Nationalism and Democracy in Post-Communist Central Asia

YILMAZ BINGOL
(Kocaeli University)

The paper evaluates misconceptions of the so-called transistologists in terms of the relationship between nationalism and democracy in the post-Soviet Central Asian context. The analysis looks at only four of the five Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The paper puts forward two main arguments. First, contrary to the argument by some political scientists that nationalism is compatible with, and indeed is the same as, democracy, the author argues that there is a significant degree of trade-off between nationalism and democracy. Second, contrary to the transistologists’ assumptions that an incipient trend would enforce a regime change from communism to liberal democracy in all post-communist cases, the author argues that it is indeed nationalism, not liberal democracy, that is the real successor to communism at least in Central Asian countries. The paper provides evidence indicating the pervasiveness of ethnic nationalism and the deficiencies of liberal democracy in post-Soviet Central Asia.

Keywords: nationalism, democracy, politics, identity, transition, central Asia

Some Western scholars have perceived the collapse of communism as the ‘end of history’ and the triumph of liberal democracy.¹ Although the ended history has shown that the task of imposing a change of regime from above could not be accomplished, these scholars and policy-makers in the West have anticipated that ‘international imperativism’ could enforce a regime change from communism to liberal democracy. The so-called Transistologist School holds that all the post-communist cases have been in a process of ‘transition’ from communism to democracy or some sort of democracy. This process, transistologists claim, has already been completed, and the ‘transition’ is to be followed by yet another stage, which they call ‘consolidation’. The central design they propose is that this unique regime change in the post-communist cases can be incorporated together, in the same pot, and should be explained with a universalistic and unified theory.² Emphasising the similarities among these cases, they often either ignore or misinterpret many differences, among inter-regional as well as cross-regional post-communist cases.

One area of neglect by transistologists is their oversimplification of the power of nationalism and lack of respect for the nature of the post-communist societies, which are

to various degrees divided ethnically. Transitologists often ignore the magnitude of nationalism, arguing that international imperativeism and/or implementation of liberal democratic principles at an institutional level will eventually eradicate the importance of this phenomenon in the post-communist world, and thus ‘identity politics’ will weaken. Yet some other transitologists have realised the fallacy of such assumptions and have distorted their approaches to some degree to argue, invalidly, that nationalism is compatible with democracy. They go even further to imply that nationalism is a component of liberal democracy.

Such assumptions are nothing but the oversimplification of nationalism in post-communist politics. Some commentators have aptly concluded that it was the revival of nationalism, not of democracy, that played the most decisive role in the collapse of communism in general, and in the disintegration of the Soviet Union in particular, and that nationalism will prevail for an uncertain time to come. They point out that national demands by the minorities in the Soviet Union were firmly suppressed under Stalin and began to come into the open under his successors Khrushchev and Brezhnev. Reforms introduced by Gorbachev after 1985 released potential forces of nationalism and initiated a process of Soviet disintegration that was completed by the end of 1991.

The experience of sudden and unsolicited independence left the five Central Asian republics struggling to carve out some form of self-definition and orientation. Soon they would begin to accelerate the process of building their nations, which most Western states had already passed through during the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, though not necessarily following the same civic path. Ethnic nationalism has been at the core of Central Asian politics. It has become both the main ideology of the successor states and the main means to legitimise the policies of the ruling elites of Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet era.

This paper argues that it is indeed nationalism, not liberal democracy, that is the real successor to communism. The Central Asian region, like many other post-communist parts of the world, has witnessed almost all attributes of nationalism. To build their respective nations, Central Asian regimes have elevated their respective titular languages to the echelon of state and/or official languages; reinterpreted their respective histories, myths and memories; rehabilitated national figures and heroes; taken many other symbolic steps toward ‘nationalisation’ of their states; and most importantly, they have made all these implementations in favour of titular nationalities at the expense of the other minorities in their respective republics.

While the process of nationalisation has taken deep root, Central Asian regimes have not moved very far at all toward democratisation of their state institutions and societies. Despite frequent statements by Central Asian leaders that they desire to transform their regimes into democratic ones, an undemocratic trend is running through the new Central Asian countries of the former Soviet Union toward stronger presidential power and extending the terms of sitting presidents. To various degrees, basic democratic rights such as freedom of political activity and free elections, freedom of speech, and freedom of the press have been regularly violated. Although religious rights or freedom of belief would be protected under liberal-democratic regimes, Central Asian ruling elites have firmly controlled and suppressed Islam and other religions in the same way that their communist mentors had done.

3 See, for example, Schmitter with Karl, ‘The Conceptual Travels of Transitologists and Consolidologists’ and especially Karl and Schmitter ‘From an Iron Curtain to a Paper Curtain’.
This paper aims to evaluate the transitologists’ misconceptions in terms of the relationship between nationalism and democracy in the post-Soviet Central Asian context. Contrary to the transitologists’ assumptions mentioned above, I put forward evidence indicating the pervasiveness of ethnic nationalism and the deficiencies of liberal democracy in post-Soviet Central Asia. My analysis here covers only four of the five Central Asian republics: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. I have excluded Tajikistan from this analysis because of both political uncertainty due to continuing civil war and the lack of sufficient data on that country. Contrary to the argument by Georgian political scientist Ghia Nodia that nationalism is compatible with, and indeed the same as, democracy, I argue that there is a significant degree of trade-off between nationalism and democracy. Borrowing Ellen Comimso’s terms, we may conclude that in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, the glass is half, if not less, full with democracy, while the remainder is full with nationalism. In Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, on the other hand, only a little democracy is evident at the bottom of the glass, while the remaining part is full of nationalism.

First, I consider some theoretical frameworks concerning nationalism and democracy and their inter-relationships. This analysis of course requires a distinction between ethnic and civic nationalism. The former prevails in Central Asia. Next I discuss these phenomena in the four Central Asian countries: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. An accurate analysis of the region along these lines requires that we distinguish between Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on the one hand and Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan on the other, recognising what Adrian Treacher has labelled ‘soft authoritarian’ for the former two and ‘hard authoritarian’ for the latter two. This paper ends with a brief conclusion and some remarks on the future of these regimes.

**Nationalism and Democracy: Theoretical Setting**

In an attempt to explain the nature of nationalism and democracy in the South African context, Janis Grobbelaar points out conflicting and unclear theoretical and conceptual problems with regard to nationalism and democracy. In his terms, ‘the many theoretical and conceptual debates often raise more questions than they provide answers’. While acknowledging the problematic nature of theoretical and conceptual phenomena, I think it is possible to find theories applicable to the Central Asian cases. Here I disregard ‘primordial’ approaches; instead, I will consider ‘nationalism’ an ideological product and/or invention. Such an approach is supported by a range of theories including Marxism, pluralism and modernism. It holds that nations, ethnic groups, and/or ‘Volke’ are what Benedict Anderson calls ‘imagined communities’.

Central Asian republics were in fact latecomers to the historical process of nation building. Before the Russian conquest of Central Asia, there was no such entity as a Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek or Tajik nation state. The Khanates of Bukhara, Khiva and Samarkand, and previous polities such as the Ulus Chaghatay were nomadic confederations, presided over by a sovereign. The current boundaries of the Central Asian Republics are the product of the USSR. The nationalisation process in the Central Asian region was initiated

---

6 Nodia, ‘Nationalism and Democracy’.
by the Soviet regime with Stalin’s infamous national delimitation and *korenisatsiia* policies of the 1920s and 1930s. Although Stalin had aimed to maximise Soviet control over the region rather than create ethnically coherent states, gradually ‘a sense of homeland developed along with a sense of national self-consciousness in the former USSR’.

Nonetheless, national identities in the modern sense remained less developed in Central Asia than in the Baltic, Slavic and Caucasus regions, even though primordial identities have always been strong among the native populations there. Perhaps it was at least partly for that reason that the Central Asian republics were quite slow in responding to the Soviet disintegration and declaring their independence.

The nationalism that typifies ‘Central Asian nationalism’ is what Anthony D. Smith called ‘ethnic and genealogical’ nationalism, as opposed to ‘civic and territorial’ nationalism. Ernest Gellner, theorist of nationalism in the modernist school of thought, may be right in indicating that mass ‘citizen-nations’ can only emerge in an era of industrialism and democracy. This is applicable to those nations pursuing ‘civic and territorial’ nationalism. However, I argue that Central Asian nations appear to be following or implementing an ‘ethnic and genealogical’ type of nationalism which does not fit into Gellner’s category of ‘citizen nations’. Moreover, the regional economies in Central Asia have traditionally and mainly been based on agriculture, even though industrialism in general has taken deep root under the Soviet regime. Therefore, Central Asian societies may resemble what Gellner calls ‘agrarian societies’, which lack ‘forces making for the fusion of culture and polity which is the essence of nationalism’.

The concept of democracy is also perceived in various ways, and many adjectives have been used to try to describe it. Yet it is not as complicated as nationalism. For the sake of simplicity here, I use Bruce Parrott’s minimalist definition of democracy: ‘a political system in which the formal and actual leaders of the government are chosen within regular intervals through elections based on a comprehensive adult franchise with equally weighted voting, multiple candidacies, secret balloting, and other producers, such as freedom of the press and assembly that ensure real opportunities for electoral competition’.

Nationalism and democracy are related to one another in that both are about inclusion and exclusion. Donald D. Horowitz has explained how democracy is neither worldwide nor consistently successful where it has begun. Many factors explain the failure of democracies. Horowitz argues that one of the most important is ethnic conflict. As Horowitz aptly reminds us, ‘Democracy is about inclusion and exclusion, about access to power, about the privileges that go with inclusion and the penalties that accompany exclusion’.

In ethnically divided societies, Horowitz says, ‘ethnic identity provides clear lines to determine who will be included and who will be excluded’. He goes further, stating ‘there is a tendency to conflate inclusion in the government with inclusion in the community and exclusion from government with exclusion from the community’.

However inclusion and exclusion are perceived differently in nationalism and democ-

---

14 Ibid., p. 13.
17 Ibid.
racy. While *citizenship* is the basis of inclusion in democratic systems, *kinship* serves that function for ethnic nationalism. Furthermore, *universality, human equality, and diversity* are the most respected principles of liberal democracy, while a certain nation’s *particularity, superiority* and *unity* through the assimilation of minorities are principles of nationalism. We may also need to distinguish between *nationalising* policies and *democratic* policies of a nation state. As Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argue,

[In many countries that are not yet consolidated democracies, a nation-state policy often has a different logic than a democratic policy. By a nation-state policy we mean one in which the leaders of the state pursue what Roger Brubaker calls ‘nationalising state policies’ aimed at increasing cultural homogeneity. Consciously or unconsciously, the leaders send messages that the state should be ‘of and for’ the nation. In the constitutions they write and in the politics they practice, the dominant nation’s language becomes the only official language and occasionally the only acceptable language for state business and for education; the religion of the nation is privileged (even if it is not necessarily made the official religion); and the culture of the dominant nation is privileged in state symbols (such as the flag, national anthem, and even eligibility for some types of military service) and in state-controlled means of socialisation (such as radio, television, and textbooks). By contrast, democratic policies in the state-making process are those that emphasise a broad and inclusive citizenship that accords equal individual rights to all.18]

Parallel to these thoughts, Thomas Eriksen points out, ‘every social community or identity is exclusive in the sense that not everybody can take part’. This is because ‘groups and collectivities are always constituted in relation to others’.19 Regarding ethnic classifications as social and cultural products, Eriksen claims that ethnic classifications ‘serve to order the social world and to create standardised cognitive maps over categories of relevant others’.20 He reminds us that the concept of shared origin is usually essential for ethnic identity, and interpretations of history are important for nationalist ideologues seeking to justify, reinforce and preserve particular ethnic identity.

Are nationalism and democracy compatible with one another, as some transitologists claim? Vicki Hesli and Ghia Nodia declare that to some extent they are. Recognising that democracy is based on the popular sovereignty, Hesli says, ‘democracy therefore implies the right of self-determination. Nationalism also rests on the principle of self-determination and, thus, the two concepts of nationalism and democracy are theoretically and practically linked together in a complementary and yet uneasy union’.21 Indicating that both democracy and nationalism act in the name of self-determination and taking the nature of pervasive opposition movements in the late Soviet era as evidence, Nodia says, ‘movements for democracy and movements for independence are often one and the same’.22 Nodia goes further, arguing that nationalism is a component of liberal democracy. Indicating that the idea of nationalism is impossible without the idea of democracy, and that democracy never exists without nationalism, Nodia claims that democracy and nationalism ‘are joined in a sort of complicated marriage, unable to live without each other, but coexisting in an almost permanent state of tension’, and that ‘“Nation” is another name for “We the people”’.23

It is true that, during the Gorbachev era, nationalist and democratic movements combined forces against their common enemy, Marxist–Leninist authoritarianism. How-

---

20 Ibid., p. 60.
23 Ibid., pp. 4 and 7, respectively.
ever, certain features distinguish between these two movements theoretically and prac-
tically. Above I have mentioned some of these theoretical distinctions. Here I turn to explore
the incompatibility of democracy and nationalism in practice in the Central Asian context.
But before moving into this discussion, we need to distinguish between two types of
nationalism.

In the apposite literature, we find various terms used to distinguish between two types
of nationalism. These include inclusive versus exclusive, moderate versus aggressive, and
in Smith’s account, ethnic or genealogical versus civic or territorial. Despite differences in
terminology, the notions that these terms imply are very similar. Nodia claimed it is not
‘good’ for scholars to make such a distinction between types of nationalism and to speak
of nationalism always with negative adjectives. However, many scholars have pertinently
distinguished between these two types of nationalism and assess the first type of national-
ism—inclusive, moderate, civic or territorial—as ‘good’ and the second type—exclusive,
aggressive, ethnic or genealogical—as ‘bad’.

Among those who disagree with Nodia is Hesli, who recognises nationalism as an
ideology with the two faces: ‘One face is a positive historical force that has provided the
political bases for democratic government. The second face of nationalism is negative and
brings forward images of genocide, ethnic cleansing, forced assimilation and many other
potentially aggressive and hostile components of group assertiveness’.24 Nodia has not
stated so explicitly in his writing, but his argument infers that the first type of nationalism
is compatible with democracy. I believe his inference is accurate, as my argument here
indicates.

The second type of nationalism may well be regarded as an antithesis of democracy.
This kind of nationalism hinders the democratisation process. It is seemingly being put into
practice in the newly independent countries of Central Asia in the post-Soviet era. The
nation-building process under way in the Central Asian republics, particularly in Uzbekistan
and Turkmenistan, appears to be aggressive, ethnic-based or exclusive. Since gaining
independence, indeed since the mid-1980s, Central Asian republics have pursued policies
of and for their respective titular ethnic groups, and these policies are seemingly exclusive
toward other minorities living in the republics. Annette Bohr has noted how in the Central
Asian states ‘nationalising policies and practices are manifest in, inter alia, the iconography
of the new regimes, the privileged status accorded to the local languages, newly revised
histories and the exclusion of members of non-eponymous groups from the echelons of
power’.25

Many scholars have claimed, like Bohr, that Central Asian regimes are nationalist, but
it is hardly possible to call these regimes democratic. I turn here to consider this latter
claim. I begin with discussion of undemocratic practices in Central Asia, and then move to
consider the ethnonationalising policies of the regimes of the Central Asian Turkic states.

How Full is the Glass of Democracy in Central Asia?

Although all Central Asian republics have some common practices which indicate the
regimes’ undemocratic nature, it is appropriate at this juncture to distinguish the more
authoritarian regimes of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan from the relatively moderate regimes
of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan cannot claim to be fully
democratic, although there are signs that the process of democratisation has laid some roots

25 Annette Bohr, ‘The Central Asian States as Nationalizing Regimes’, in Graham Smith et al. (eds), Nation-
in these countries. Both of these republics of Central Asia are more liberal than
neighbouring Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan—the reason why Adrian Treacher has described
Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as ‘soft authoritarian’, and Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as
‘hard authoritarian’ regimes.26 ‘Thanks to the presidents of Kazakhstan, and especially
Kyrgyzstan, these ‘soft authoritarian’ regimes opted for rather more moderate approaches
to political rule than their illiberal neighbours.

In Kazakhstan, the Socialist Party, which comprises former communists, and a number
of other secular parties were legalised and allowed to participate in the political process.
Among these parties is the Alash party, which stands mainly on a platform of nationalism,
reformist Islam and preservation of other cultural and linguistic heritage. Nevertheless,
political imprisonments under harsh conditions in Kazakhstan are one very clear indication
of the undemocratic nature of this country. The imprisonment of Pyotr Afanasenko and
Satzhan Ibrayev (security assistants to the former Prime Minister Kazhegeldin, who now
lives in exile in the US) were recently discussed in the US House of Representatives
International Relations Committee hearings with Secretary of State Colin Powell. Although
Afanasenko was subsequently released, Ibrayev is still in prison, and Florida Congress-
woman Ileana Ros-Lehtinen has urged the government of Kazakhstan to release Ibrayev as
well.27 In Kyrgyzstan, by the mid-1990s political opposition was neither banned nor
prosecuted, and there were no reports of political imprisonment even though the opposition
in this country was surprisingly vocal at times.28

In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, opposition groups have little means of influencing
policy. However, in Kyrgyzstan in particular, under the supervision of President Askar
Akayev, the country has established for itself a reputation for political and economic
liberalisation. Looking at positive developments by the mid-1990s in Kyrgyzstan, some
Western commentators have portrayed the country as the ‘island of democracy’,29 while the
US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott has identified Kyrgyzstan President Askar
Akayev as ‘the Thomas Jefferson of Kyrgyzstan’.30 These observers acknowledge that
multinational Kyrgyzstan has, like Kazakhstan, experienced strong ethnic tensions, but they
hold that the liberal-minded Akayev has made democratisation more appealing in Kyrgyzs-
tan than leaders have done in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In 1999, John
Anderson observed that by attempting to preserve ‘ethnic harmony’ and encouraging an
inclusive sense of citizenship, ‘Kyrgyzstan retains a considerable degree of social pluralism
and a more open political space than any of its Central Asian neighbours’.31

Nevertheless, recent developments in Kyrgyzstan have turned these observations upside
down, and led to speculations that Kyrgyzstan has joined the regional trend toward more
firmly authoritarian rule in Central Asia. Parliamentary elections held in February and
March 2000 and a presidential election held in October 2000 were reported with ‘allega-
tions of irregularities, ballot stuffing, intimidation of the media, and the exclusion of serious
opponents’. Some observers documented these elections as a ‘setback for the development
of democracy’, ‘neither free nor fair’, and having ‘failed to comply with international

26 Treacher, ‘Political Evolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia’.
27 Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, ‘Free Speech in Central Asia’, House International Relations, FDCH Congressional
Testimony, 18 July 2001, accessible through EBSCO Academic Search Premier Database.
28 John Anderson, ‘Elections and Political Development in Central Asia’, Journal of Communist Studies and
Central Asia’.
29 See, for example, John Anderson, ‘Island of Democracy? The Politics of Independence’, in John Anderson
30 Strobe Talbott, ‘Promoting Democracy and Prosperity in Central Asia’, US Department of State Dispatch, vol. 5,
The remarks of one Western observer in Bishkek after these elections demonstrate some Westerners’ disappointment that their positive expectations of democratic development in Kyrgyzstan were premature: ‘Kyrgyzstan used to be an island of democracy, then it became an atoll, and now it is just a reef.’

Despite these allegations about Kyrgyzstan’s elections in 2000, the media have enjoyed greater freedoms under the regimes in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan than under those in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Kazakhstan, for example, private newspapers, radio networks and television channels have been established. Press freedom in Kyrgyzstan has been the most extensive in the region. Nevertheless, since the end of 1994, some censorship has been reported in these two countries. Two opposition newspapers critical of President Akayev have been closed, and court proceedings against several other newspapers have been reported.

The Kyrgyzstani Constitution, which was inaugurated in May 1993 and is based loosely on that of the French Fifth Republic, gave President Akayev considerable power, as he acts as head of state in charge of all three branches (legislative, judicial and executive) of government. He appoints the Prime Minister and Supreme Court judges, and he has the right as president to propose or veto legislation. President Akayev has claimed even greater powers than granted in the Constitution. For example, although the Constitution allows a national leader to be elected only twice consecutively, the last election of 2000 was Akayev’s third consecutive election. President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has similar extensive powers. He remains the indisputable authority in every field, and he and his own associates, mainly former communists, play the greater role in policy formation.

In comparison with the Kazakhstani Constitution, however, the Kyrgyzstani Constitution to some degree provides an inclusive sense of citizenship or ‘social pluralism’. While the first article of the Constitution of Kazakhstan states ‘The republic is a form of statehood self-determined by the Kazakh nation’, that of Kyrgyzstan indicates, ‘The carriers of sovereignty are the people of Kyrgyzstan’ [emphases added]. However, it should also be noted that the government of Kyrgyzstan has changed the name of the country from Republic of Kyrgyzstan to the rather ethnically oriented Kyrgyz Republic, demonstrating that the Kyrgyzstan government has also taken, albeit symbolically, exclusive measures against its non-Kyrgyz citizens.

The relatively liberal nature of the regimes of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan can be attributed to the personalities of the leaders of these two states. Unlike the case of Benin, where the three main presidential candidates received the majority of their support from their respective ethnic fellows or home regions, both Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan and Akayev of Kyrgyzstan have enjoyed considerable lingering support from people of all ethnic groups. As Olcott indicated, ‘While Nazarbaev got the support of most Kazaks because of his ethnic identity, most Russians saw him as a figure of prominence from the multi-ethnic Soviet past, who could be counted on to be more sympathetic to their

34 Treacher, ‘Political Evolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia’.
37 Horowitz, ‘Democracy in Divided Societies’, p. 28.
“Russianness” than would any possible successor’.38 Reminiscent of Olcott’s argument that Nazarbaev possessed in effect two nationalities, which allowed him to move confidently among his ethnic kin as well as among Russians and other Slavs, Eugene Huskey claims ‘This dual patriotism, or dual identity is an even more pronounced feature of Akaev’s biography … Akaev’s ability to harness the “core nation” mentality of the Kyrgyz while earning the confidence of all ethnic communities derived from his own identity as well as his policies of ethnic moderation.’39

However moderate the characteristics of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, thanks to their relatively liberal-minded presidents, thus far these two countries are a fair distance away from democracy. Western media announced that free and multiparty presidential elections were held in Kyrgyzstan in October 1991, although Treacher claims that ‘Prospective candidates looking to put their name on the ballot paper were required by law to obtain a petition containing 252,000 signatures; only Akayev had the logistical resources to fulfil this stipulation’.40 Moreover, even Akayev acknowledged that votes had been bought and that campaigning was conducted along clan and ethnic lines. As a result of the parliamentary election, ethnic minorities in Kyrgyzstan (mainly Russians and Uzbeks), who constitute more than 40 per cent of the population, received almost no representation.41

Kazakhstan, too, has yet to hold completely free and competitive elections. Serious cases of fraud about the parliamentary elections held in March 1994 have been reported. They include ‘ballot-stuffing, proxy voting, harassment of those parts of the media critical of election rules and severe pressure by local administrations to ensure the right results’.42 To guarantee victory for his supporters, Nazarbayev nominated 42 members of parliament, about a quarter of the total number of the seats in the parliament. As a result, about 90 per cent of the members of the parliament comprised members of the old nomenklatura, who are also loyal to President Nazarbayev.43

Democratic principles have been violated even more blatantly under the extreme regimes of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, as these two cases have not met even the minimal requirements of democracy defined by Parrott. Both in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, elections lacked democratic voting and any sense of practical competition. Uzbekistan’s President Karimov and Turkmenistan’s President Niyazov have not hesitated to use force to guarantee their positions in power. They have regularly exploited the coercive powers at their disposal, and both have lucratively remained at the centre of the political arenas of their respective republics.

According to former Vice President of Uzbekistan Shukrulla Mirsaidov, writing in the very early period of independence, Uzbekistan ‘has made a transition from one totalitarian system to another—an authoritarian one—and there is an ongoing steady increase in personal power’.44 Like the presidents of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, Karimov of Uzbekistan has also been in charge of the legislative, judicial and executive branches of this republic and he himself dominated almost all political appointments, including to the Presidential Council made up of 150 members, and hakims (regional heads) of the local councils. Moreover, Karimov has institutionalised the Presidential Decree as a means to

41 Ibid.
42 Ibid., p. 312.
43 Ibid.
implement policy and circumvent the other branches of government. Some commentators have characterised the policies implemented under Karimov’s regime in Uzbekistan as ‘autocratic immobilism’. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan has proved to be probably the least transformed, and thus the most authoritarian, of the former Soviet republics. Niyazov, who took the name Turkmenbashi (the head of Turkmens), has remained the sole authority ruling the country. Not only is he above all three branches of the government, Niyazov too has regularly and extensively ruled the country with presidential decrees.

Although the 1992 Uzbek constitution established a multiparty democracy, Karimov has left no free space for political parties, and the leaders of the principal opposition groups, Birlik and Erk (Freedom), have been harassed, imprisoned and even attacked physically. Both parties have been almost erased from the media and from the public consciousness. Karimov has established an oppositional ‘puppet’ party, Vatan Taraqqiyoti (Progress of the Homeland), followed by the other ‘puppet’ parties such as Adolat (Justice) and Fidokorlar (Patriots), which have always been in line with the government. Those opposing Karimov’s regime face the risk of a prison sentence. Muhammed Salih, former leader of Erk and the only presidential contestant against Karimov in the 1991 election is now in exile in Norway and recently has been held in the Czech Republic owing to alleged accusations against him by Karimov’s regime. The new leader of Birlik, Vassilya Inoyatova was charged with anti-state activities. In the presidential election of January 2000, the sole candidate running against President Karimov declared that he was not voting for himself, but for the incumbent.

In Turkmenistan, all political parties have been banned, except for the former Communist Party, which was simply renamed the Democratic Party. Agzibirlik (Unity), the most important political group that pushed actively for democratic reforms in the last stage of the Soviet Union, was virtually crushed by the incumbent regime. Almost all those critical of Niyazov’s regime had likewise to flee the country. It was reported that two Turkmen dissidents in Moscow and two in Tashkent were arrested.

Popular elections held in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan by no means had democratic voting or any sense of competition. In Uzbekistan, as William Fierman has examined in detail, although a short period of ‘thaw’ took place, and Karimov allowed Muhammad Salih of Erk to face him in the presidential election in 1991, Karimov ‘manipulated the rules to make sure that no serious contest took place’. The political party Birlik and its candidate Abdurrahim Polatov was disqualified from participating in the election on the basis of technicalities. Although Muhammed Salih of Erk was able to register for the election, ‘the presidential race was hardly played on a level field’ because ‘Karimov as president could directly or indirectly mobilise resources’. The candidates in the election were not given equal access to the mass media, as the press devoted much more attention to Karimov and, on some occasions, Muhammad Salih’s speeches on state television were censored.

45 Treacher, ‘Political Evolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia’.
47 Anderson, ‘Elections and Political Development in Central Asia’.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
elections, ‘on each occasion election officials ruled that they had failed to fulfill requirements for getting their names on the ballot papers’.  

The suppression of Islam and Muslims in these countries may be taken as further important evidence of the undemocratic nature of these regimes, and this also explains the control of political opposition by the ruling elites of these countries. Historically, Islamic revival has been weak in the nomadic Kyrgyz, Kazakh and, to a lesser degree, Turkmen traditions, but it has been very strong in the lives of the Uzbeks. The regimes of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan do not hesitate to use Islamic symbols to legitimise the state’s authority; for example, the official state symbols in the flags of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan display crescent moons, a prominent symbol of Islam. Yet all religious activities in these two authoritarian states are very carefully controlled and monitored by the state authorities via each country’s Committee for Religious Affairs operating directly under the Cabinet of Ministers. Banning the Islamic Revival Party, which was quite active in the region especially during the first years of independence, the authoritarian leaders of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have taken assorted actions against Islamic opposition groups and all other religious organisations. Legislation was introduced making it illegal for anyone—except government and certified clergy—to talk publicly about religion. Private religious instruction was also banned. Any Christian churches with fewer than 100 members must close their doors and stop all activities. Furthermore, many imams (Islamic clerics) were arrested arbitrarily, detained and even killed by the Uzbek secret police. Upon the 1998 adoption of a highly restrictive religion law, President Karimov warned the parliament not to be soft on ‘Islamic extremists’, articulating ‘such people must be shot in the forehead! If necessary, I’ll shoot them myself …!’.

It is true that there have been some radical Islamic groups in the region. However, the activities of ‘fundamentalist Islamic groups’ in Central Asia can partly be attributed to the lack of a democratic environment there. Radical groups are very likely to appear where governments suppress religious rights, and it should not be difficult to predict that the ‘fundamentalists’ would continue to be active formally and informally, as is the case in Uzbekistan. The bombing incident in Uzbekistan on 16 February 1999, which was supposedly targeted at Uzbekistan’s President Karimov, may be taken as important evidence for explaining the political tactics of the leadership against political Islamic opposition. There is no supporting evidence in hand, but it is very likely that the incident in Uzbekistan was a new ‘Wag the Dog’ played by Karimov’s regime to de-legitimise political and democratic opposition groups. This is because immediately after the incident, the regime started to blame both Islamists and Muhammed Salih’s opposition group simultaneously for alleged attempts to plan the bombing against Karimov.

In sum, the regimes of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have regularly desecrated democratic principles by electoral inconsistencies, human rights violation against political figures, and widespread practices regarding violations of the freedom of belief, press and speech. All evidence suggests that these inconsistencies are intentional practices by the ruling elite to secure their positions of power. As Michael Ochs explains, ‘The lack of

---

reform is neither accidental nor due to uncontrollable circumstances; rather, it reflects a deliberate decision by the countries ruling elite to eschew policies initiated in Russia and the other successor states which, in the regime’s view, have generated, or exacerbated, economic hardship, political conflict, civil unrest, ethnic tension, and in some cases, have led to ethnic warfare.\footnote{57} Borrowing Ochs’ fine German words, Stabilität iber alles (stability above all) has been at the centre of politics as the source of justification and legitimacy of the authoritarian regimes in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Authoritarian leaders of the Central Asian republics have taken the Tajikistan case as a landmark example of volatility when insisting on stability, and avoiding democratic release of political opposition groups, including Islamists and those in human rights organisations.

Undemocratic practices in Central Asian Turkic Republics will persist for an uncertain time. All current regional leaders have ruled since Soviet times and routinely extended their terms through constitutional amendments passed by hastily called plebiscites or polls that were criticised by independent observers. Evoking images of Soviet-style ballot rigging, in March 1995, the Oliy Majlis (Grand Assembly) of Uzbekistan extended Karimov’s term of office to the year 2000 with 99.96 per cent vote. The Uzbek government held another referendum in January 2002 to extend President Karimov’s presidency to 2007 by amending Uzbekistan’s constitution to allow for seven-year presidential terms. In January 1995, Niyazov’s term of office was extended to 2002 with a 99.9 per cent vote.\footnote{58} Although the Turkmen President has declared himself the life-long president of his country, he later promised to leave office in 2010 ‘when he sees a proper successor’.\footnote{59} By then, he will have spent 25 years as president. Undemocratic practices in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan thus seem likely to persist for some time to come. Karimov’s response to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), when the latter criticised the 1999 parliamentary elections in Uzbekistan, demonstrates Karimov’s genuine deliberation with regard to democracy: ‘The OSCE focuses only on establishment of democracy, the protection of human rights and the freedom of the press. I am now questioning these values.’\footnote{60}

Pessimism about the future of democracy in the region is not only because the authoritarian leaders of these countries hold their positions firmly, and each leader has had their parliament extend their presidential term each time it was set to end. Conducting popular and contested elections aside, these regimes have made only modest institutional changes necessary for continued democracy. As Bruce Pannier has aptly put it ‘Central Asian leaders are learning less from Westerners about the practice of democracy and more from each other about how to simulate it.’\footnote{61}

To summarise the situation of democracy in post-communist Central Asia, there are two different patterns: one represented by Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, which has appropriately been called ‘soft authoritarianism’, and one represented by Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, which has been termed ‘hard authoritarianism’. In the ‘hard authoritarian’ Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, political control is firm. Almost no opposition group is allowed to participate in politics, the political leaders opposing the authoritarian regimes are either persecuted or have to continue their activities in exile, and Islam and Islamic-oriented opposition groups are likewise severely constrained. In short, the opposition in these two countries has been

\footnote{58} Anderson, ‘Constitutional Development in Central Asia’; Treacher, ‘Political Evolution in Post-Soviet Central Asia’.
almost completely eliminated. Furthermore, the media are strictly controlled by the state, and there are many other serious violations of liberal democratic principles, including freedom of expression, freedom of belief, freedom of organisation and even freedom of life.

In the ‘soft authoritarian’ Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, the democratic situation is rather moderate. Opposition groups, albeit weak and ineffective, are not constrained strictly, although they are to some extent marginalised. Freedom of expression is relatively widespread compared with the other two extreme cases; the media here enjoy some degree of freedom. Nevertheless, all four of these countries of Central Asia share some common practices that defy democratic principles. Super-presidentialism is the case in all four of these republics. All four presidents have undermined or dissolved their parliaments. Social, political and economic spheres in all four countries are dominated by the former communists, who are not really eager to further democratic development. We could offer many more examples. Worst of all, however, is that the current situation seems likely to persist for some time.

What of Nationalism?

While such undemocratic practices have been at the centre of Central Asian politics, in the post-communist era, the policies of and for the respective titular ethnic groups have been set in motion by governmental officials and titular nationalists alike. In the absence of a democratic environment, nationalism has become the legitimising force of ruling elites. Before examining the details of these persistent nationalisation policies, let us consider the evidence supporting this study’s argument that the type of nationalism prevailing in Central Asian countries is indeed ethnic, genealogical and exclusive as opposed to civic, territorial and inclusive.

The relatively moderate government of Kazakhstan has insisting on denying the opportunity for dual citizenship to its Russian minority (even though Russians are a majority in some regions, especially in the north), but has pursued a policy that gives the Kazakh diaspora the opportunity for dual citizenship. Such dual policy in Kazakhstan is one example of how the new Central Asian regimes have chosen to pursue a policy of ethnic and genealogical nationalism. While explaining types of nationalism, Smith elucidated the characteristics of ethnic nationalism in the post-independence era with ‘Post-independence movements whose concept of the nation is basically ethnic and genealogical will seek to expand by including ethnic “kinsmen” outside the present boundaries of the “ethnonation”.’

It is also in Kazakhstan, which witnessed perhaps one of the greatest demographic catastrophes among the former Soviet republics because of the ‘bitter truth of history’, that Kazakh nationalists and governmental officials alike have encouraged ‘honoured women’ and ‘honoured returnees’ of Kazakh origin to contribute to the demographic change in Kazakhstan in favour of the Kazakh ‘ethnonation’. In an effort to do so, for example, the nationalist Kazakh demographer Tatimov has applauded Kazakh women for giving birth to more children and encourages ethnic Kazakhs living outside Kazakhstan, mainly in China, Mongolia and Turkey, to return to ‘their homeland’. The Turkish daily Zaman has reported that the Kazakh government has invited Kazakhs living in Turkey to return to ‘their homeland’, and will provide them a house, land and extra money as inducements.

62 Smith, National Identity, pp. 82–3.
64 ‘Anavatana Göç Çağrısı’, Zaman (20 March 2000).
These actions support Smith’s observation and expectation about the policies of ethnic nationalism in a post-independence era.

As a result, the legal, cultural, political and psychological positions of non-titular ethnic groups, especially Russians in the former Soviet republics, began to change in fundamental ways after the demise of the USSR (indeed from even earlier in the Gorbachev era). Some members of titular nationalities saw identification with the formerly ruling centre and mastery of the ‘language of inter-ethnic communication’ as a liability for the Russians, who were identified with Soviet misrule and oppression. The post-Soviet governments attempted to expand education in titular languages of the respective republics at the expense of Russian language, and knowledge of the titular languages was made as a requirement for jobs and citizenship (in some instances). Many Soviet or Russian names of cities, streets and so forth have been changed to the indigenous names. Similarly, the Soviet or Russian national and official days have been replaced with the titular ones. Some nationalist groups began openly to articulate anti-Russian sentiments. Russians and other ethnic minorities came to face the prospect of losing their privileges, their jobs, their rights to own property and, as a result, they began to lose their sense of security.

All newly emerged Central Asian states have chosen to follow the model of a classical nation state with identity based on titular nationality and largely disregarding the demographic and regional realities within their borders. Ethnic nationalism, which has been at the core of Central Asian politics, became the main ideology of the successor states, and the main source for legitimising the policies of the ruling elite of Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet era. One aspect of the ‘nationalisation’ of the state is the implementation of language laws in all the Central Asian republics. The language laws were passed at the end of the Soviet period, but they were put into effect in the post-independence era. These laws encourage the use of titular languages and contain what appear to be discriminatory measures against the minorities and their languages. Indeed, titular languages as a symbol of ethnonational identity have been at the core of the state building process in the newly emerged countries of Central Asia. Language laws, originally aimed at saving titular languages from further erosion, soon ‘became a means of reserving preferential treatment for one’s national group and excluding others’ (italics added), and the effect of the campaigns in favour of the titular languages was to ‘put the Russians and other minorities at risk with respect to employment and increase their sense of alienation’.65

In Kazakhstan, where almost 60 per cent of the population are not fluent in the titular language, the Language Law has asserted Kazakh language as the sole state language. The language law promulgated in 1997 proclaims, ‘The Kazakh language must now become the language of state administration, legislation, legal proceedings, and record keeping’. Local newspapers cast this law as ‘a very important factor in consolidating the people’.66 The conflict that this law might cause, however, was defused, thanks to the liberal-minded Kazakh President and some other elites. The government has not pushed that programme too strongly, and the Russified Kazakh elite, who feel more comfortable in Russian than in Kazakh, have to some extent hampered the Kazakh language revival.67 In Kyrgyzstan, where a significant number of Russian and Uzbek minorities live (each around 15 per cent of the total population), the regime has followed a rather moderate language policy toward

other minority languages. Russian was declared a second language in 1994, and almost at
the same time, a special Slavonic university was established.68

In Uzbekistan, too, the language law has declared Uzbek the sole official language. Here, the 1989 Language Law made Russian the ‘language of inter-ethnic communication’, and language ‘nativisation’ was slowed in the post-Soviet era owing to economic impediments. Nevertheless, attempts were made to expand education in the titular language at the expense of the Russian and Tajik languages, and the Uzbek administration proposed that knowledge of the titular language be made a requirement for employment and citizenship. In such circumstances, as Fierman noted, ‘Russian-speakers without Uzbek skills often perceive that they are being mocked and that language is being used as a weapon to exclude them from knowing what is going on’.69 There are also reports that Tajiks likewise feel dissatisfied with the discriminatory measures taken against their language in Uzbekistan.70 Surprisingly, given its otherwise hard-line ethnic stance, the regime in Turkmenistan has followed a rather moderate and unique path on minority languages. Here the language law declared Russian a state language alongside Turkmen, and Turkmen citizens of Russian origin have been granted dual citizenship.

Another sign of growing ethnic revival in the Central Asian region is the move to rename streets and towns. Soviet or Russian names have been replaced gradually and increasingly by local names which reflect the history and culture of the titular people. In Kazakhstan, for example, ‘Tselinograd’ was replaced by ‘Akmola’, and then by ‘Astana’. In Kyrgyzstan, ‘Frunze’ has been re-named ‘Bishkek’ and in Turkmenistan, ‘Krasnovodsk’ has become ‘Turkmenbashi’. The Uzbek president changed the 9 May Soviet ‘Victory Day’ to the national ‘Day of Commemoration and Homage’.71 The flags of the new republics are likewise drawn from the national heritage of the titular ethnic groups. As I noted earlier, the flags of Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan display prominently the Islamic symbol of the crescent moon. On the flag of Turkmenistan, five carpets represent five different Turkmen tribes, and the flag of Kyrgyzstan has 40 rays that represent 40 Kyrgyz tribes and a sun representing the roof of the traditional Kyrgyz yurt. The flag of Kazakhstan is perhaps the least nationalistic, in the sense that it has only a rather impartial national ornamentation on the hoist side.

The new Central Asian regimes’ use of the past by rehabilitating historical figures, and by filling ‘blank spots’ left by the Soviet historians are other types of evidence signifying the revival of nationalism in Central Asia. Manas, the legendary warrior and hero of the Kyrgyz epic poem, has become a national symbol of Kyrgyzstan. In 1995, this country, with the support of UNESCO, celebrated the millennium of Kyrgyz national epic Manas with a series of major events. In Uzbekistan, Tamerlane, who was formerly portrayed as a bloodthirsty oppressor, is now regarded as the embodiment of a great and judicious ruler. Uzbekistan’s government has glorified him by devoting numerous projects to the study of his reign and by erecting 11 monuments to him. Besides Tamerlane, Babur and such nationalist figures of the early Soviet era as Fitrat, and Cholpan were rehabilitated as Uzbekistan’s primary political icons. In Turkmenistan, along with the nationalist poet Makhtumkhuli, who wrote mainly on the unification of the Turkmen tribes, President

---

Niyazov himself has become the republic’s most prominent national symbol, as his name has been given to over 1,000 objects in the country. This type of symbolism goes on and on.72

Taking such symbolic ethnic bias into account, Anna Matveeva has aptly called the new ideologies created in the post-communist Central Asian republics ‘state nationalism’. She has observed how, since the early period of independence in the Central Asian Republics:

A drift towards an ethnic bias became more apparent as time passed. State-centric nationalism, based on promotion of the dominant ethnic group as a defining element of the new societies, required construction of these ‘imagined communities’ from above. Ideologies incorporating myths of a Golden Age, moral virtues, cultural traditions and promotion of local heroes to service the requirements of nation-building broadly followed the Soviet pattern of ideological design and generally demonstrated the familiar lack of subtlety’.73

Recognising the Uzbek leadership as ‘the most earnest in its desire for the new ideology to take root’, Matveeva continues:

In reality, the enhanced status of the titular ethnic groups came about to only a very small degree because of the new national ideologies, which left many indifferent, or the imposed use of state languages, as language laws had few resources to supplement their implementation, and minorities were not forced to communicate in them. Of far more significance in this development was the promotion of selected representatives of the dominant group to positions of real power and influence. In Kazakhstan the governmental positions and top civil servants’ jobs are dominated by the members of the titular nationality, with Russians unable to rise above junior ministerial level, and this pattern is broadly followed to varying extents by other states. Another method of securing privileged positions for the members of the titular groups was to ensure their predominance in the national parliaments. In Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, where competitive elections were conducted, the constituencies were defined in such a way as to safeguard the titular nationality majority where at all possible.74

In sum, in the absence of democracy, ethnic nationalism has been at the core of Central Asian politics. It has become the main ideology of the successor states, and the main source of legitimising the policies and powers of the ruling elite of Central Asian countries in the post-Soviet era. The language laws promulgated in the post-independence era have encouraged the use of titular languages, while containing seemingly discriminatory measures against the minorities and their languages. Many Soviet/Russian names of cities, streets and the like have been changed to indigenous names. Other similar symbolic measures also signify the national heritage of the titular ethnic groups. Some nationalist groups began openly to articulate anti-Russian sentiments. Russians and other ethnic minorities came to face the prospect of losing their privileges, their jobs, their rights to own property, and as a result they began to lose their sense of security.

Some Remarks on Democracy in the Region after September 11

Some developments taking place after the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States have fortified the argument brought forward in this paper. These developments also demonstrate how premature some expectations of the transitologists were. As indicated earlier, one of the arguments by transitologists claiming progression towards liberal democracy has been that ‘international imperativism’ would move forward authoritarian

74 Ibid., pp. 29–30.
regimes towards becoming liberal democratic ones. In other words, transitologists have argued that international organisations such as the IMF and the World Bank on the one hand, and Western powers, particularly the United States, on the other would truthfully contribute to the transition of the post-Soviet states to liberal democratic systems.

Post-September 11 events have shown that transitologists are wrong in this argument as well. First, since the unfortunate incident on September 11, the United States has been passing through a perplexing era with regard to its own democracy. Certain policies and actions of the George W. Bush administration have led to misgivings about the US government’s eagerness to push for democracy in other parts of the world. These include this administration’s policies on national security and violations of democracy and human rights, particularly anti-democratic measures taken against Arab and Muslim minorities in the US. While the US has these domestic problems with upholding liberal democratic principles, it is important to consider whether US efforts to push for democracy in other parts of the world, and in Central Asian particularly, are really worth anything. If not, we may be well justified in perceiving the so-called ‘international imperativism’ simply as rhetoric.

Indeed, post-September 11 developments have highlighted how the US government is not keen to encourage democracy and human rights in the post-Soviet authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. In the post-September 11 era, the George W. Bush administration has pursued some unprecedented policies that it claims are in the interests of US national security. This administration has not hesitated to collaborate closely with the Central Asian authoritarian regimes during these times, particularly with Uzbekistan. US Assistant Secretary of State Lorne Craner justified this stance, claiming that the ‘global struggle against terror’ requires the US administration to work ‘in close cooperation with an array of governments, some of which have, by our own accounts, poor human rights records and with whom we have not had close relations in the past’.75 Clearly, this ‘array of governments’ included the Central Asian regimes. One can only conclude that close cooperation by the US administration with the current regimes of Central Asia contributes to legitimising and consolidating authoritarianism, rather than legitimising and consolidating democracy and human rights.

Conclusion

This paper has presented an analysis of nationalism and democracy in the post-communist Central Asian context. I have given evidence indicating that to varying degrees all Central Asian regimes have pursued policies supporting an exclusive type of nationalism, a type that Smith has termed ethnic and genealogical nationalism. I have argued that in the process, these regimes have violated principles of liberal democracy. Contrary to transitologists’ expectations that democracy or liberal democracy would replace Marxist–Leninist authoritarianism and their conclusion that ‘identity politics’ will be eradicated eventually, the findings presented here suggest that in Central Asia nationalism is replacing communism. More precisely, nationalist authoritarianism has replaced Marxist–Leninist authoritarianism in post-communist Central Asia. The transitologists’ argument that an international imperative would push democratisation of the authoritarian regimes also seems to be premature. Post-September 11 developments have demonstrated that the US as sole superpower is not really keen to promote democracy and human rights in the Central Asian

region. Rather, the close cooperation of the US with the Central Asian regimes serves to justify and consolidate a new wave of authoritarianism.

The evidence I have presented here also demonstrates that Ghia Nodia’s argument about the compatibility of nationalism and democracy is mistaken. My study recognises that democratic and nationalist forces combined to fight Marxist–Leninist authoritarianism as their common enemy. But as I have argued here, recognition of a shared enemy of itself did not make nationalism compatible with democracy, either in theory or in practice. Indeed, there are certain trade-offs between the two in that the more nationalism is developed, the less likely democracy persists. In this sense, for example, while the Kyrgyz regime is somewhat democratic and moderately nationalist, the Uzbek regime is more nationalist and less democratic.

It is interesting that, despite the variation in the evolution of these regimes, they have faced almost no serious ethnic conflict in their respective republics in the decade that has passed since their independence. This is in part because the leaders of these regimes, especially of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, built their careers and popular support in the multi-ethnic Soviet past and, to some extent, these leaders have been able to enjoy considerable lingering support from people of all ethnic groups. This has allowed these leaders to move confidently among their ethnic kin as well as among other ethnic groups. Another influence may derive from the economic environment in the post-Soviet era, when people of all ethnic groups have shared economic hardship, and their anxiety about economic matters has to some extent overridden their concerns over identity. However, while these factors help to explain the recent past, they do not indicate that the situation will be the same in the future. When new generations of leaders come to power and when people of all ethnic groups reach a certain level of economic satisfaction, we may see a new relationship between democracy and nationalism in the nations of central Asia.