirziyoyev underlined this message in a symbolic act of homage to his nation's political culture: the construction of a mausoleum on Karimov's grave in the grounds of a historic mosque in his native city of Samarkand. Since it opened in January 2018 the memorial has become a popular place of pilgrimage, complete with rituals characteristic of holy sites.[13] The sacralisation of power is firmly

6 President Mirziyoyev's official biography can be found on the website of the Uzbek embassies: https://www.uzbekembassy.org/e/president/ (accessed 30 June 2020).

7 For example a diplomatic cable from the US embassy in Tashkent dated August 2008: https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/08TASHKENT977_a.html (accessed 30 June 2020).

8 Dell, "Lifeless Uzbek Election Hides Power Struggle" (see note 2); Abdurasulov, "Intrigue and Power Games" (see note 2).

9 "Informatsionnoe soobshzhenie o sovmestnom zasedanii Zakonodatel'noy palaty i senata Olij Mazhlisa Respubliki Uzbekistan" [Information about a joint session of the Legislative Chamber and the Senate of the Parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan], 8 September 2016, https://www.gov.uz/ru/news/view/7246 (accessed 30 June 2020).

10 Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODHIR), *Republic of Uzbekistan, Early Presidential Election 4 December 2016, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw, 21 March 2017), https://www.osce.org/office-for-democratic-institutions-and-human-rights/elections/uzbekistan/306451?download=true (accessed 30 June 2020).

11 Ibid., 1 f.

12 For example during the extended meeting of the cabinet on 15 January 2017: *Kriticheskiy analiz, zhestkaya disciplina I personal'naya otvetstvennost' dolzhny stat' povsednevnoy normoy v deyatel'nosti kazhdogo rukovoditelya* [Critical analysis, strict discipline and personal responsibility must become the everyday norm for every leader], https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/187 (accessed 30 June 2020).

13 A short film published by the Islom Karimov Foundation on 8 May 2019 offers striking insights: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVtCwO6yc3E (accessed 30 June 2020).

established in the political cultures of Central Asia. Mirziyoyev was satisfying a widespread expectation when he granted his predecessor a prominent place in Uzbekistan's sacral geography — and at the same time symbolically underlining his own claim to be the legitimate successor.

The construction of the mausoleum in Samarkand and other tributes to Islom Karimov and his era — the ceremonial inauguration of monuments in Samarkand and Tashkent and the conversion of his former residence into a museum — are also politically significant because these forms of musealisation grant Karimov a prominent and unchallengeable place in the nation's collective memory. Integrating the founder into the canon of greats of Uzbek history and thus making him a part of an established historical semantics neutralises the case for historical reappraisal.[14] The message is: One can — and should — now look to the future.

Even before taking office, Mirziyoyev had made it clear that change was coming. It was this second, much more challenging element of his programmatic oxymoron that raised expectations, within Uzbekistan and even more so abroad. But in order to understand Mirziyoyev's reform agenda, the strategies he has pursued to implement it, and the overall direction of the transformation process, we must first review the era of his predecessor Karimov.

Uzbekistan under Karimov

Karimov's Uzbekistan was a state with remarkable internal stability and a high degree of economic autarchy, and was regarded as one of the world's most repressive.[15] Unlike neighbours such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan shunned economic liberalisation following the collapse of the Soviet Union and preserved core characteristics of the centrally planned economy. Small businesses and retail were rapidly privatised but the strategic sectors — agriculture, fossil fuels, energy, transport and services, and the enterprises involved in them — remained subject to state planning and control, as did foreign trade and banking.[16]

This initial decision was indicated by the economic structure inherited from the Soviet era, in which three factors were of fundamental importance: firstly the country's constellation of resources and specialisation in agriculture, especially cotton-growing (which had accounted for more than 60 percent of the Soviet Union's production). Another significant resource is gold, of which Uzbekistan possesses the world's sixth-largest reserves. With cotton and gold, secondly, Uzbekistan possesses resources that are easy to export and generate large revenues. And thirdly, light industry orientated largely on the needs of agriculture allowed domestic production of basic consumer goods that had hitherto been imported. Local production of wheat (which accounted for about 40 percent of imports in 1989) and oil products was also stepped up.

Achieving self-sufficiency in strategic economic sectors and avoiding social unrest were also the principal objectives of state economic policy. Both mitigated against radical reforms that could have risked social unrest — especially in view of the low standard of living of the rural population, which made up 40 percent of the total in 1989.[17] A fundamental economic reorientation would also have endangered the established system of political relationships, which was based on the state-controlled production of *cash crops* (cotton and later cereals) and the division of the resulting revenues (rents) between the involved strategic groups.[18] The central apparatus, the associated bureaucracies, and the regional agriculture-based elites enjoyed de facto control over access to the central production factors (land, labour, capital) and all had multiple possibilities to skim rents for particular ends and to build their own influence networks.[19] Implementing the state development objectives thus depended on ensuring the flow of resource revenues

14 For details: Andrew F. March, "The Use and Abuse of History: 'National Ideology' as Transcendental Object in Islam Karimov's 'Ideology of National Independence'", *Central Asian Survey* 21, no. 4 (2002): 371–84 (374 ff.).

15 The latest Freedom House reports still categorise Uzbekistan as "consolidated authoritarian"; see *Freedom in the World 2018: Uzbekistan*, https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b2cb8386.html und *Freedom in the World 2019: Uzbekistan*, https://www.justice.gov/eoir/page/file/1151971/download (both accessed 30 June 2020).

16 Kobil Ruziev, Dipak Ghosh and Sheila C. Dow, "The Uzbek Puzzle Revisited: An Analysis of Economic Performance in Uzbekistan since 1991", *Central Asia Survey* 26, no. 1 (2007): 7–30 (12).

17 Ibid., 8–11.

18 Lawrence P. Markowitz, "Rural Economies and Leadership Change in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey* 35, no. 4 (2016): 514–30.

19 Idem., "Beyond Kompromat: Coercion, Corruption, and Deterred Defection in Uzbekistan", *Comparative Politics*, (October 2017): 103–21 (112 f.).

to the centre and containing the power of the regional elites, which also included private-sector entrepreneurs.

To achieve this, the regime increasingly employed the institutions of the security apparatus and from 1997 successively expanded the powers of the law enforcement authorities — tax inspection as well as intelligence service and police — to keep tabs on key local actors. However, integrating the organs of repression into the structures they were supposed to keep under surveillance did not lead to more efficient action against corruption; instead it enabled the security services to participate in illegal rent skimming using means such as blackmail, threats and physical violence, in conjunction with local administrative actors.[20] The resulting entanglement of security institutions and resource extraction made the regime increasingly dependent on the former.

This coalesced the elites, most of whose leading figures belonged to President Karimov's inner circle and maintained patronage networks extending down to the local level.[21] At the same time, the powerful security apparatus functioned as an effective deterrent to dissent. Opposition tended to come from the private business sector, whose property was protected neither by institutional guarantees nor informal mechanisms, thus making them especially vulnerable to overreach by the state's organs of repression.[22] Although demands for a liberalisation of trade and commerce were frequently voiced, they fell on deaf ears because they contradicted the interests of the leading circles.[23]

That said, the stability of Karimov's system was not based exclusively on coercion and repression. Since the late 1990s, largely unnoticed by the outside world, a (predominantly urban) middle class had emerged and accommodated itself to the circumstances. This milieu was socially heterogeneous, comprising a broad spectrum of public employees above all in the health and education sectors and the administration.[24] That was no coincidence: Since the end of the 1990s the public sector had profited from rising investment, in association with the expansion of manufacturing in the second decade of independence and enabled by high global prices for cotton, gold and natural gas.[25]

These "new Uzbeks" *(yangi davr odam),* as state propaganda referred to these ideal citizens, were the product of a modernisation programme ideologically grounded in a narrative of de-Sovietization and national consolidation,[26] which had effected a deep transformation also affecting the urban landscape. The changes signified by widened roads, new multistorey buildings, shopping centres, restaurants, and expanded and covered bazaars, also opened up new possibilities of employment and consumption and were perceived by the majority as representing progress.[27] Official statistics backed up the perception with figures indicating steady economic growth averaging 8 percent and implying a continuous rise in the standard of living.[28]

In reality, however, life became harder for many Uzbeks after the end of the Soviet Union. Large sections of the population were economically squeezed and often forced to seek alternative and/or additional sources of income.[29] Seasonal labour migration to Russia, Kazakhstan and elsewhere grew after the dissolution and restructuring of the agricultural collec-

20 Ibid., 111 f.

21 Ibid., 114 — 116.

22 Barbara Junisbai, "Improbable But Potentially Pivotal Oppositions: Privatization, Capitalists, and Political Contestation in the Post-Soviet Autocracies", *Perspectives on Politics* 10, no. 4 (December 2012): 891 — 916 (901).

23 Ibid., 905.

24 Tommaso Trevisani, "The Reshaping of Cities and Citizens in Uzbekistan: The Case of Namangan's 'New Uzbeks'", in *Ethnographies of the State in Central Asia: Performing Politics*, ed. Madeleine Reeves, Johan Rasanayagam and Judith Beyer (Bloomington, 2014), 243 — 60.

25 World Bank, *Uzbekistan: On the Path to High-Middle-Income Status by 2030*, 13 April 2016, https://www.worldbank.org/en/results/2016/04/13/uzbekistan-on-the-path-to-high-middle-income-status-by-2050.print (accessed 1 July 2020); Mamuka Tsereteli, "The Economic Modernization of Uzbekistan", in *Uzbekistan's New Face*, ed. S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (London, 2018), 82 — 114 (85 f.).

26 Sergej Abashin, "Entsowjetisierung und Erinnerungspolitik in Zentralasien", *Jahrbuch für historische Kommunismusforschung,* (2014): 125 — 38; March, "The Use and Abuse of History" (see note 14).

27 Trevisani, "The Reshaping of Cities and Citizens" (see note 24), 249 f.

28 Ruziev et al., "The Uzbek Puzzle" (see note 16), 15 f.; see also *Human Development Report: Inequalities in Human Development in the 21st Century: Briefing Note for Countries on the 2019 Human Development Report: Uzbekistan*, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/UZB.pdf (accessed 1 July 2020).

29 Trevisani, "The Reshaping of Cities and Citizens" (see note 24), 247 f.

tives *(shirkat)* in 2000, and accelerated after 2004.[30] The proportion of GDP contributed by small-scale private enterprises rose from more or less zero to 45 percent by 1997, but largely plateaued at that level.[31] From 2002 the regime successively imposed new tariffs on imported goods and required bazaaris to apply for licences, in order to suppress the growing demand for foreign currency and stem the capital flight associated with cross-border trade. The resulting impediments to trade weighed on living conditions for those working in the semi-informal sector and fuelled dissatisfaction with state policies. This burst into the open in May 2005 with large-scale protests in Andijan.[32]

The bloody suppression of those protests by police and military forces and the refusal of the Uzbek leadership to permit an independent international investigation led to a diplomatic rift with the United States and Europe. Against the background of a wave of "colour revolutions", which saw the president of neighbouring Kyrgyzstan toppled in March 2005, Western criticisms of the Andijan massacre led Uzbekistan to tighten internal repression and initiate a long period of self-isolation.[33] Nevertheless it did remain an important partner for the United States and Europe on account of its role in NATO's supply lines for its forces stationed in Afghanistan.[34]

The Reform Agenda

Given the starting situation outlined above, the reforms announced by Shavkat Mirziyoyev represent a real break with the past. His programme was laid out during the 2016 election campaign and published in February 2017, as one of his first presidential decrees.[35] The decree lays out a binding political course:[36] a five-year Development Strategy for 2017—2021[37] to "modernise and liberalise all spheres of life". Five areas of reform are identified:

(I) State and society,
(II) Rule of law and the judicial system,
(III) Economic development
(IV) Social policy and
(V) Security, foreign policy, nationalities and religion policies.

A hierarchy of commissions is formally responsible for implementing the strategy. At their apex is the National Commission, under which separate bodies are responsible for each of the five areas; their tasks and composition are defined in the strategy document. The Development Strategy also stipulates that a reform priority will be set each year, with a programme of its own listing in detail the measures required, estimating costs, and naming the expected outcomes.[38]

30 Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO), *Gender, Agriculture and Rural Development in Uzbekistan* (Budapest, 2019), 15 f., http://www.fao.org/3/ca4628en/ca4628en.pdf; Evgeniy Abdullaev, *Labour Migration in the Republic of Uzbekistan: Social, Legal and Gender Aspects* (Tashkent, 2008), http://www.gender.cawater-info.net/publications/pdf/labour-migration-uzbekistan-en.pdf (both accessed 1 July 2020).

31 Ruziev, "The Uzbek Puzzle" (see note 16), 25; Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI), *Uzbekistan Country Report 2018*, 21, https://www.bti-project.org/content/en/downloads/reports/country_report_2018_UZB.pdf (accessed 15 July 2020).

32 Ruziev, "The Uzbek Puzzle" (see note 16), 25 f.; International Crisis Group, *Uzbekistan: The Andijon Uprising*, Asia Briefing 38 (Bishkek and Brussels, 25 May 2005), 8 f., https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b38-uzbekistan-the-andijon-uprising.pdf (accessed 1 July 2020).

33 Martha Brill Olcott, "Uzbekistan: A Decaying Dictatorship Withdrawn from the West", in *Worst of the Worst: Dealing with Repressive and Rogue Nations*, ed. Robert I. Rotberg (Washington, D.C., 2007), 250—68.

34 Andrea Schmitz, *Beyond Afghanistan: The New ISAF Strategy: Implications for Central Asia,* SWP Comment 10/2010 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2010), https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/comments/2010C10_smz_ks.pdf.

35 On the significance of decrees: OSCE/ODIHR, *Preliminary Assessment of the Legislative Process in the Republic of Uzbekistan* (Warsaw, 11 December 2019), 38, https://www.legislationline.org/download/id/8517/file/364_11Dec2019_en.pdf (accessed 1 July 2020).

36 *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan: O Strategii Dejstviy po dal'neyshemu razvitiyu Respubliki Uzbekistan* [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan on the Development Strategy for Uzbekistan], doc. no. UP-4947, 7 February 2017, https://lex.uz/docs/3107042#3108077 (accessed 1 July 2020).

37 *Strategiya Dejstviy po pyati prioritetnym napravleniyam razvitiya Respubliki Uzbekistan v 2017–2021 godach* [Development Strategy of the Republic of Uzbekistan for 2017—2011], Appendix 1 to *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan: Strategii Dejstviy* (see note 36).

38 The priority for 2017 ("Dialogue with the public and the interests of the population") is already defined in the strategy document. The priorities for 2018 ("Supporting active entrepreneurs, innovative ideas and technologies"), 2019 ("Promoting investment and social development") and 2020 ("Science, education and the digital economy") were developed successively and published as presidential decrees: https://lex.uz/docs/3516841 (Programme 2018), https://lex.uz/

Such plans were of course a central aspect of state development planning during the Soviet era. And under Karimov each year was already dedicated to a particular problem, to which the state promised to dedicate special attention and sometimes developed detailed plans.[39] To that extent the Development Strategy of 2017 is not an innovation in terms of form: it stands explicitly in the context of the Karimov era, whose achievements it underlines. The idea is to launch a modern reform policy from that starting point. The implicit message: the old model is no longer working.

Mirziyoyev's Development Strategy engineers a shrewd transition from old to new. The general objective of development through modernisation is especially well suited to creating a pre-political consensus concerning the legitimacy of state action: it is unspecific but positively connoted, strongly associated with economics and technical innovation, and supposedly unpolitical.[40] An economic policy of gradual transition to a market economy was already a priority under Karimov.[41] The same applies to the principle of rule of law, where Karimov's constitutional reforms from 2011 expanded the powers of parliament without reducing the power of the executive. There was also a significant social policy strand, above all in the areas of housing, agricultural development, cultural policy and youth policy.

Two important aspects were fundamentally new in Mirziyoyev's strategy document, however:

Firstly, the explicit commitment to economic liberalism to accelerate growth and make Uzbekistan competitive in its regional and international context (Area III in the strategy document). The steps proposed here represent a clear break with earlier policies: withdrawing the state from the economy, encouraging the private sector and protecting private ownership. The liberalisation of the exchange rate in September 2017, the lifting of foreign currency controls, tariff reductions and a liberalisation of prices signify a paradigm shift in economic policy. Liberalisation of the visa regime in 2018, the dismantling of trade barriers and simplification of the tax system all had a dynamising effect on foreign trade and created incentives for both the private sector and international donors to operate in Uzbekistan.[42]

The second aspect relates to the relationship between state and society, and thus to fundamental questions of political order (Area I in the strategy document). Here again the intention is to expand the reach of liberal principles, as well as strengthening the role of parliament, political parties and civil society in the political process. Legislative amendments to the changes made since 2011 expanded the powers of parliament; since 2019 presidential cabinet appointments require the prior approval of parliament. The same also applies to the appointment of the deputy prime minister and the chairs of state committees. Since 2020 parliament also votes on the annual budget, passing it as a piece of legislation.

The Development Strategy revamps the entire state apparatus.

Civil society organisations and mass media have been given greater freedom under the liberal principle of participation. The state administration is to be made more transparent, more accessible to the citizens and more efficient through the introduction of digital processes. As a visible sign of the will to encourage "dialogue" and openness online portals have been established for citizens to complain,[43] submit petitions[44] and comment on draft laws.[45] Such measures are also designed to improve Uzbekistan's position in international rankings and accelerate the inflow of the investment needed for economic reforms.[46]

The development strategy was issued as a presidential decree and is legally binding. Together with its

ru/docs/4168757 (Programme 2019), https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4751567 (Programme 2020) (all accessed 1 July 2020).

39 One good example is the order on the state programme for rural development for 2009, which included a detailed catalogue of measures: https://lex.uz/docs/1437234 (accessed 1 July 2020).

40 Andrew F. March, "From Leninism to Karimovism: Hegemony, Ideology, and Authoritarian Legitimation", *Post-Soviet Affairs* 19, no. 4 (2003): 307–36 (316).

41 Islam A. Karimov, *Uzbekistan: The Road of Independence and Progress* (Tashkent, 1992), 16, 36–40.

42 Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report Uzbekistan 2nd Quarter 2019* (30 July 2019), 6; German Economic Team, "Positive Economic Outlook Thanks to Reform Dynamic", Newsletter 01 (July–August 2019), https://www.german-economic-team.com/usbekistan/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/GET_UZB_NL_01_2019_en.pdf (accessed 2 July 2020).

43 *Virtual'naya Priemnaya Prezidenta* [The President's Virtual Reception], https://pm.gov.uz/ru (accessed 2 July 2020).

44 *Mening Fikrim* [My opinion], https://meningfikrim.uz (accessed 2 July 2020).

45 See https://regulation.gov.uz/ru (accessed 2 July 2020).

46 *Strategiya Dejstviy po pjati prioritetnym napravleniyam* (see note 37).

annual and sectoral programmes, which define priorities and personal responsibilities, it has set the entire state apparatus in motion and initiated a flood of regulatory activities. Since 2017 the Decree on the Development Strategy has been successively reinforced and amplified by further decrees, operational directives and other subsidiary acts which document — and create — an enormous need for legislative coordination in implementing the reform agenda. The number of presidential decrees, which lay out legally binding political guidelines and instructions, has proliferated since 2017, as has the volume of resolutions *(postanovlenie)* concretising and implementing the decrees.[47] The bulk of legal acts relate to Areas I and III, clearly reflecting their special status in the reform process as a whole. The great effort put into regulation demonstrates the will to systematically implement the strategy — but creates challenges for a planned, structured and systematic approach.

Overregulation is a both consequence and a symptom of a legal system dominated by the executive, which has accumulated a multitude of inconsistencies that now impede the reforms.[48] The existing legislative process, for example, is poorly prepared for the new requirement of public participation. The planned reform of the legal system (Area II)[49] is supposed to eliminate these inconsistencies and synchronise it with the objectives of the Development Strategy. This venture presupposes a transformation of the legal culture and is anything but trivial.[50] It can therefore be expected to take years.

The same applies to all aspects of the reforms affecting the relationship between state and society. But the Development Strategy is not conceived for gradualism. It sets out to break path dependencies, demanding rapid change and quick, visible results. The example of the activities of the Development Strategy Centre (DSC) illustrates very well how implementation of the reform agenda focuses more on activity and visibility than structure and coherence. Established in February 2017 by presidential order as an NGO,[51] the DSC is supposed to prepare practical measures for realising the development goals, working together with experts and civil society groups and in close coordination with the National Commission that is formally responsible for implementing the strategy. A coordinating council composed largely of representatives of the presidential apparatus and the ministerial bureaucracy is responsible for supporting the DSC in its work and facilitating its cooperation with the state organs. The Centre is funded through state sources and external contributions from domestic and international state and non-state organisations.

The Development Strategy Centre describes itself as a think-tank with watchdog functions,[52] and operates as an intermediary between government and society. It communicates the requirements of state policy to society and reflects the latter's reactions back to the political sphere in the form of recommendations. At the same time the DSC exhibits characteristics comparable to those of Western development agencies: It operates as umbrella organisation and point of contact for a broad spectrum of foreign actors seeking fields of activity and cooperation partners in Uzbekistan. Correspondingly diverse are the activities that the DSC has conducted since 2017 in the service of the reform agenda. Two areas are particularly prominent: organising events to mobilise media and youth — in other words public relations — and preparing project proposals in collaboration with domestic and foreign partners. The latter include a wide range of actors, such as the German Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) along with the World Bank, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Chinese company Huawei.[53]

In terms of topics the spectrum is just as wide-ranging, if not to say scattered. Conferences in pres-

47 In 2016 47 presidential decrees and 84 resolutions were issued, in 2017 137 and 364; the numbers subsequently declined slightly. I am grateful to Belinda Nüssel for her quantitative and thematic analysis of the legal acts.

48 OSCE/ODIHR, *Preliminary Assessment* (see note 35), 40 f.

49 *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan: Ob utverzhdenii koncepcii sovershenstvovaniya normotvorcheskoy dejatel'nosti* [Decree of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan: Confirmation of a concept for improving norm-setting], doc. no. UP-5505, 8 August 2018, https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3858812 (accessed 2 July 2020).

50 OSCE/ODIHR, *Preliminary Assessment* (see note 35), 45 f.

51 *Rasporyazhenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Ob organizacionnych merach po realizacii Strategii Dejstviy po pyati prioritetnym napravleniyam razvityja Respubliki Uzbekistan v 2017–2021 godach* [Order of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan: On organisational measures for realising the Development Strategy for Uzbekistan 2017—2011], doc. no. R-4849, 14 February 2017, https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3114490 (accessed 2 July 2020).

52 Discussion with the Director of the DSC in February 2020 in Berlin.

53 The DSC website provides a summary of activities since 2017: https://strategy.uz/ (accessed 2 July 2020).

tigious venues with up to three hundred often prominent participants address a plethora of issues ranging from religious policy, judicial and administrative reform to digitalisation. Although they all stand in some relation to the Development Strategy and its annual priorities, little in the way of systematisation is discernible. Variety is perceived as proof of the new "openness" that is now part and parcel of Uzbek politics, absolutely positively connoted, and an important aspect of the national image at home and abroad. The concept of "openness" points in turn to the complexity and potential reach of the reform agenda, which generates high expectations and pressure to demonstrate progress. The DSC is active here too, with attractive brochures presenting activities undertaken and results achieved in specific policy areas and periods.[54]

54 See for example: Development Strategy Center, *The Time of Development: 2019: Outcomes for January–September 2019*, Online version at https://strategy.uz/index.php?news=709&lang=en (accessed 2 July 2020).

Domestic Political Anchoring

The ambitious and highly complex programme of state-led and centrally controlled liberalisation, with which Uzbekistan's new ruler intends to lead the country forwards, goes further than legislative, organisational and technical adjustments. If it is to be effective, the reform agenda also needs to be taken on board and internalised by all involved. The demand for political participation by civil society in particular requires behavioural adjustments on the part of both the political protagonists and society at large, which will not come about automatically. If Uzbekistan's transformation is to succeed, actors with very different interests need to support the agenda and participate in its realisation. The strategy itself reflects this requirement, emphasising the inclusivity and representativeness of the reform agenda and presenting it as the outcome of the president's discussions and consultations with all relevant actors.[55]

Simply presenting a reform programme does not in itself, however, create the social consensus the Development Strategy will require. In fact, the point of many of the changes is to establish such a consensus in the first place and secure the necessary backing in society and among the elites. Three groups of institutional actors in particular need to be won over: the security institutions, leading cadres and civil society. These therefore form the heart of the reforms and are exposed to correspondingly strong pressure to change. The political decision-making structures and the framework of political institutions itself, on the other hand, remain excluded from significant innovation.

Reorganisation of the Security Apparatus

Speculation about rivalries within President Karimov's inner circle began long before the change of leadership.[56] Few details reached the public, of course, still less verifiable facts. Alongside then Prime Minister Mirziyoyev, two other members of the core elite occupied positions of significant power: Rustam Azimov, first deputy prime minister and long-serving finance minister, regarded like Mirziyoyev as a technocrat and "moderniser"; and Rustam Inoyatov, head of the National Security Service (SNB).[57] The SNB's powers were significantly expanded in 2005 after Inoyatov's predecessor Zokir Almatov was dismissed following the massacre in Andijan. The relationship between Inoyatov and Almatov — who had headed the Interior Ministry and its police force since 1991 — had already been regarded as fractious, with both competing for powers and resources to which their respective institutions enjoyed privileged access.[58] After Almatov's dismissal Inoyatov in effect controlled the entire security apparatus. His SNB had a reputation for overreach and unpredictability and was feared by governing politicians and citizens alike. Inoyatov was not said to hold ambitions of succeeding to the presidency himself, but he was regarded as a *power broker* with decisive influence over Karimov's succession.[59]

Mirziyoyev already began reshuffling the cabinet while interim president. Sweeping changes and new appointments at all levels of the executive followed after his official inauguration in December 2016.[60] Azimov lost his post as finance minister within the month and in June 2017 also resigned as deputy prime minister; many of his long-serving appointees in the Finance Ministry were also replaced a few months later.[61] But the most significant changes

55 *Strategiya Dejstviy po pjati prioritetnym napravleniyam* (see note 37).

56 Shawn Snow, "After Islam Karimov, What Next? Uzbekistan's Succession Question", *The Diplomat*, 30 August 2016, https://thediplomat.com/2016/08/after-islam-karimov-what-next-uzbekistans-succession-question/ (accessed 2 July 2020).

57 Official Uzbek designation: Sluzhba Nacional'noj Bezopasnosti (SNB).

58 See above, p. 9.

59 Snow, "After Islam Karimov" (see note 56).

60 Legal acts concerning changes in personnel, mostly decrees *(ukaz)* and resolutions *(postanovlenie)*, are listed at: https://lex.uz (accessed 2 July 2020).

61 "Hundreds Fired from Uzbek Finance Ministry after President's Criticism", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL)*,

affected the security apparatus, which Mirziyoyev subjected to a systematic and apparently strategically planned reorganisation in the course of which the powers of the SNB were curtailed, the role of the Prosecutor General expanded and a new structure installed that is tailored specifically to the president.[62] Mirziyoyev brought former interior minister Almatov out of retirement in December 2016, appointing him first as head of a state anti-corruption commission, later as advisor to the interior minister.[63] In May 2017 the armed units of the SNB (20,000 men) were transferred back to the Interior Ministry, which had been forced to relinquish them following the Andijan massacre.[64]

Purges within the SNB began in summer 2017 in the provinces.[65] Arrests in the headquarters and the regions followed in January 2018, before Inoyatov himself was removed on 31 January 2018. Instead of prosecution, Inoyatov was made a senator and thus granted a position conferring status and political immunity. There was speculation[66] that Inoyatov had been treated with kid gloves in return for supporting Mirziyoyev's candidacy as interim president in September 2016, and thus paving the way for a consensual transition. In view of the power and authority the head of the intelligence service must have wielded, such interpretations are certainly plausible.

In the aftermath of the sequence of events described above, the National Security Service (SNB) was reorganised and renamed the State Security Service (SGB). Its legal status, responsibilities, powers, funding and technical resources are now governed by a law that was adopted by parliament on 15 March 2018 and came into effect within weeks on 6 April.[67] Prosecutor General Ichtiyor Abdullaev was appointed to lead the new authority, but was not to last long. In February 2019 he in turn was accused of abuse of power and corruption and in September sentenced to eighteen years in prison.[68] Countless members of the intelligence service, public prosecutors and tax inspectors, many of them linked by family or business relationships, were prosecuted during President Mirziyoyev's first three years and sentenced in camera, in most cases for abuse of power, corruption and large-scale illegal business dealings. The published details of the indictments convey an impression of the modus operandi of Karimov-era patronage networks — which extended into the top leadership.[69] Huge sums disappeared into private bank accounts, often abroad. The state's desire to retrieve these resources is one of

27 December 2017, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-finance-ministry-mass-firing-after-president-criticism/28942439. html (accessed 3 July 2020).

62 "Prezident provel zasedanie Soveta Bezopasnosti" [President holds a session of the Security Council], *Gazeta*, 11 January 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/01/11/security-council/ (accessed 3 July 2020).

63 "Zokirzhon Almatov korruptsiyaga qarshi kurashadi" [Zokirjon Almatov declares war on corruption], *Kun,* 21 December 2016, https://kun.uz/news/2016/12/21/zokirzon-almatov-korrupciaga-karsi-kurasadi; "Zakirzhon Almatov naznachen sovetnikom glavy MVD" [Zakirzhon Almatov appointed advisor to interior minister], *Gazeta*, 27 February 2018, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2018/02/27/mvd/ (both accessed 3 July 2020).

64 "Uzbekistan: Security Services Lose Elite Units", *Eurasianet*, 7 February 2018, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-security-services-lose-elite-units (accessed 3 July 2020).

65 For details see Anna Kozyrova, "Ispugannye i Razorennye: Nasledie Inoyatova izgonyayut iz silovych struktur Uzbekistana" [The fearful and the ruined: Inoyatov's legacy driven out of Uzbekistan's security agencies], *Fergana*, 9 March 2018, https://www.fergananews.com/articles/9843; Rafael Sattarov, "Vidimost' Lyustracii: Zachem vlasti Uzbekistana nachali massovye chistki silovikov" [The appearance of a lustration: Why Uzbekistan's rulers have started a mass purge of the security authorities], *Moskovskij Centr Karnegi*, 28 September 2018, https://carnegie.ru/commentary/77365 (both accessed 3 July 2020).

66 Alisher Ilchamov, "Politicheskaya sistema Uzbekistana vse eshche pokoitsya na neformal'noy tabeli o rangach" [Uzbekistan's political system is still based on an informal ranking], *Aziys'kiy Monitor*, 29 October 2019, https://cacds.org.ua/?p=8160 (accessed 3 July 2020).

67 "Nazad v Budushchee: Zachem sodtrudnikov SGB Uzbekistana sdelali neprikosvennymi" [Back to the future: What do members of Uzbekistan's state security service need immunity for?], *Fergana,* 10 April 2018, https://www.fergana news.com/articles/9893. The Law of 5 April 2018 can be found under identifier SRU-471 in the Justice Ministry database: https://lex.uz (both accessed 3 July 2020).

68 "Eks-glava specsluzhb Uzbekistana progovoren k 18 godam tyurmy" [Former head of Uzbekistan's intelligence service sentenced to 18 years imprisonment], *Radio Ozodlik*, 28 September 2019, https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/30187741.html (accessed 3 July 2020).

69 Sattarov, "Vidimost' Ljustracii" (see note 65); Kozyrova, "Ispugannye i Razorenny" (see note 65); Aziz Jakubov, "Snova 'Bol'shoy Brat'': Zaymet li genprokuratura Uzbekistana mesto Karimovskoy SNB" [Another "big brother': Is Uzbekistan's Prosecutor General taking the place of Karimov's SNB?], *Fergana*, 10 August 2018, https://www.fergananews.com/articles/10114 (accessed 3 July 2020).

the motives behind the reorganisation of the security apparatus.[70]

While the responsibilities of the SGB were curtailed in the course of the purges, the powers and staff of the Prosecutor General were expanded. The Prosecutor General now occupies a key role monitoring implementation of the reforms and coordinates closely with the tax and customs authorities.[71] Mirziyoyev has also exploited the security service reorganisation to establish a system in which two closely linked elite units — the National Guard and the State Security Service of the President (GSBP) — have taken over central tasks of the former intelligence service.

The new central organ of the structures responsible for internal security is the National Guard, a paramilitary formation that was hived off from the Interior Ministry's armed forces in 1992 and placed under the Defence Ministry. The remit of this elite unit, which numbers about one thousand men, was both broad and unspecific, but consisted principally in protecting the president and guarding strategically important sites.[72] It was also deployed in counter-terrorism operations.[73] In August 2017 the National Guard was taken out of the armed forces, expanded and granted the status of an independent force. Its mandate has been successively expanded and now includes genuine police responsibilities such as maintaining public order during rallies and demonstrations, manhunts and criminal investigations, as well as controlling the import, dissemination and export of arms. Legislation to codify the various legal changes is in preparation.[74]

The safety and security of President Mirziyoyev and his family are the responsibility of the GSBP. It represents a kind of praetorian guard,[75] and since a legislative amendment in September 2019 is also responsible for criminal investigations and prevention in cases involving "the president's security" — a catch-all vague enough to justify almost any deployment.[76] Relatives of the president feature prominently in the leadership of both units. Major-General Batyr Tursunov, who helped establish the National Guard, is related by marriage to Mirziyoyev,[77] and can look back at a long career in the Interior Ministry police and the intelligence services.[78] Another son-in-law of the president is second in command of the GSBP.[79] As can be seen, the president's reorganisation of the security apparatus creates a structure that serves not least to secure his personal power.

Cadre Policy and Governance

Close confidants of Mirziyoyev are also found in other important posts, for example in leading positions in the presidential administration.[80] They include Prime

70 Sattarov, "Vidimost' Lyustracii" (see note 65).

71 For details see Jakubov, "Snova 'Bol'shoy Brat'" (see note 69).

72 The Law Establishing the National Guard of 23 January 1992 can be found under identifier 29 (29-son) in the Justice Ministry database (https://lex.uz [accessed 3 July 2020]).

73 "Prezident provel zasedanie Soveta Bezopasnosti" (see note 62).

74 "Zakon o Nacgvardii odobren senatorami" [Law on National Guard passes Senate], *Gazeta*, 14 December 2019, https://www.gazeta.uz/ru/2019/12/14/security/; "Nacional'naya gvardiya Uzbekistana poluchit novye polnomochiya" [Uzbek National Guard granted new powers], *Podrobno,* 19 March 2020, https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/natsionalnaya-gvardiya-uzbekistana-poluchit-novye-polnomochiya-/ (both accessed 3 July 2020).

75 The analogy is pointed out by Aziz Jakubov, "Kto nynche na Brodvee glavnyy" [Who's playing the lead on Broadway now], *Fergana*, 10 September 2019, https://fergana.agency/articles/110646/?country=uz (accessed 3 July 2020).

76 "Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Mirzieeva vozmet opponentov prezidenta na karandash" [Mirziyoyev's security service turns attention to President's opponents], *Fergana*, 6 September 2019, https://fergana.agency/news/110595/. The Law of 5 September 2019 can be found under identifier SRU-564 in the Justice Ministry database: https://lex.uz (both accessed 3 July 2020).

77 "In Uzbekistan, National Guard Turned into a Personal Army of the President", *Analytical Center for Central Asia*, 4 November 2019, https://acca.media/en/in-uzbekistan-national-guard-turned-into-a-personal-army-of-the-president/ (accessed 3 July 2020).

78 "Tursunov Batyr Radzhabovich", https://centrasia.org/person2.php?st=1549443471; "Ojbek Tursunov", *Mezon*, https://mezon.io/tag/ojbek-tursunov/ (both accessed 3 July 2020).

79 Otabek Umarov is an afficionado of martial arts, especially Mixed Martial Arts (MMA), and until August 2020 headed various sports bodies (MMA, Triathlon); "President's Son-in-law to Head New Central Asian MMA Confederation", *Tashkent Times*, 11 February 2020, https://tashkenttimes.uz/sports/4960-president-s-son-in-law-to-head-new-central-asian-mma-confederation (accessed 3 July 2020).

80 "Derzhat sovet: Kto budet upravlyat' Uzbekistanom vmeste s prezidentom" [The advisors: Who governs Uzbekistan together with the President?], *Fergana*, 3 September

Minister Abdulla Aripov, Deputy Chairperson of the Senate Sadyk Safaev and Komil Allamjanov, an experienced media functionary. They are all of great significance for the external representation of Mirziyoyev's reform policies.[81] What connects these representatives of the political elite is not least the active role that they — like Mirziyoyev himself — played in the old system. The protagonists of this "old guard" are of elementary importance for the president's power base, as exemplified by the reintegration of former interior minister Almatov into the police apparatus.

Mirziyoyev's supporters also include influential business figures who actively push the economic reform agenda, are centrally involved in the implementation of projects and help to secure Mirziyoyev's reforms simply by creating visible facts on the ground. Jahongir Artykhojayev for example, since 2018 senator in the upper chamber and mayor of Tashkent, is publicly responsible for the *Tashkent City* business centre, a contract worth about US$1.3 billion whose realisation is proceeding rapidly. But several firms owned by Artykhojayev are also commercially involved in the project.[82] The billionaire Alisher Usmanov is probably the most prominent champion of Mirziyoyev's political course. An Uzbek by birth who lives in Russia and has family ties to the Uzbek president, Usmanov is founder and part owner of the Russian-registered holding company USM, which owns stakes in major Russian enterprises.[83] By his own account he has invested "several hundred million dollars" in Uzbekistan, "to help the new president and his team".[84] Usmanov is also said to possess a degree of political influence over the Uzbek president, especially in relation to his policies towards Russia.

Alongside the politically seasoned representatives of his own generation, on whose loyalty the president can count to guard his interests in both the civil service and the security structures, Mirziyoyev has integrated younger specialists into his team. These representatives of the post-Soviet generation — mostly economists and jurists who studied at elite universities and gained work experience both at home and abroad — are crucial for realisation of the reform agenda They include Justice Minister Ruslanbek Davletov and Sardor Umurzakov, Deputy Prime Minister for Investments and Foreign Economic Relations. These comparatively young individuals identify wholeheartedly with the reform agenda and operate in the conviction that they are doing the right thing.[85] They are also represented in the presidential administration and in think tanks involved in implementation of the reform agenda, like the DSC. With their fundamentally liberal attitude, their enthusiasm, their familiarity with the language of international development and their admiration for the president they embody the spirit and objectives of the reform programme and are able to communicate them credibly at home and abroad.[86]

But staff of that calibre remain a minority in the civil service. Most public officials were socialised in a system whose culture was worlds apart from the one Mirziyoyev is seeking to establish. In his inaugural address to parliament on 14 December 2016 he laid out the attitudes and conduct he expected from his cadres.[87] The ceremonial speech, which was largely intended to prepare his audience for the upcoming reforms, ended with sharp criticism of the attitudes of state cadres. In the past, he said, outmoded attitude had prevented "rational" and "efficient" deployment. Too many staff had merely "simulated" activity, while personnel had been lacking in important areas. It was time, he said, to cultivate a new generation of public

2018, https://www.fergananews.com/articles/10156 (accessed 11 July 2020).

81 Ilchamov, "Politicheskaya sistema Uzbekistana" (see note 66).

82 Kristian Lasslett, "Uzbekistan Ltd: Private-public Interests Clash in Flagship Project", *Open Democracy*, 29 January 2019, https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/odr/uzbekistan-ltd/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

83 See the company's website: https://usm-group.com/company (accessed 11 July 2020).

84 Henry Foy, "Alisher Usmanov: 'I Was Never What You Could Call an Oligarch'", *Financial Times*, 3 January 2020, https://www.ft.com/content/a472f9e6-28c6-11ea-9305-4234e74b0ef3 (accessed 11 July 2020).

85 Catherine Putz, "Uzbekistan: Reforms on the Right Path: An Exclusive Interview with Uzbek Minister of Justice Ruslanbek Davletov", *The Diplomat*, 16 May 2018, https://the diplomat.com/2018/05/uzbekistan-reforms-on-the-right-path/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

86 Discussions with representatives of the Uzbek think tanks in Tashkent and Berlin (2019/20).

87 "Svobodnoe, demokraticheskoe i procvetajushchee gosudarstvo Uzbekistan my postroim vmeste s nashim muzhestvennym i blagorodnym narodom" [We will build free, democratic and prospering Uzbekistan with our courageous and magnanimous people], address by President Mirziyoyev to joint session of lower chamber and senate, 14 December 2016, https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/111 (accessed 11 July 2020) (English: https://president.uz/en/lists/view/111).

officials, with a "professional attitude to work", "modern ways of thinking" and "vision", who are capable of achieving objectives. Not least, the proportion of women in all state functions needed to be increased.

The president repeated his criticisms at the first, extended meeting of the cabinet in January 2017.[88] For much too long the state administration had been characterised by an unrealistic and superficial "cabinet style", he said, where staff had seen themselves principally as advocates of their agency or ministry, rather than representing the interests of the state. It was now time to establish a new "behavioural norm" characterised by "critical analysis, strict discipline and personal responsibility", especially in the executive grades. The president went on to warn the government and parliament that the "reconstruction of state and society" proposed in the reform agenda would demand a "qualitatively completely new" attitude to the needs of the population. Politicians and officials would have to break with the past, engage properly with the situation on the ground and "enter into dialogue with all population groups". He said he expected law enforcement authorities and regional administrations in particular to change their attitudes and bear in mind that "not the people are to serve the state, but the state is to serve the people".

So what Mirziyoyev wants to introduce in the state administration is nothing less than a working style characterised by an ethics of responsibility as a central element of good governance. That requires training and education. The task of the Agency for Civil Service Development established by presidential decree in October 2019 is to ensure that the staff of state organs and agencies receive such (re)training.[89] A presidential advisor heads the Agency, which is also responsible for preparing a fundamental reform of the civil service and coordinating state personnel policy across the board. One of the priorities is to introduce a competitive selection process and to systematise performance assessments The state-run Nation's Hope Foundation *(El-yurt umidi)*, which has been funding young academics to study abroad since 1993, now falls under the responsibility of the new Agency for Civil Service Development in order to accelerate the training of highly qualified young specialists and to recruit as many of them as possible to the civil service. Efforts are also under way to persuade Uzbeks who have built a career abroad to return and place their talents at the service of the reforms.[90]

Preceding this development, the Prosecutor General announced in August 2019 that all staff in the state administration would be required to participate in courses on ethics, conflicts of interest and anti-corruption methods. The background to this is that the media liberalisation has seen growing coverage of complaints concerning abuses of power in public offices. The *regional hokims*,[91] who frequently bypass legal channels to enforce their decisions and are known to resort to violence, have come in for particularly widespread criticism.[92] The president has repeatedly underlined that the authoritarian style of the hokims is no longer acceptable and publicly criticised their misconduct.[93] However, the hokims — in whose appointment the local parliaments *(kengesh)* also have a say since a reform in 2017[94] — play a key role in regional

88 *Kriticheskiy analiz, zhestkaya disciplina i personal'naya otvetstvennost'* (see note 12).

89 Agenstvo Razvitiya Gosudarstvennoj Sluzhby (ARGOS). Decree UP-5843 of 3 October 2019 available at https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4549993; see also "U Mirzieeva posyavilsya ARGOS dlja kontrolja chinovnikov" [Under Mirziyoyev ARGOS established to control officials], *Fergana*, 4 October 2019, https://fergana.agency/news/111393/?country=uz (both accessed 11 July 2020).

90 "Umidovcy iz raznych stran vossoedinyatsya po initiative fonda "El-Yurt Umidi" [Umid scholarship-holders from various countries meet at initiative of El-yurt umidi Foundation], *Kultura*, 5 December 2019, https://kultura.uz/view_2_r_14363.html (accessed 11 July 2020).

91 In this publication I use the Anglicised plural of *hokim* rather than the linguistically correct *hokimlar*.

92 "Chokimiyaty i vlast': chto dumayut uzbekistancy o svoich chokimach" [The power of the hokimat: What Uzbeks think about their hokims], *Kun*, 21 May 2019, https://kun.uz/ru/news/2019/05/21/xokimiyaty-i-vlast-chto-dumayut-uzbekistansy-o-svoix-xokimax; "Genprokuratura Uzbekistana ozabotilas' sluzhebnoy etikoy chinovnikov" [Prosecutor General concerned about civil service ethics], *Fergana*, 16 August 2019, https://fergana.agency/news/109955/ (both accessed 11 July 2020).

93 "Uzbek Leader Disparages Governors over House Demolitions", *BBC Monitoring Central Asi*a, 5 August 2019; "Mirziyoyev poruchil chinovnikam kardinal'no peresmotret' metody svoey raboty" [Mirziyoyev tells civil servants to change their working methods], *Kun*, 14 August 2019, https://kun.uz/ru/news/2019/08/14/mirziyoyev-poruchil-chinovnikam-kardinalno-peresmotret-metody-svoyey-raboty (accessed 11 July 2020).

94 Under the amended Law on Local Governments of 1993 (https://www.lex.uz/acts/112168, accessed 11 July 2020) the

power structures and are in a position to severely disrupt implementation of reforms. So for those reasons, and for lack of alternatives, Mirziyoyev is sticking with them. In fact their responsibilities are to be expanded, giving them the task of implementing economic reform measures on the ground themselves rather than simply following instructions from the central authorities. But local parliaments are also to be given the power to remove hokims by vote of no confidence.[95] The hokims are already legally accountable to the local parliaments in relation to plans for implementing reform projects and progress reports, but this is plainly not taken seriously enough on the ground. The president regularly calls for greater transparency, also vis-à-vis the mass media and the wider public.[96]

Aside from the head of state's direct pedagogical interventions and institutional incentives for reeducating existing cadres, great import is placed on investment in the education system to create the personnel required in the longer term to reshape the country. The government hopes to tap expertise from abroad to bring curricula, teaching materials and assessment systems up to international standards, and also intends to double the number of study grants to increase the proportion of young people with university degrees. This applies above all to subjects of practical relevance.[97]

Public Mobilisation

Alongside a revamped personnel policy, popular mobilisation plays a central role in securing compliance and legitimacy for the reform programme. One early sign of this was that the first reform year was dedicated to "dialogue" with society. Here the strategy operates on two fronts: with the citizenry and within the state organs. Confidence in the state is to be consolidated by introducing the principle that office holders are accountable to the public, while reducing bureaucratic obstacles should create accessibility and make it easier for citizens to take their concerns to the authorities. Public events concerning the reform programme are to involve relevant population groups as well as representatives of the state.

The organisation of such events is to be entrusted to specially founded organisations whose purpose is principally to mobilise the population for the reform programme. One of these "government NGOs" (GoNGOs), the DSC, has already been discussed above (see p. 13 f.). It runs information events on the topics and "results" of the reforms to create "a positive image" of the modernisation policy and also get on board those who "are still inactive and have not yet understood that everyone should be participating and contributing".[98]

Similar objectives are pursued by the *Yuksalish* (Progress) Movement, which was founded in February 2019 — again by the government.[99] On its website *Yuksalish* presents itself as a "voluntary association" of citizens and NGOs seeking to inform the country about the reform programme and encourage popular participation.[100] The movement, whose activity profile is as broad as the DSC's, works to network state and non-state actors and institutions. It is apparently also intending to establish itself as an umbrella organisation for the NGO sector, because smaller NGO operating outside the state structures still experience difficulties in Uzbekistan.[101] But with its official mandate and offices in all regions *Yuksalish* is well positioned to absorb the grassroots sector and — in the context of the state reform policies — to become a kind of super-GoNGO.

hokims are elected by the local parliaments "after consultation with the president".

95 At least according to the proposal for a reform of the Law on Local Governments: "Zakon o gosvlasti na mestach primut v novoy redakcii" [Law on Local Governments to be revised], *Aloqada*, 24 May 2019, http://www.aloqada.com/News/2019/05/24/zakon-o-nbsp-gosvlasti-na-nbsp-mestakh-primut-v-nbsp-novoy-redakcii (accessed 11 July 2020).

96 "Poslanie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkata Mirzieeva Oliy Mazhlisu" [Text of President Shavkat Mirziyoyev's address to the Oliy Majlis], 24 January 2020, https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/3324 (accessed 11 July 2020) (English: https://president.uz/en/lists/view/3324).

97 Ibid.

98 Discussion with DSC Director, February 2020, Berlin.

99 *Postanovlenie Kabineta Ministrov Respubliki Uzbekistan, O merach po organizacii dejatel'nosti negosudarstvennoy nekommercheskoy organizacii – Obshchenacional'noe dvizhenie "Yuksalish" i ego territorial'nych podrazdeleniy* [Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Uzbekistan, on measures to organise the activities of the non-state, non-profit movement "Yuksalish" and its territorial subdivisions], 13 February 2019, no. 124, https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4200154 (accessed 11 July 2020).

100 See https://yumh.uz (accessed 11 July 2020).

101 A draft law of January 2020 has to date done nothing to change this. "NGO Bill Criticised as 'Bureaucratic Red Tape'", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 23 January 2020.

As can be seen, the idea of participation becomes an instrument of social engineering in this context, a tool of social "reeducation" in support of the reform policies. The imperative character of the offer of participation is also discernible in the president's speeches, where he regularly reminds his compatriots that "all reforms must originate from society" and that society must therefore develop "more activity and initiative", "entrepreneurial spirit" and "business acumen".[102] Such virtues were shunned by the Soviet-era command state and its planned economy — but are vital for the liberal market economy the president is working towards. Uzbeks are being told to rethink, to mobilise their "inner reserves", to do their utmost, and to display the kind of determination and stamina that the nation has often demonstrated in the course of its history. Only then can the objective of "radical improvement in living conditions for everyone" be achieved.[103] "It depends on you," is the implicit message of these speeches, in which the president appeals to his compatriots to back his policies.

The third pillar of the mobilisation offensive is the mass media. Liberalisation of the media sector is regarded as an outstanding achievement of Mirziyoyev's reform policies. Compared to the strict censorship imposed under Karimov, the media do indeed enjoy significantly greater freedom. The official commitment to freedom of speech and Mirziyoyev's own willingness to address problems has encouraged the emergence of a lively blogging scene in Uzbekistan.[104] It is has become easier for foreign journalists to gain accreditation and media outlets that had been blocked in Uzbekistan since the unrest in Andijan in 2005 are now available again. These include Deutsche Welle, the BBC's Uzbek service, Eurasianet and Fergana, as well as Uzmetronom which offers a forum for critical internet journalism in Uzbekistan. Access to the websites of Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International has also been restored.

102 Examples: "Svobodnoe, demokraticheskoe i procvetajushchee gosudarstvo" (see note 87); "Poslanie Prezidenta" (see note 96).

103 "Poslanie Prezidenta" (see note 96).

104 Umida Hashimova, "A New Era for Press Freedom in a Changing Uzbekistan?" *The Diplomat*, 8 July 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/07/a-new-era-for-press-freedom-in-a-changing-uzbekistan/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

New liberties come with new restrictions.

There are also restrictions, however, with repeated reports of pressure applied to journalists and human rights activists who publicise local grievances.[105] Intimidation and detention of journalists and bloggers repeatedly casts doubts over the official commitment to freedom of expression.[106] A scandal involving the mayor of Tashkent, Artykhojayev, threw a particularly sharp light on the way representatives of the state interact with the media. During a debate Artykhojayev grossly insulted and massively threatened three reporters from the news portal *Kun.uz*. The discussion was secretly recorded and subsequently disseminated.[107] The authorities investigated and concluded that the mayor's insults represented a violation of ethical norms but not a crime.[108] The Agency for Information and Mass Communication (AIMK), which is part of the presidential administration and implements the state media policy, also intervened — with an appeal to bloggers and journalists not to overdramatise the affair.[109]

Such reactions starkly expose the limits of the new media freedom. The Development Strategy explicitly states that the mass media, including internet channels, should explain the reform agenda and its objectives to the population — meaning the "deepening of democratic reforms", "the protection of human rights and liberties", and the introduction of principles of rule of law, peace and "the common good".[110] In other words, the media are supposed to present the public with a positive image of the state's policies. The AIMK sees itself as a mediating instance, supporting the

105 *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, Highlights from Central Asian Press, Websites, 27 June 2019.

106 Examples: "Uzbekistan: Government Still Restricting Free Reporting", *Eurasianet*, 10 October 2019, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-government-still-restricting-free-reporting (accessed 11 July 2020); "Facebook User 'Abducted, Beaten' for Comments", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, Highlights from Central Asian Press, Websites, 17 December 2019.

107 "Uzbekistan: Tashkent Mayor's Outburst Shocks Reporters", *Eurasianet*, 18 November 2019, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-tashkent-mayors-outburst-shocks-reporters (accessed 11 July 2020).

108 "'No Signs of Crime' in Uzbek Mayor's Threats to Reporters", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 27 November 2019.

109 "Uzbekistan: Tashkent Mayor's Outburst" (see note 107).

110 *Ukaz Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan: Strategii Deystviy* (see note 36), items 6—8.

media in information-gathering, communicating with state instances and ensuring that reporting is "constructive".[111]

Media receive targeted state support as long as they fulfil these conditions. In August 2019 more than one hundred popular bloggers and influencers from across the world were invited to Uzbekistan to promote the country as a tourist destination. The Uzbek state spent about US$250,000 on the event, hoping that the influencers' huge followings would create a significant marketing effect.[112] The president himself met with the bloggers to explain Uzbekistan's "politics of openness" and to convey his expectation that they would present his reform policies in a positive light.[113] In the same vein, the press departments of public bodies are instructed to respond to critical reporting rather than ignoring it. On the one hand they are supposed to take criticism seriously, verify its veracity and convey it to the responsible instances; on the other they are encouraged to provide the media with material enabling them to "correct" their reports.[114] Active media policy is the motto.

In December 2019 the registration of television and radio stations and print and digital media was simplified in the interest of better interaction between state agencies and mass media. Licence applications no longer have to be presented to AIMK in a cumbersome and time consuming procedure, but can be submitted at the service centres that have been set up across the country since 2018 to centralise and digitalise information flows and transactions between politics, administration and citizens. The relevant resolution, which was prepared by AIMK, also introduced a series of arrangements designed to give journalists better protection against the authorities.[115]

The media policy is a good example of the ambivalence of the Uzbek reform programme. Liberalisation in this sector does not serve only, as occasionally insinuated by Western experts, to enhance the efficiency of state control over citizens, in the sense of refining the methods of authoritarian rule.[116] In fact the encouragement of public engagement in Uzbekistan, in however controlled a form, is also directed towards the political executive and the cadres — not least with the intention of employing media scrutiny to motivate them to internalise the reform objectives.[117] To reduce this to the perfecting of authoritarian rule fails to do justice to the complexity of the reforms. Responsible, lawful governance demanded by and benefitting the population is certainly a core interest. At the same time, greater freedoms also naturally increase the need for regulation, for example to respond to defamation and deliberate disinformation, especially online.[118]

A Public Fund for Support and Development of National Mass Media was founded in February 2020, apparently as a response to the new complexity of the media landscape. Its heads — Komil Allamjanov and presidential daughter Saida Mirziyoyeva — previously led the AIMK. Unlike the AIMK, which has status of a state regulator, the Public Fund is registered as an NGO and is supposed to promote the development of the media sector through concrete projects funded by private donors and grants; for example training for journalists and bloggers is planned. It would appear that the Public Fund is supposed to become a kind of umbrella organisation for the media sector, taking up the interests of media-makers, mediating between them and the authorities, initiating projects, and channelling funding to media sector partners judged

111 "Uzbekistan Explains Why Radio Liberty's Uzbek Website Blocked", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 21 May 2019.

112 Todd Prince, "Uzbekistan Turns to Foreign Social-Media Stars to Boost Tourism", *RFE/RL*, 23 September 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-tourism-foreign-social-media-stars-to-boost-tourism/30176880.html (accessed 11 July 2020).

113 "Uzbek Leader Vows to Support Bloggers", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 27 August 2019.

114 "Uzbek State Press Secretaries Rebuked for Lack of Reporting", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 6 October 2019.

115 "V Uzbekistane uprostili registraciju SMI" [Registration of mass media eased in Uzbekistan], *Fergana*, 23 December 2019, https://fergana.ru/news/113670/?country=uz (accessed 11 July 2020).

116 Edward Lemon, *Mirziyoyev's Uzbekistan: Democratization or Authoritarian Upgrading?* Central Asia Papers (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 12 June 2019), https://www.fpri.org/article/2019/06/mirziyoyevs-uzbekistan-democratization-or-authoritarian-upgrading/ (accessed 11 July 2020); see also (in relation to Kazakhstan) Sebastian Schiek, *Kasachstans autoritäre Partizipationspolitik*, SWP-Studie 20/2019 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, August 2019).

117 "Verchovenstvo Konstitucii i zakonov — vazhneyshiy kriteriy pravovogo demokraticheskogo gosudarstva i grazhdanskogo obshchestva" [Rule of constitution and law — the most important criterion for a democratic and civil society). Address by President Mirziyoyev for Constitution Day of the Republic of Uzbekistan, 7 December 2019, https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/3119 (accessed 11 July 2020).

118 "Uzbek Bill Obliges Bloggers to Erase 'Illegal' User Comments", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 2 October 2019.

to be suitable.[119] In that respect it is analogous to the *Yuksalish* Movement, which represents the NGO sector and (at least potentially and in certain areas) also absorbs it. While *Yuksalish* watches over the NGO scene's conformity with the objectives of the reforms, the Public Fund has the potential to channel press freedom in directions the regime regards as desirable and acceptable.

These forms of containment are apparently regarded as inadequate in some quarters. In April 2020 the Interior Ministry published a draft resolution — ostensibly concerning prevention of youth criminality — recommending the establishment of a "virtual group of patriotic bloggers" to identify "negative views" in social media and create an "atmosphere of intolerance" towards them.[120] It remains to be seen whether this will be put into practice. Uzbekistan now has many active bloggers, who welcome Mirziyoyev's policy of opening, follow political events both critically and constructively, and quickly publicise such manipulation attempts.[121] They embody precisely the type of engaged, socially and medially active citizen that the reform policy seeks to foster. Their legitimacy in a young and internationally orientated public sphere will depend not least on their ability to withstand authoritarian and paternalistic cooptation by hardliners in security-relevant ministries.

119 "New Uzbek Media NGO Vows to Put Free Speech into Practice", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 10 February 2020; see also "Allamjonov and Mirziyoyeva to Head Uzbek Media Fund's Board of Trustees", *Fergana*, 2 February 2020, https://en.fergana.news/news/114721/.

120 Resolution 16692 is available at https://regulation.gov.uz/uz/document/16692 (accessed 11 July 2020).

121 In this case the blogger Khushnud Khudoyberdiyev on 13 April 2020 on *Telegram*, https://t.me/s/xushnudbek (accessed 11 July 2020). Khudoyberdiyev was coopted into the state structures in July 2020, when he was appointed deputy director of the National News Agency UzA.

Foreign Policy Dimensions of the Reforms

Foreign policy is not a reform priority in its own right, but falls — along with security, nationality policy and religion — under Area V of the development strategy. And here the parameters developed under Karimov remain in force: the commitment to the principle of neutrality and a policy often referred to in the post-Soviet space as multivectoral, in the sense of seeking a strategic balance that secures maxium leeway and permits a broad spectrum of partnerships.[122] But there is one decisive difference. Whereas Karimov's priority was preserving independence, especially vis-à-vis Russia, and his foreign policy was therefore fundamentally defensive, the commitment to neutrality today is underpinned by an offensive interest in regional influence and international empowerment.

Economic interests are key. Economic modernisation depends centrally on a dynamisation of trade relationships and the acquisition of investment capital, with foreign policy initiatives recognisably orientated on those objectives. The regional neighbourhood tops the new foreign policy agenda,[123] as the region where Uzbek exports can be most easily expanded. Cooperation with Central Asian neighbours, especially Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which had in the past suffered from tensions, have improved noticeably under Mirziyoyev. Agreement has been reached over numerous border demarcation and water management issues, which are crucial to relations with those two states. The reopening of border crossings and the establishment of scheduled flights (with Tajikistan) now opens the way for an expansion of economic and trade relations, which represents the heart of Uzbekistan's regional initiatives.[124]

These increasingly also include Afghanistan, where Uzbekistan played a mediating role in the talks between the Kabul government and the Taliban and intends to participate in the country's economic reconstruction. Uzbek participation in the construction of highways, rail links and electricity transmission, which had already begun under Karimov, is to be continued and expanded. Afghanistan is an important market for Uzbek exports, especially foodstuffs, pharmaceuticals, construction materials, mineral fertiliser, agricultural machinery and electricity. Both countries are also crucial transit corridors for each other.[125]

Relations with the region's major powers Russia and China have also intensified enormously. Russia remains the most important strategic partner, as manifested most visibly in the economic sphere. Cooperation in the fuel and energy sectors formed the heart of Soviet-era economic cooperation and remains central.[126] During Vladimir Putin's state visit in October

122 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Uzbekistan, *Foreign Policy*, https://mfa.uz/en/cooperation/. On the historical context see Aleksey Asiryan, "New Faces, Old Patterns in Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy", *The Diplomat*, 21 August 2019, https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/new-faces-old-patterns-in-uzbekistans-foreign-policy/ (both accessed 11 July 2020).

123 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Foreign Policy* (see note 122).

124 Umida Hashimova, *A Year in Review: Uzbekistan Pursues Liberalization at Home, Neighborly Relations Abroad*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 15, no. 6 (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 17 January 2018), https://jamestown.org/program/year-review-uzbekistan-pursues-liberalization-home-neighborly-relations-abroad/. Central Asia's share of Uzbek foreign trade grew from 8.6 percent in 2015 to almost 16 percent in 2019: International Monetary Fund, *Direction of Trade Statistics*, http://data.imf.org/?sk=9D6028D4-F14A-464C-A2F2-59B2CD424B85 (both accessed 14 July 2020).

125 "Uzbekistan Pursues Economic Partnership with Afghanistan", *Caspian Policy Center*, 27 August 2019, https://www.caspianpolicy.org/uzbekistan-pursues-economic-partnership-with-afghanistan/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

126 Umida Hashimova, *In Uzbekistan, Western Powers Compete for Influence with Russia*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 16, no. 35 (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 13 March 2019), https://jamestown.org/program/in-uzbekistan-western-powers-compete-for-influence-with-russia/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

Map

2018 contracts were signed for economic projects worth US$27 billion, including an agreement to build a nuclear power station. Intended to address Uzbekistan's growing energy needs, the move raised eyebrows as the first civil nuclear power project in Central Asia. Construction is projected to cost about US$10 billion with completion due in 2030.[127] Although China (with 20 percent) was just ahead of Russia (with 18 percent) on trade in 2018, Russia retains its special status, not least as the main destination for most Uzbek labour migrants.[128]

Military and security cooperation also resumed in 2017, with Uzbekistan and Russia conducting joint military exercises for the first time since 2005.[129] A string of defence agreements were also signed, including purchases of Russian military equipment.[130] This intensification of relations has given rise to speculation that Uzbekistan might rejoin the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), a Russian-dominated mili-

127 "Uzbekistan, Russia Agree on Site for Nuclear Plant", *Eurasianet*, 2 May 2019, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-russia-agree-on-site-for-nuclear-plant (accessed 11 July 2020).

128 "Ezhegodno v Rossiyu vyezzhaet svyshe 2 mln migrantov iz Uzbekistana" [Every year more than 2 million migrants travel from Uzbekistan to Russia], *Podrobno,* 18 June 2019, https://podrobno.uz/cat/uzbekistan-i-rossiya-dialog-partnerov-/ezhegodno-v-rossiyu-vyezzhaet-svyshe-2-mln-migrantov-i/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

129 John C. K. Daly, *Russia and Uzbekistan Hold First Joint Military Exercise in 12 Years, Plan Further Cooperation*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 14, no. 122 (Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 3 October 2017), https://jamestown.org/program/russia-and-uzbekistan-hold-first-joint-military-exercise-in-12-years-plan-further-cooperation/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

130 Ilja Kramnik, "Oruzhie dlya Tashkenta: zachem Rossii VTS s Uzbekistanom" [Arms for Tashkent: Why is Russio cooperating with Uzbekistan on military technology?], *Izvestiya*, 17 July 2019, https://iz.ru/899665/ilia-kramnik/oruzhie-dlia-tashkenta-zachem-rossii-vts-s-uzbekistanom (accessed 11 July 2020).

tary alliance including Belarus as well as Uzbekistan's Central Asian neighbours. Tashkent left the CSTO in 2012 in the course of a foreign policy realignment.

The question of an Uzbek accession to the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is also in the air. Founded in 2015 and benefitting above all Russia as the strongest member economy, the EEU is one of a multitude of integration projects in the territory of the former Soviet Union that enable Russia to preserve its political influence in the region. The question of Uzbek membership is contested within the country.[131] In light of the geopolitical dimension of the EEU, accession would undoubtedly represent a major foreign policy move whose consequences for the success of the reform project are hard to foresee. That is probably why Mirziyoyev has to date avoided taking a firm stance on the issue.

Foreign policy backing the image of a reforming state.

Uzbekistan wishes to keep all options open for acquiring the investment it will require to modernise and develop its economy. This makes China — which has significantly expanded its relations with Central Asian states under the conceptual umbrella of the "New Silk Road" (Belt and Road Initiative, BRI) — a strategic partner of the first order. China regards Uzbekistan as a key partner for the success of the BRI's Central Asian component,[132] and has become Uzbekistan's largest trading partner and an increasingly important lender and investor. Most incoming foreign direct investment since 2016 has originated from China; at the end of 2019 about 1,600 Chinese firms were registered in Uzbekistan. In January 2020 China opened an economic cooperation office in Tashkent. It is located within the Ministry of Investments and Foreign Trade and is the first of its kind in Central Asia.[133]

Chinese capital is flowing into a broad spectrum of projects, including conventional and renewable electricity, petrochemicals, construction and textiles, and investment in digital infrastructure and telecommunications rolled out very rapidly. In August 2019 Uzbekistan's state telecommunications provider UMS signed a credit agreement with the Chinese company Huawei for US$150 million to upgrade the Uzbek mobile phone network. In April the Uzbek Ministry for Development of Information Technologies and Communications had already concluded a deal worth billions with a subsidiary of the CITIC Group to develop digital infrastructure for government agencies and to establish a digital *"Safe City"*[134] *surveillance structure.* The equipment for the project, which had been on the table since August 2017,[135] will also be supplied by Huawei.[136]

The third pillar of economic progress for Tashkent is support from the international financial institutions and Western investors. Soft loans from institutions like the World Bank are obviously attractive, and the World Bank has significantly expanded its engagement since 2016 and supports the Uzbek transformation project with several billion dollars in loans and development aid.[137] Western technologies and know-how have always been prized in Uzbekistan, while cooperation with the West functions as a strategic counterweight to the structural dominance of the two regional powers — and is indispensable for the international recognition as a relevant actor that Uzbekistan seeks. The commitment to economic and political opening laid out in the Development Strategy seems to have made the political and ideological differences that formerly hampered cooperation a thing of the past.

131 Farkhod Tolipov, "History Repeats Itself: Uzbekistan's New Eurasian Gamble", *CACI Analyst*, 22 November 2019, https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13596-history-repeats-itself-uzbekistans-new-eurasian-gamble.html (accessed 11 July 2020).

132 Jeffrey Reeves, "China's Silk Road Economic Belt Initiative: Network and Influence Formation in Central Asia", *Journal of Contemporary China* 27, no. 112 (2018): 502—18 (514).

133 Yau Tsz Yan, "Chinese Business Briefing: Yuan Welcome, But Flights Cancelled", *Eurasianet*, 4 February 2020, https://eurasianet.org/chinese-business-briefing-yuan-welcome-but-flights-cancelled (accessed 16 July 2020).

134 "What Is Huawei Safe City Network Solution", 2 May 2018, *Youtube*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= gCjNL_2DPYA (accessed 11 July 2020).

135 Presidential resolution PP-3245 of 29 August 2017 is accessible at https://lex.uz/ru/docs/3324011 (accessed 11 July 2020).

136 Umida Hashimova, *Uzbekistan Increasingly Turns to China for Development Loans*, Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol. 16, no. 118 (4 September 2019), https://jamestown.org/program/uzbekistan-increasingly-turns-to-china-for-development-loans/ (accessed 11 July 2020).

137 In April 2020 World Bank loans and credits to Uzbekistan totalled US$4.14 billion, half of which was development assistance: World Bank, *The World Bank in Uzbekistan: Country Snapshot*, Stand 1 April 2020, http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/988861587043457680/Uzbekistan-Snapshot-Apr2020.pdf (accessed 11 July 2020).

The commitment to liberal values plays a prominent role in the way Uzbekistan presents itself to Western partners. The strategy document itself and the terms it uses are to quite some extent a response to the expectations of international donors, which tie their support to promises of good governance. The core components of the concept, which was developed in the 1990s by the World Bank,[138] include protecting property rights, transparency in public administration, and accountability of the executive for use of public resources; those objectives also feature prominently in Uzbekistan's development agenda. The rankings of the World Bank, which supports and advises Uzbekistan on the implementation of reforms,[139] therefore represent — like the rankings and indices of other relevant institutions and organisations — an important frame of reference for the success of Mirziyoyev's policies.

In January 2019, in connection with the determination of reform priorities for the year ("investment and social development") the government decided to establish a department for international rankings within the presidential administration and to name individuals within ministries and agencies who are responsible for positioning Uzbekistan. The rankings are listed in the decree and include all the relevant sources: from the World Bank's Doing Business Index and the OECD's country risk classifications to Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, the *Economist Intelligence Unit's* Democracy Index and the Reporters without Borders World Press Freedom Index. The aforementioned AIMK is expected to function as a "PR centre responsible for organising broad information and propaganda especially in business circles".[140]

There is plainly awareness that willingness to invest in Uzbekistan presupposes confidence in the sustainability of the reforms, and that the problematic aspects of Uzbek politics — such as nepotistic tendencies in appointments and a lack of judicial independence — have certainly not gone unnoticed in the West.[141] Creating a "positive international image" is consequently a pressing task of Uzbek foreign policy, with the authorities sparing neither cost nor effort to present Uzbekistan as a free and competition-orientated country with a "centuries-old culture of tolerance and hospitality" that is attractive to investors and tourists alike.[142] Stemming forced labour, releasing political prisoners and closing a high-security prison that had become a symbol of Karimov's tyranny have also won recognition.[143]

The reward for these efforts can be seen in Uzbekistan's rising position in the relevant rankings, in a growing willingness to invest and in the development of tourism.[144] Within the country these changes are presented as confirmation of the success of President Mirziyoyev's reform course. This improves the chances of consolidating his policy of controlled opening, which is supposed to bring about a better life for Uzbeks and international recognition of their state.

138 Andrea Schmitz, "Entwicklungspolitische Konditionalität und Demokratisierung", in *Externe Faktoren der Demokratisierung*, ed. Gero Erdmann and Marianne Kneuer (Baden-Baden, 2009), 127—45 (131 f.).

139 *The World Bank in Uzbekistan: Country Snapshot* (April 2020), http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/988861587043457680/Uzbekistan-Snapshot-Apr2020.pdf (accessed 15 July 2020).

140 Presidential Decree UP-5635 of 17 January 2019 is accessible at https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4168757. A follow-up decree of 7 March 2019 (UP-5687, https://lex.uz/docs/4230910) appointed a commission to coordinate the "work with international rankings and indices" and gave the Finance Ministry more staff to deal with the issue. Another decree, of 2 June 2020 (UP-6003, https://lex.uz/ru/docs/4838765 [all accessed 11 July 2020]) established a national advisory group in response to ongoing dissatisfaction over the country's position in international rankings. In order to motivate officials to engage more on the issue, Uzbekistan's position in important rankings is to be included in their performance evaluations.

141 Todd Prince, "Where Wall Street Meets Tashkent: Amid Reforms at Home, Uzbek Officials Make Their Pitch to Investors in New York", *RFE/RL*, 24 July 2019, https://www.rferl.org/a/uzbekistan-wall-street-investors-reforms/30073584.html?ltflags=mailer (accessed 11 July 2020).

142 "Official Says Uzbekistan Deserves Better International Image", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 29 July 2019; see also "Senator Hailed for Uzbekistan's Enhanced International Standing", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 25 June 2019.

143 Human Rights Watch, *Uzbekistan: Events of 2019*, https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/uzbekistan (accessed 15 July 2020).

144 Between 2017 and 2018 — within the space of a year — foreign direct investment in Uzbekistan quadrupled from $98 million to $412 million: United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), *World Investment Report 2019*, https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2019_en.pdf. During the same period the number of tourists visiting Uzbekistan grew by about 2.5 million: World Data, *Tourism in Uzbekistan*, https://www.worlddata.info/asia/uzbekistan/tourism.php (both accessed 11 July 2020).

Perspectives and Implications for Cooperation

Uzbekistan on Course for Reforms

The reform process is fully under way, seeking to modernise and liberalise the economy and society. The strategy paper with which President Mirziyoyev came to power guides the process of reinventing Uzbekistan and has initiated a wealth of activities in all spheres of state and society. The dismantling of barriers to trade, investment and private enterprise is — in conjunction with a comprehensive lifting of visa requirements — dynamising the economy and creating visible change. The will to renewal is reflected in extensive construction activity and radical redevelopment of cities and landscapes, while the digitalisation of public infrastructure is in the process of revolutionising modes and means of communication.

Internally too the reform course is paving the way for liberalisation, as a shift towards controlled political participation and freedom of expression and away from repression. The introduction of principles of rule of law is having a noticeable influence on the domestic political climate — manifested not least in an enormous increase in legislative activity and reforms requiring state officials to show a stronger service orientation and obliging politicians to exhibit greater openness and accountability. Public discourse is also becoming more diverse to the benefit of Uzbekistan's international reputation and foreign policy reach. Both have positive effects on the acquisition of investors and international donors for economic modernisation projects.

This politics of opening represents a break with the Karimov system, which had forced Uzbekistan into isolation and was hated by many Uzbeks, but supported for decades by an elite to which the new leader also belonged. The challenge for Mirziyoyev was therefore to generate support for (or at least compliance with) for his reform course among the relevant actors, to either integrate or neutralise potential veto players, and thus to create the preconditions for lasting reforms.

To this end the security apparatus was restructured to clearly circumscribe the powers of the individual agencies and assure the safety and security of the president and his family. Secondly, the president filled key posts with trusted confidants from the Karimov era, including close relatives. Otherwise young experts, many of whom had studied abroad, were recruited for leadership positions wherever possible. They identify with the goals of the reforms and are highly motivated, but are still a minority. The civil service is dominated by individuals who were socialised in the Karimov era. They lack performance orientation, which is a central virtue in Mirziyoyev's Uzbekistan and which the president also expects from civil servants. Efforts are under way to remedy this situation as quickly as possible through training and active promotion of new talent.

Thirdly, social changes are supposed to consolidate the reform process. The key liberal concepts of openness, dialogue and participation are employed here to promote confidence. Unlike earlier times, Uzbeks are now encouraged to express their opinions and advocate for their interests, and the reform concept requires politicians and officials to heed the needs of the people and take them seriously. Conversely the population is expected to participate actively in the national reforms. In the context of the reform policies the concept of participation is less an offer than a demand for citizens to accept the reforms, engage in their implementation and if necessary put their own needs second.

The regional and international context is also of great importance for the Uzbek reforms. The objective of modernising the economy cannot be achieved without foreign investment. Rapid visible progress is needed to secure the reform course and its sustainability. Foreign policy is therefore strongly focussed on making Uzbekistan attractive to investors and presenting the country as a dependable partner of international standing. "There is no way back," the

Uzbek leadership assures both its domestic public and foreign investors[145] — to date with success.[146]

The Limits of Transformation

So the die is cast for a new path forward. But what this really means for Uzbekistan remains open. The selective liberalisation pursued in the reform concept could lead to a further opening, one that ultimately also encompasses the political institutions and paves the way for democratisation. But it could also end in an "enlightened authoritarianism" that combines free market structures with effective and lawful governance, enables controlled political participation, but prevents real political competition. There is much to suggest that the latter option will shape Uzbekistan's future development because strong moments of inertia block any shift to an open society governed by democratic principles and rule of law.

This is seen for example in opaque public tendering practices. These are especially obvious in the construction sector, where they are associated with massive abuses echoing the clientelist appropriation of resources that characterised the Karimov era. For example construction projects associated with the promotion of tourism are often rushed through approval processes and cause irreparable harm to the historic heritage. Laws and regulations are also regularly ignored and property rights violated in the implementation of the (World Bank—funded) government programmes "Prosperous Villages" and "Prosperous Neighbourhoods", which are designed to boost the private sector and have triggered a construction boom in the towns and villages. In all cases the violations occurred with the consent of the relevant authorities, the hokims — if not at their instigation.[147] After a series of such cases were publicly reported President Mirziyoyev distanced himself explicitly from the hokims, but left them in office.[148]

There is plainly no intention of disrupting the institutional framework that enables abuse of power by the local elites. Although the new legislation provides for the hokims to be elected by the local parliaments, this follows "consultations" with the president who will thus exercise direct influence over appointments. In the absence of effective checks and balances it is still the president who decides.

The persistence of the old order is clearly discernible in the parliament and political parties. The parliamentary elections of December 2019 provide a good example. Although the campaign was a great deal more lively than in earlier elections, with broader public participation, it still left little room for real political competition.[149] And the only parties permitted to participate were those founded under Karimov to grant an appearance of plurality to the political system. None of them fought on a regime-critical platform, and their programmes differ only marginally. Unsurprisingly, the election results provided no surprises. Each of the five parties received about the same number of seats as in 2014, leaving the composition of parliament practically unaltered. On the other hand, more than half of the deputies are new and the parliament as a whole is younger and more female.[150]

145 "Es gibt keinen Weg zurück" (interview with the Uzbek foreign minister), *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 29 January 2019, https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/usbekistan-reformen-komilow-1.4307921 (accessed 12 July 2020).

146 Cyril Muller, "Sharing My Optimism for Uzbekistan's Future" (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 27 February 2019), https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/speech/2019/02/27/sharing-my-optimism-for-uzbekistans-future (accessed 12 July 2020).

147 Aziz Jakubov, "Samarkand for sale: Kto kontroliruet zastroyku osnovnogo turisticheskogo centra Uzbekistana" [Samarkand for sale: Who controls the expansion of an important Uzbek tourism centre?], *Fergana*, 15 December 2018, https://fergana.agency/articles/103286/; Early Warning System, *Uzbekistan Prosperous Villages*, https://ewsdata.rightsindevelopment.org/projects/p168233-uzbekistan-prosperous-villages-obod-qishloq/. See also "Za poslednie dva goda prokuratura vyyavila chishcheniya v stroitel'stve na 38 milliardov sumov. Zavedeno 365 ugolovnych del" [In just two years state prosecutor uncovers theft of 38 billion som. 365 cases opened], *Pordobno*, 7 May 2020, https://podrobno.uz/cat/obchestvo/za-poslednie-dva-goda-prokuratura-vyyavila-khishcheniya-v-stroitelstve-na-38-milliardov-sumov-zavede/ (all accessed 12 July 2020).

148 "Uzbek Leader Attacks Governors over Illegal Demolitions", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 5 August 2019; "Three Uzbek Governors Given Chance to Regain People's Trust", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 9 August 2019.

149 OSCE/ODHIR, *Republic of Uzbekistan, Parliamentary Elections 22 December 2019, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report* (Warsaw, 13 May 2020).

150 Bruce Pannier, "Will Fresh Faces, More Women In New Uzbek Parliament Make a Difference?" *RFE/RL*, 13 January 2020, https://www.rferl.org/a/will-fresh-faces-more-women-in-new-uzbek-parliament-make-a-difference-/30374382.html?ltflags=mailer (accessed 12 July 2020).

It is questionable, however, whether this will dynamise the work of parliament. Despite the recent reforms to expand its powers (see above, p. 12) parliament still plays only a subsidiary role in political decision-making and functions above all as an implementing organ for the plans of the executive. Although the president consistently calls on parliament to act as the "initiator of reforms", driving implementation through legislative initiatives,[151] this always means within the framework of the reform agenda, whose basic tenets are not up for discussion. Functioning in a sense as an arm of the executive, the actual role of parliamentarians is to act on instructions from the president, as the supreme representative of the new state doctrine.

The legacy of the past is manifested not least in the way criticism and dissent are handled. Although citizens are encouraged to express their opinions and participate, and the media landscape has been visibly liberalised, the expectation is that civil engagement will adhere to the reform script as interpreted by the official organs. To back up this process, the latter have initiated the founding of "NGOs" whose role is to ensure that freedom of expression is used as intended and civil society engagement remains within bounds.[152] The limits of the new civil liberties rapidly become apparent where criticism takes an unexpected — usually meaning undesirable — turn. In such cases it also becomes obvious that the entrenched mechanisms of repression are still effective. Torture, namely, remains an everyday occurrence in Uzbek prisons.[153]

A new authoritarian social contract?

While the official reform discourse foregrounds liberal ideas of governance, the principles of the authoritarian social contract continue to guide actions. These include rigid vertical chains of command that reward obedience and permit initiative from below only where it is aligned with official directives. The top of these chains of command is always the president, to whom the constitution still grants sweeping powers. He decrees the direction of policy and guards the reputation of the polity, as its supreme representative. The *image* of a reforming state, personified in the president, is the yardstick of the politically correct and morally desirable.[154]

This orientation on image explains why institutional actors regularly resort to practices incompatible with the official reform programme. In April 2020 it was reported that school staff had been instructed to send mass text messages praising the state's crisis management in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic and thanking the president personally. Parents of school students were also instrumentalised to disseminate propaganda messages.[155]

Other measures responding to the COVID-19 pandemic also suggest that Karimov's legacy weighs heavier than the reform discourse and its external reception would suggest. For example economic planning instruments that were being phased out have been reinstated to address the economic losses associated with measures taken to contain the pandemic. These include production quotas for particular agricultural crops. Information control techniques associated with the authoritarian era have also been reactivated during the crisis.[156]

151 "Poslanie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkata Mirzieeva Oliy Mazhlisu" [Address to parliament by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev], 22 December 2017, https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/1371. Similar: "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirzieeva na pervom zasedanii zakonodatel'noy palaty Oliy Mazhlisa" [Speech by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at the first session of the legislative chamber of parliament], 20 January 2020, https://president.uz/ru/lists/view/3303 (both accessed 12 July 2020).

152 See above, p. 13 (DSC), p. 20 f. (NGO *Yuksalish*) and p. 22 f. (Public Fund for Support and Development of National Mass Media).

153 "Uzbekistan: Blogger Flees Country, Cites Pressure from Authorities", *Eurasianet*, 21 January 2020, https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-blogger-flees-country-cites-pressure-from-authorities. On the prisons: Aziz Jakubov, "Etapom v Navoiy — zla nemereno" [Prisoner in Navoiy — a centre of evil], *Fergana*, 27 November 2019, https://fergana.agency/articles/112807/?country=uz (both accessed 12 July 2020).

154 Very obviously for example in his invective against the hokims in August 2019: "Zo'ravonlik foyda bo'lganida 30 yilda zo'r bo'lib kettan bo'lar edik" [If violence helped we would have grown strong in the past 30 years], *Youtube*, 2 August 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D947EgE5u5o (accessed 12 July 2020).

155 "Tashkentskich uchiteley ispol'zuyut v kachestve 'trolley', voshvaljajushchich karantinnuyu politiku Mirziyaeva" [Tashkent teachers used as 'trolls' to praise Mirziyoyev's quarantine policy], *RFE/RL*, 27 April 2020, https://rus.ozodlik.org/a/30577701.html?withmediaplayer=1 (with numerous examples, accessed 12 July 2020).

156 Janis Kluge, Andrea Schmitz, Franziska Smolnik and Susan Stewart, *Eurasiens Wirtschaft und Covid-19*, SWP-Aktuell

Because the tried and tested options tend to be those from the past, actors that are sceptical towards the new course or reject it outright might be in a position to gain in influence. In the first place this means the representatives of the old regime in the ministries and the economic losers of the reforms. The latter include those expropriated without adequate compensation for modernisation projects in villages and neighbourhoods, and the many labour migrants who have returned to Uzbekistan after becoming unemployed in the Russian Federation in the course of the pandemic. The cost of living has risen sharply in recent years, while the labour market still offers scant opportunity.[157] If this situation leads to even sporadic unrest the use of force to secure public order cannot be excluded — even in the "new" Uzbekistan. The spirit of the authoritarian past is still very much alive, especially in law enforcement, where brutal coercion techniques are used with the approval of superiors.[158]

The pace of implementation of the economic reforms, the intensity of legislative activity and the president's insistence all obscure the tenacity of the old structures. To the Uzbek reformers the latter are relics of an era they regard as irrelevant for future developments and wish to leave behind as quickly as possible. The foreign audience of the Uzbek reforms also shares that perspective. But at least in the medium term it must be assumed that the simultaneity of different, and sometimes contradictory modes of governance, rules and practices will determine the direction of the Uzbek transformation and will see the mechanisms of the old order snap back into action, especially in situations of crisis.

Recommendations

Many openings are available for German and European cooperation with Uzbekistan, which should pursue a fundamental orientation on supporting developments towards an open society. Four fields are especially relevant. They all relate to Area I of the development agenda, which concerns the relationship between state and society and thus the heart of the authoritarian social contract.

- *"Dialogue" with the population.* Communication remains heavily shaped by a paternalistic top-down approach: the state defines what its citizens should wish for. They should engage, but only in the formats provided. They should develop new ideas, but only in prescribed areas. They should be critical, but steer well clear of sensitive matters. These contradictions need to be raised with Uzbek partners. They need to be encouraged to permit real participation and autonomous civil engagement, to abstain from state cooptation, and to reward criticism of abuses rather than merely tolerating it. Opportunities to support independent voices in Uzbekistan also need to be identified, for example through education partnerships and cooperation in the media sphere.
- *Cooperation with the political parties.* The reform agenda explicitly calls for an expansion of political competition, as does the president himself. Although the scope of competition remains restricted and relatively narrow, opportunities certainly arise, for example in terms of sharpening the parties' political programmes and their relevance to voters' interests. Here there is scope for political foundations to become involved. The next parliamentary elections, scheduled for late 2024 or early 2025, create a potential timeline for such cooperation. They will also reveal how much political competition the Uzbek reforms can tolerate.
- *Parliamentary cooperation.* Here there are two primary interests: Firstly to strengthen the legislative competence of parliamentarians, to stimulate critical debate on draft legislation and to ensure its relevance to the interests of the voters, as articulated in the relevant online portals. Secondly to support parliamentary control and oversight over the executive, which the president himself mentioned in his January 2020 address to the new *Oliy Majlis*,[159] through targeted cooperation with parliamentary committees. Assistance from the research service of the German Bundestag would also be conceivable. Whatever form it takes, cooperation should aim to strengthen the independence of the parliament vis-à-vis the government and the president and foster its development into a venue of genuine debate about political alternatives.

47/2020 (Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, June 2020), 3 f.

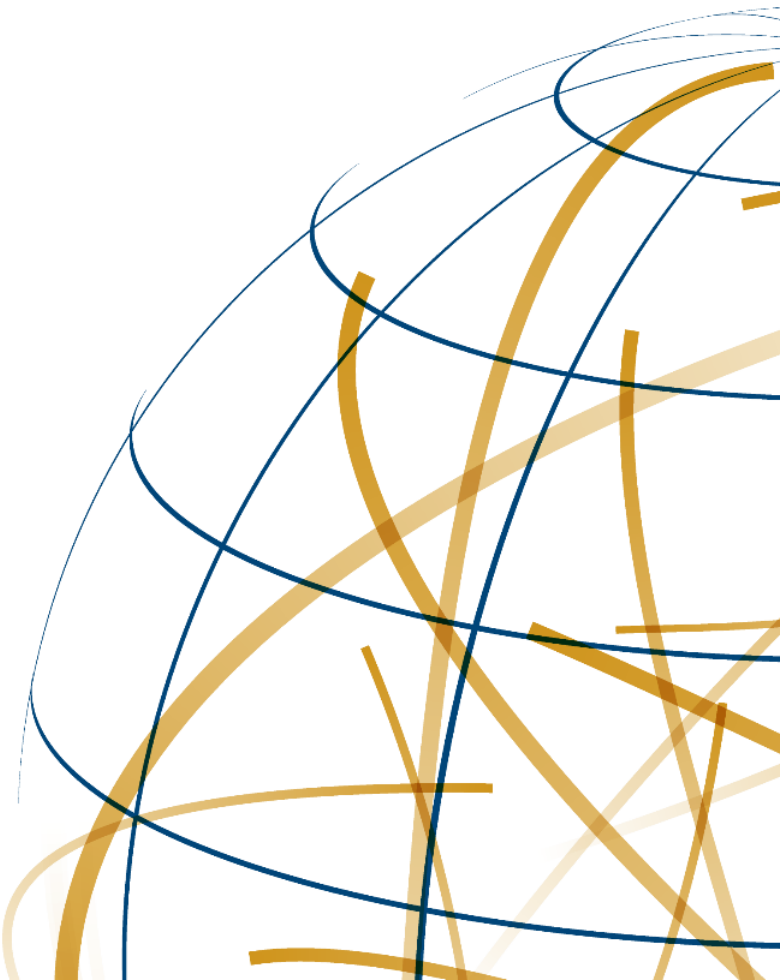
157 Ibid., 4.

158 "Systemic Reforms Urged as Uzbek Man Dies after Police Torture", *BBC Monitoring Central Asia*, 15 June 2020.

159 "Vystuplenie Prezidenta Respubliki Uzbekistan" (see note 151).

- *Inclusion of the local level.* There are growing calls to change the procedures for electing provincial governors, to have them elected directly. The president himself had already called for such a change in 2016,[160] in order to curtail the power of local leaders and to make them more accountable to the public. The measures introduced thus far are plainly inadequate. Passing the new Law on Local Governments, which gives local parliaments the power to remove hokims would also be an important step forward. Ways should be sought to boost the role of local parliaments and civil society vis-à-vis the powerful hokims. That would certainly serve the principles of good governance and respect for the law that feature so prominently in Uzbekistan's reform agenda.

Abbreviations

AIMK	Agenstvo Informacii i Massovych Kommunikacij (Agency for Information and Mass Communication)
ARGOS	Agenstvo Razvitija Gosudarstvennoj Sluzhby (Agency for Civil Service Development)
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
BTI	Bertelsmann Transformation Index
CACI	Central Asia — Caucasus Institute (Washington, D.C., The Johns Hopkins University, Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies)
CITIC Group	China International Trust and Investment Corporation
CNN	Cable News Network
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organization
DSC	Development Strategy Centre
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
GoNGO	Government organised NGO
GSBP	Gosudarstvennaja Sluzhba Bezopasnosti Prezidenta (State Security Service of the President)
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE/ODIHR	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
RFE/RL	Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty
SGB	Sluzhba Gosudarstvennoj Bezopasnosti (State Security Service)
SNB	Sluzhba Nacional'noj Bezopasnosti (National Security Service)
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

160 "Chokimiyaty i vlast'" (see note 92).