

Tajikistan: the trial period

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Theses

1. Tajikistan in its present state has been built on the civil war experiences and provisions of the peace accords signed in 1997. These have had a great impact on the present form of the state, its political scene and power mechanisms. President Emomali Rakhmonov is the central figure in the state. The political system, which he has co-created, is based on – unique in this region – political pluralism (the existence of the Islamic party), decentralisation (far-going independence of the regions and relatively limited potential of the central structures) and compromise as the basic way of resolving conflicts. Such a system has so far guaranteed stabilisation and normalisation of the country.

2. Since 2002, gradual erosion of the system, which is due to the president's political offensive and occurrence of new threats (new forms of Muslim fundamentalism) has been visible. The president's attempts to unilaterally challenge the existing order may rekindle the old conflicts. The system's evolution and reform is necessary, a good occasion for which should be the 2005 parliamentary elections.

3. 11th September 2001 and the consequences thereof, i.e. actions of the antiterrorist coalition in the region and Tajikistan's participation in them has meant a real breakthrough for the country. Those events have removed the greatest threats (the Taliban Afghanistan), made the country really open to the world and cooperation with other countries that CIS members, raised its prestige and reinforced its position in the international arena. Although they have not broken the Russian domination in the region – especially felt in Tajikistan – still, they have challenged its monopolist position in the fields of security, regional policy, economic activity and domination in terms of civilisation in the broad meaning of the word.

4. Reinforcement of the country's internal stability (*inter alia* through adaptation of some democratic mechanisms) and skilful usage of the interest the powerful states show in Tajikistan is a unique opportunity for this country's development.

Introduction

Tajikistan, like no other Central Asian republic, had a very bitter experience of regaining independence and undergoing peculiar political, social and cultural transformation. Nowhere else was it so dramatic. The threats for the stability of the entire region, which it used to generate, could not be compared to anything in the other republics. Present-day Tajikistan is built on the experience of the civil war, hard and unprecedented process of normalisation and post-war (re)construction, rapidly changing political situation in the region, which it probably feels the strongest of all the other post-Soviet Central Asian states. The country, which until recently was left out of the way, is coping exceedingly well with its problems, though the process of normalisation has not been finished yet and is not free from threats. One of the key challenges is the strengthening of the political system, which has so far stabilised the state, and, in particular, of the mechanisms of cooperation between the pairs: government – opposition, centre – regions and state – Islam. Another important task seems to be complete usage of the potential of cooperation with other countries and international organisations interested in that. Without internal stability and further considerable aid from the outside, Tajikistan has no chance of overcoming the deep economic and civilisation-related crisis, and no chance for development.

I. The internal situation

For Tajikistan the fundamental and constitutive experience was the civil war (1992–1997), which at the same time was a war of ideologies (between the post-Soviet nomenclature and the democratic-Islamic opposition); a war of the “clans” (between the elites of particular regions of the country), a peculiar proxy war for the future of the Central Asia (where the vision of Russia and, partly, of Uzbekistan collided with the Muslim and Afghan vision). The war ended in a compromise between all the parties concerned, which laid the foundations for a political system that paid due respect to the interests of its main actors (the Kulab and Karategina clans; the post-communists and the opposition, etc.). They managed

to do a deal, which does not provide for equal rights to all the parties but still guarantees some pluralism and includes safety valves for the system¹. Despite some crises, this deal (not always formally) is still working, though increasingly more authoritarian actions of the president more and more often put it to the test. Still, maintaining the spirit of the accords and its institutional evolution is a precondition for the stability of the state.

1. The authorities vs. the opposition. The political system

President Emomali Rakhmonov is the main authority in Tajikistan. His career – similarly to those of all the other leaders of contemporary Tajikistan² – has developed as a result of the civil war, during which he was the leader of the National Front (NF). At first, he was treated by his henchmen as a transition period politician, a puppet in the hands of Russia and Uzbekistan, a hostage of the field commanders. However, Rakhmonov appeared to be a skilful and, with time, an increasingly more independent politician. His co-authorship of the peace accords and the implementation thereof (which was not free from manipulation) ensured him a good position on the political scene and great respect among the Tajik people.

The first and the greatest challenge the president had to face after the war end (1997) was the pacification of the field commanders, on both the government and the opposition sides. The process was very complex and it could not impair the interests of the regional, political and business groups from which particular commanders originated. Rakhmonov managed to include the opposition forces in it (e.g. the putting down of colonel Mahmud Khudoberdiev’s revolt in Leninabad in 1998 with the help of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO) troops but also crushing the rebel opposition units). Another, even more important tool for Rakhmonov was and is the ability to hand out official posts to representatives of particular political groups; this way he managed to really pacify and weaken UTO for a long time, either by winning some politicians over (as e.g. Hoji Akbar Turadzhonzoda, who is now deputy Prime Minister, set at variance with his UTO colleagues), or by cutting them off their support bases (the nominations of field commanders coming from Kara-

tegina to posts in Dushanbe or in other parts of the country). Such actions were carried out on the basis of informal arrangements with the opposition leaders, which met their key interests in Dushanbe and in the regions. Therefore, the fixing of the parliamentary and presidential elections by the authorities, which has limited the political representation of the opposition, has only formally changed the distribution of power.

As Rakhmonov had become stronger and his international position gained importance after 11th September 2001 (participation in the anti-terrorist coalition, fight against fundamentalism, absolutisation of the category of stability), this encouraged him to take further steps to eliminate any opposition. For a start – in 2002 – some limited detentions among members of the Tajikistan Islamic Revival Party (TIRP) took place, then attempts to remove from their posts influential UTO and former NF politicians were made (e.g. the cases of Saidsho Shamolov, Qurban Cholov, Mahmudruzi Iskandarov, Salomsho Mukhabbatov, gen. Gaffor Mirzoev – “Sedoy”³ and others). The process revealed the strength of the post-war conditions; in especially drastic cases, those attacked threatened they would use force and referred to their support bases in the regions, which made Rakhmonov give up his plans⁴.

Apart from attacks aimed at particular politicians (which due to the personalisation of the Tajik political life and the role of informal pressure is of key meaning), the president’s camp made the attempt to legitimise the president’s actions by offering him the ability of being re-elected (in June 2003, there was held a referendum – strongly criticised by the opposition – which was won by the president) and ensuring his camp victory in the parliamentary (February 2005) and presidential (2006) elections. The ruling team made a significant, yet very controversial step, by ensuring for itself favourable electoral regulations and control over the entire electoral process. Although the outcome of the elections alone is not going to change the balance of power in the state (it is based on actual influence, regardless of representation in the parliament), still it will block the process of resolving conflicts by political means and the chance of reinforcing the structures of the state.

2. Islam

Islam, and, in particular, the Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism generated by it, is seen as the greatest threat to the stability of Central Asia as a whole and of individual countries in the region. This fight is the official task of all the regional security organisations, which Tajikistan is a member of (including the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation). Radical Muslim movements gave rise to the greatest crises in the region (the civil war in Tajikistan, the fear of the Afghan Taliban invasion, the Batken crises). This was also the reason for the serious engagement of the USA in Central Asia after 11th September 2001. Fight against fundamentalism is an important tool in the fight against the opposition, especially in the neighbouring Uzbekistan.

Huntington’s paradigm of the clash of civilisations, the growing fundamentalism in the Muslim world, the widely publicised by the governments of Central Asian countries increasing activity of fundamentalist organisations (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir), the terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan in March and July this year: all these make this question one of the key factors in the analysis of the situation in the region and in Tajikistan itself. Tajikistan has a special position here, as the impact of Islam on politics has been the strongest here, and the solutions to this issue have been the most “radical” and unprecedented. Tajikistan, as compared to the region and, especially, to Uzbekistan, seems to be a successful yet still unfinished experiment.

Islam became the most legible ideological base for United Tajik Opposition groups during the civil war (1992–1997), which at the same time gave their opponent a convenient argument to be used for propaganda purposes. The United Tajik Opposition had armed troops that openly referred to Islam: locally the Sharia law was introduced⁵; such groups used to find temporary shelter in Afghanistan and received technical, military and humanitarian assistance and sporadically cooperated with particular groups there. UTO troops were accused of taking part in Afghan drug trafficking, with the main route going *via* Tajikistan. Its politicians (e.g. Said Abdullo Nuri) many a time paid visits and received various kinds of support in Kabul, Kandahar, Tehran⁶, United Arab

Emirates and Saudi Arabia. UTO troops became a harbour for the Islamic opposition from other countries of the region, especially from Uzbekistan (Dzhuma Namangani, the terror of Central Asia, used to be one of the most important commanders and staff officers of the civil war period). Generally, even the end of the civil war did not mean that the past was automatically written off: Namangani, with his Uzbeks, was still illegally staying in Tajikistan and creating a new organisation (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), organising armed cross-border raids from this country to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (the Batken crises in 1999 and 2000). Finally, he moved to Afghanistan (2001), where he found shelter and with his troops he formed the core of Osama bin Laden's international brigades fighting against the intervention of the US-led coalition in 2001–2002.

Almost unnoticeably for external observers, all those problems have basically been resolved in Tajikistan (although there is no guarantee that a problem will not reappear) and, paradoxically, this has been achieved by using peaceful methods.

The compromise between the government and the opposition (the 1997 Moscow accords) was achieved owing to the awareness of the impossibility of a military victory, tiredness of the war and vast destructions, pressure by Russia and Iran and, indirectly, by the Afghan North Alliance anxious of subsequent successes of the Taliban. Presumably that was a greatly forced and tactical concession for the government (the authorities had many a time tried to weaken the implementation of the accords, still they never went beyond the boundary of the opposition's tolerance). The compromise soon started yielding effects: cooperation during liquidation of the renegade commanders' rebellions and, in particular, expelling Dzhuma Namangani from the country⁷.

Doubtlessly, a good way to "pacify" the Islamic opposition was to give its representatives access to public life (the legalisation of the opposition parties, including Tajikistan Islamic Revival Party, the only legally operating Muslim party in the region, giving representatives of the opposition access to the offices, integration of a substantial part of the Mujahideen into the republic's law enforcement structures). Other safety "valves" included mass migrations for economic reasons, including of the veterans, mainly to Russia, en-

sureing far-reaching autonomy to regions traditionally controlled by the opposition (the Karategina Valley/Rasht; Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) and ensuring freedom of action to foreign non-governmental organisations and financial institutions (International Monetary Fund, World Bank, Asian Development Bank, etc.). The Tajikistan Islamic Revival Party plays a significant part in Tajikistan; together with other parties of the United Tajik Opposition, it has shown sufficient political maturity to accept and implement the peace accords, so it is one of the pillars of the present system. Its weakening may cause destabilisation of the entire system. It is only TIRP that can launch a positive (e.g. programme-based) fight against radical Muslim movements (e.g. Hizb ut-Tahrir). After all, such steps have already been taken for fear of losing public support⁸. Characteristic seems to evolution within the party itself; the once radical slogans have been replaced with moderate ones, the secular state is seen as potentially friendly and useful, the need to strengthen the democratic mechanisms in the country has become a matter of "to be or not to be" for the party, and increasing the intellectual level and constant programme-based discussion are seen as necessary to deal with current problems. It seems worthwhile mentioning that the party is believed to be inspired by the programme and practice of the Turkish Party for Justice and Development (AKP). The changes in TIRP are usually associated with the strengthening of the position of the young Muhiddin Kabiri (deputy chairman of the party).

3. New threats

While TIRP is a well-established party in the Tajik political scene, still a serious and constantly growing problem is the activity of radical and Pan-Islamic organisations, especially of Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami⁹, whose objective is the creation of a global caliphate, ruled under a peculiarly understood Sharia. The party emphasises the need of religious and moral revival of the society (hence the pressure on the development of human resources and structure-building and propaganda activity) and bitterly criticises any symptoms of social injustice¹⁰. Its strong structures, radical programme, successes in building of an alternative society, having its own system of education,

social aid, etc.; all this causes that the party is seen as a serious threat to the present socio-political system. Even though it formally distances itself from violence, still there exists a serious threat that this is only done for propaganda purposes; besides evolution or splitting of the party into more radical factions cannot be excluded. This party, active all over Central Asia, had until recently been considered especially strong among Uzbeks, which has already changed. In Tajikistan, Hizb ut-Tahrir was at first developing in the Sughd region (Khodzhent, Isfar, *kishlaks* in the province, where – in all probability – it also inspired the foundation of the radical organisation Bayat¹¹). Yet, in the recent years, it has become extremely active in Dushanbe and in Kulab itself (the lair of the former NF, now People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan and the clan which won the civil war). Actions taken by the militia against it have not given any positive effects, either; the intellectual frailty of the official and state-controlled Muslim structures and the attempts to marginalise TIRP by the state authorities prevent effective ideological response.

4. The regions

In addition to Islam, Tajikistan has to deal with the problem of the feuds between the regions, a consequence of which is the clan-based system. Such regional discords and disagreements between the clans were one of the key causes of the civil war (the ideological divides in a way, secondarily, overlapped them)¹². Even though today the meaning of the clan divisions is incomparably smaller than several years ago, still the regional discords have remained and they still pose a great challenge to the state.

Regional divides in Tajikistan are due to the country's diversity in terms of ethnics and ethnography (e.g. a large percentage of Uzbek population in Sughd, Pamir peoples in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, ethnographical divisions between various groups of Tajiks), religion (a large part of GBAO inhabitants are the Shia Ismailis in contrast to the Sunni majority), geography (mostly lowland Sughd, and Kulab, and highland Rasht and GBAO), history (connected with the Fergana Valley and earlier occupied by the Russians Sughd), economy, and so on. It is also worth mentioning problems with communication, which are due to

both geographical (mountains, etc.) and infrastructural (e.g. devastation of the roads) reasons¹³. Such factors, as well as the political consequences of the civil war, make the differences in the situation, directions and tempo of development of particular regions really big. Support in the native region is still an important determinant of the positions of particular politicians. Still, it is worth noticing that the authorities in Dushanbe (first of all, president Rakhmonov), aware of their own limited capabilities, to a relatively small degree attempt to impose their will on the regions; and the regions, in turn, are aware of their weakness in a potential conflict with the state, of the real lack of an alternative and of the benefits that the common state provides.

Paradoxically, the situation is the most difficult and potentially dangerous for the state in the regions that have not been affected by military actions, or even the victorious ones, i.e. in Sughd and Kulab.

The main current problems for Sughd include the lack of due representation on the central level and the feeling that the oblast administration is dominated by the Kulab clan. The feeling of alienation from the governing elites and the capital of the country is even deepened by the problems with communication¹⁴. An additional burden is the susceptibility to the influence exerted by Uzbekistan, which surrounds the Sughd oblast on its three sides: starting with the development of Islamic fundamentalism and Hizb ut-Tahrir, through the crisis in Uzbekistan, which hinders trade development, and the tightening of Uzbekistan's borders, and ending with the escalation of the crisis in that country (after the terrorist attacks in Uzbekistan this March and July, the state borders were periodically closed).

The victory in the civil war has had rather negative effects for Kulab. The victory has led to internal divides among the camp's politicians and commanders, aroused envy and dashed hopes. Symptomatic of the process is the erosion of the support base of the president (he comes from Kulab), who on the one hand has been forced to make offices available to the opposition and respect the informal autonomy of the regions and on the other, as a part of reinforcing the state and his power, he has had to keep a rein on some of his field commanders and party colleagues.

As a result, his closest milieu has shrunk to his native Dangara, and a new opposition party, *Tarraqqiyat*, which has still not been legalised, emerged out of the Kulab elites. Another negative effect the civil war has had on the victorious region has been the preservation of the socioeconomic relations dating back to the early 90's, cementing as the local nomenclature has been strengthening as a result of the war. The fact that a great part of the arable land has been allocated for cotton cultivation contributes to the concentration of land and power and to confirmation of the feudal-like relations in the region, which hinders its development and deepens the frustration among the public. This is probably one of the main causes of the emergence and development of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* in Kulab¹⁵.

A peculiar situation has come to existence in the Rasht Valley. The region has stabilised owing to the completion of the military actions (which used to be carried out mainly in this valley), the memory of which makes the public distrustful to any sorts of radicalism and conflict resolution by force. Another positive circumstance has also been the outflow of a substantial part of people engaged in the military actions: some of the commanders have been nominated to offices, a part of the *Mujahideen* have been incorporated in the state law enforcement structures, others work in Russia. Rasht has maintained an informal autonomy: local authorities are made up of local people¹⁶. It is still able to grant support to its people in Dushanbe, which has been proven by the fight for posts between *Mahmadruzi Iskandarov* and *Salamsho Muhabbatov*¹⁷; paradoxically, cementing the stability built on the 1997 accords. It is characteristic of the situation in the Rasht Valley (and even to a greater degree in *Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast*) to be under an enormous influence of international and non-governmental organisations conducting large-scale programmes for activation of the society, liquidation of the causes and effects of poverty, infrastructure rebuilding, etc., which have significantly contributed to actual transformation on the local level.

Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast is the region that stands apart most from the rest of the country and uses the least conventional solutions. The region being hardly accessible, located in high mountains, sparsely populated, inhabited by Pa-

mir and *Ismaili* peoples (thus differing from the *Sunni Tajiks*), the poorest (in the USSR times, it used to be in 80% supported by central subsidies, and the influx of refugees during the war even worsened the poverty problem), bordering the instable, war-torn Afghanistan, was basically condemned to continuous degradation. However, almost all of those factors have proven beneficial for the region. The relative weakness of the region made it withdraw fast from active military actions and assume "isolationist" positions. Internally, the region is relatively independent; the region's representation in the central structures is quite weak. There also are some formal differences: e.g. to enter *GBAO* you need a special permit, there is 1 hour time difference between Dushanbe and *GBAO*. The role of the region's spiritual leader (though without a trace of separatism or disloyalty to Dushanbe) is played by *Aga Khan IV*, the global leader of the *Ismaili* community residing in Switzerland, through the controlled by him network of organisations, foundations and projects united in *Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN)*¹⁸. During the war, *AKDN* in fact saved Pamir from starving to death, actively contributed to the signing of the peace accords; and it has been acting as an agent and advocate in obtaining aid for Tajikistan from international institutions. Since the 90's, using its dependent institutions and the means of the *International Monetary Fund*, the *World Bank* and similar organisations, it has supervised a number of humanitarian, educational (e.g. the building of the *Central Asian University* in *Khorog*), social (trainings, professional activation), and economic projects (micro credits, consulting, co-financing of e.g. hydroelectric power plants, roads and bridges – including international – plants, etc.)¹⁹. The scale of changes in *GBAO* can be illustrated e.g. by the fact that, with the aid of *AKDN*, 90% of the arable land has been privatised and the region has become significantly less dependent on external supplies. Similar actions (as mentioned above) are extended over the other regions of Tajikistan. Still, it is worth emphasising that, despite the significant and deepening differences, *GBAO* is free from any separatist tendencies.

II. The socioeconomic problems

A great problem, which projects onto all the other, is the protracted economic crisis. The fact that Tajikistan has always been the poorest republic in the region, the extent of the destruction caused by the war (including destruction of the infrastructure, the brain drain), the potential of instability, the demographic boom, etc. do not provide good prospects for a radical improvement of the situation. However, worth noticing is the constant economic growth (approx. 10%) in the country (owing mainly to the low starting point) and increasingly more often occurring prospects of foreign investments in the infrastructure (e.g. roads, bridges, tunnels, etc.) and in selected branches of the economy (mainly hydropower engineering²⁰), and the growing interest of foreign financial institutions.

Interestingly, the objectively disadvantageous weakness of the state and its withdrawal from a number of social initiatives (programmes for fighting unemployment, for development of education, medical care, etc.) is in contrast with the great engagement of the non-governmental sector²¹ and with the enormous activity of citizens, which is practically out of the state's control and uncovered by the official statistics. The citizens' enterprise mainly consists in economic migrations; it also takes the form of grey area and criminal activity, especially involving drug smuggling²²).

1. The economic migrations

It is hard to overestimate the significance, in many aspects, of economic migrations for Tajikistan. It is estimated that since the late 90's between 600 thousand and 1.5 million of Tajiks (the entire population of the country being 6 million) annually emigrate to work (mostly on construction sites) to Russia alone (Siberian cities, Samara, Moscow)²³. It can be assumed that such migrations provide maintenance to at least half of the country's population (especially, if one considers the number of companies dealing with organisation of such trips). Estimates show that money from this source may even three times exceed the central budget earnings. At the same time, this is the most serious tool for Russia to exert pressure on Tajikistan (hypothetical limitation of migrations

would mean a catastrophe for Tajikistan, which both sides are well aware of)²⁴. For Tajikistan, this also has a great meaning in terms of state security, as it is for economic reasons that a significant part of the former Mujahideen have left the country. It can be assumed that such a scale of migration brings about a number of profound cultural changes: among other things, the traditional family model has been upset and the role of the woman at home is changing; there emerges the need to work for money²⁵. Moreover, contact with the Russian culture and language, which has become looser because of the war (in contrast, it is being deliberately limited in the neighbouring Uzbekistan), is being re-established²⁶. Russia is for Tajiks the largest, albeit not the only, labour market. Tajiks travel to Muslim states (the Persian Gulf states, Pakistan, Iran) on a scale incomparable to the other Central Asian countries; this especially concerns business trips and migrations of qualified specialists (e.g. doctors). This does not change the fact that the high mobility of the Tajik society (like nowhere else in the region) is a consequence of the malfunction of Tajikistan's economy.

III. Tajikistan in the region

At the end of the first decade of its independence (1991–2001), Tajikistan was a weak, passive and almost incapacitated state, generating trouble for its neighbours. Tajikistan's security and stability was dependent on Russia's standpoint (the real guarantee for the peace accords, protection from Afghanistan, protection against the expansionism of Uzbekistan). Russia also used to hold the patronage over almost the entire foreign activity of Tajikistan, which was limited to its presence in the structures operating under the auspices of Russia: the Commonwealth of Independent States, the Collective Security Treaty, the Shanghai Five (thereafter the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and the like. Russian forces stationed in Tajikistan were both a guarantee for the country's stability and the key Russian point of military support in the entire Central Asia and, together with the border guard forces, they formed one of the last checkpoints on the frontiers of the former empire. At the same time, Tajikistan used to be accused of tolerating or even

supporting the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. The instability and internal weakness seemed to condemn Tajikistan to vegetation.

1. A breakthrough?

The events that followed after 11th September 2001, the sudden interest by the USA and coalition members in the region as a part of the planned operation in Afghanistan and, with time, the success of the operation and US attempts to ensure constant military and political presence in Central Asia, were a breakthrough Tajikistan could hardly not appreciate. From the viewpoint of Washington, as well as of Europe, Tajikistan appeared as a base for operations in Afghanistan and an area potentially in danger of fundamentalism and terrorism. Almost overnight, it became the target of visits of high-rank diplomats and military officials (both US and European), the place where the coalition troops were stationed and a beneficiary of financial aid. Moreover, the fast defeat of the Taliban by the antiterrorist coalition suddenly removed the threat of invasion from the south. In effect, the neighbourhood of Afghanistan, which used to be a curse for Tajikistan, is now starting to yield benefits. Western financial institutions are interested in the development of the infrastructure on both sides of the Panj (the border river between Tajikistan and Afghanistan) to stabilise the situation; hence the financing of the building of bridges and roads in the frontier zone and plans to supply electricity to Afghanistan from the hydroelectric power plants being built in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast.

This situation has opened Tajikistan to the world, it has become a school of international politics for people whose only partners used to be CIS politicians and Afghan field commanders and, last but not least, it has shaken the dogma of Russian monopoly on military presence in the region and guarantee of the region's security. This process, in addition to many other consequences, has been of immense significance for the formation and maturing of the young Tajik elites.

The political and military "offensive" of the West in Central Asia practically ended in 2002. The deployment of military bases in Uzbekistan, Kyr-

gyzstan and Tajikistan (although Americans are not present here) set the frontier beyond which the West, in quality terms, has achieved nothing more. The defeat of the Taliban (of the state but not of the forces), the operation in Iraq and the tension inside the coalition have caused Washington, whose first ambitions in Central Asia²⁷ have been satisfied, focus its attention on other regions of the world. Even such limited presence of the West in Tajikistan (and in the entire region) has given Dushanbe stronger arguments in its dealings with Russia, and it has in fact opened the country to independent cooperation with other states.

2. And yet Russia?

Russia, anxious of the profoundness of the changes in the region, has intensified its activity in the fields of politics and military tasks, regional security and economy, inter alia, by reviving the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (founding of the antiterrorist centre, with its headquarters in Tashkent) and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, causing animation of bilateral cooperation, etc. Still, it needs to be stated that Tajikistan has not decided to renounce Russian military presence in its territory.

A great problem in the bilateral relations, in which Tajikistan took an unprecedentedly hard stand, appeared to be the conditions of Russian military presence in the country: the status, financing and control of the 201st Mechanised Division, which had been planned to be transformed into a permanent (4th) base (by the way, the largest Russian tactical unit deployed outside the Russian Federation borders). Apart from the 201st Mechanised Division, another problem concerned the Russian Space Forces complex, the "Okno" ("Window") optoelectronic station in Nurek, for which Tajikistan demanded special payments.

The control of the Tajik-Afghan border, which was being gradually handed over by Russians to the hosts, appeared to be an additional problem. Similarly as in the case of the base, Tajikistan demanded as fast as possible completion of the Russian mission and handing over control of the border to it. In this context, regional rivalry was stirred up, as Dushanbe asked the USA and the EU for special support in taking over control of the border; the West positively responded to the

proposal, yet the pressure exerted earlier by Russia on Tajikistan prevailed²⁸.

The agreement concluded between Vladimir Putin and Emomali Rakhmonov on 4th June 2004 (preceded, *inter alia*, by the campaign against Tajik immigrant workers in Russia), regulating some disputable matters, complied with the Russian interests, which confirmed that it is Russia which still has the most potent arsenal to exert pressure on Dushanbe and that it is able to enforce solutions of strategic importance in the political and military fields. It should not be expected that in this regard it will be soon overpowered by others. The Russian presence in Tajikistan is shrinking to a narrower and narrower safety field; the Russian Federation is now forced to negotiate and carry out concrete actions. Unless such actions are effective, its place will be gradually taken by others (this, in particular, concerns economic issues, which are of interest for other countries, including China, India and Iran).

3. The alternatives

The reason why China, Pakistan, India²⁹ and Iran are interested in Tajikistan is its geopolitical location. Firstly, Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, so it provides for a possibility of conducting an active policy there: Iran and India used this occasion during the war in Afghanistan, supporting the North Alliance. For China (whose enormous activity in the entire Central Asia deserves special attention) Tajikistan is, additionally, a place of potential development of fundamentalism, being the base for “terrorism” in the neighbouring turbulent Chinese Turkistan; hence the great and active role of China in strengthening the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and bilateral initiatives. The situation in Afghanistan and the convenient slogan of war on terror is a good occasion to tighten political and military cooperation between Tajikistan, Pakistan and India (advanced bilateral projects of coordination centres, manoeuvres, military and technical assistance, etc.). Secondly, Tajikistan has a good location at the intersection of the East–West and North–South axes, which either go past Afghanistan or provide easier access to it. Recently, the first Tajik–Chinese border crossing point (Kulma–Karasu³⁰) has been opened on the East–West axis, which gives Tajikistan temporary access to the road con-

necting China and Pakistan (Karakorum Highway) and provides a way out, even if narrow, to the ports of the Indian Ocean; a new road from Dushanbe (crossing the Kulab region) to Khorog is almost finished. Interest in the renovation of roads going from Dushanbe through Rasht to Kyrgyzstan and China is simultaneously expressed by the EU, China and Iran. The East–West direction is important both for the countries of the region, which have poor infrastructure, and for China and Iran (which are implementing similar projects in western and northern Afghanistan). The North–South corridor, apart from its importance for Tajikistan (the earlier mentioned construction of the tunnel under the Anzob Pass with the aid of Iranians), also has an immense geopolitical meaning. Pakistan has for years been trying to persuade Tajikistan to build a road connecting both countries, which would go through the Vakhn Corridor in Afghanistan (just more than ten-kilometres-wide, which divides both of the countries) and, simultaneously, a power supply main³¹; implementation of those projects would create the first direct and relatively secure corridor connecting Central and South Asia.

5. Conclusions

Curbing the authoritarian tendencies, encouraging political pluralism and letting the opposition co-rule the country and institutionalisation of the informal political mechanisms (as a part of the “rationed democracy”, an occasion for which will be the 2005 elections) are necessary to preserve stability in the country and to create a friendly environment for further development. It is worth emphasising that in many of Tajikistan’s regions the weakness of the state does not impede social and economic development supported by foreign aid (e.g. in GBAO). Islamic fundamentalism is a very sensitive issue (especially in the context of its destabilising potential in Uzbekistan). To succeed in handling this challenge, a positive alternative needs to be created. It seems that it will be necessary to strengthen the moderate Muslim forces (TIRP and official religious structures) and the local secular elites, as well as to launch a special social policy in the areas that are particularly susceptible to fundamentalism.

The meaning of Tajikistan in the international scene and the interest in the country shown by both great Asian powers (China, India, Pakistan) and Iran, and by the West (USA and EU), is gradually growing. This is not limited just to the security issue (although the matters of “soft security” of Tajikistan may become more and more important for the EU). This also covers infrastructure-related and economic projects, which provides a great chance for reconstruction of the country, gradual overcoming of the crisis and economic development.

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¹ The Moscow peace accords (June 1997) provided for, among other things, legalisation of the opposition (including the Tajikistan Islamic Revival Party), integration of its armed troops into the state structures, granting 30% of the posts in the state administration to the opposition and free elections.

² It is worth noticing that, unlike the ruling elites in the neighbouring countries, the Tajik ones are not direct heirs of the Soviet elites. It was not the USSR but the civil war that has shaped all the political leaders.

³ The well-publicized case of gen. Gaffor Mirzoev (he comes from Kulab), who in 1995–2004 was the chief of the President's Guard. This January he was transferred to the post of chief of the Drug Control Agency, and on 6th August he was arrested on suspicion of being involved in murder, possession of large amounts of arms and obtaining substantial material benefit from operations in the grey area.

⁴ For more details see e.g.: "Tajikistan's politics: Confrontation or Consolidation", ICG Asia Briefing 19 V 2004, www.crisisweb.org

⁵ E.g. in the Karategina Valley, which the author noticed as early as in 2000.

⁶ Iran was deeply involved in the peace negotiations, supporting the opposition.

⁷ Cf. Mike Redman, "Central Asian Militant Group Remains Active In Pakistan", 3/24/04, www.eurasianet.org

⁸ Cf. Salima Vahobzade, "Tajikistan: Islamic Party Slams Banned Rival", RCA No. 264, 11-Feb-04, www.iwpr.net

⁹ Cf. "Radical Islam in Central Asia: Responding to Hizb ut-Tahrir", Asia Report N°58, 30 June 2003, www.crisisweb.org

¹⁰ Yet according to its own system of values: e.g. it is not against slavery, which is admissible under Sharia.

¹¹ Cf. Daniel Kimmage, Bayat: Nothing But Questions, 6/02/04 www.rferl.org

¹² The Leninabad (today Sughd) clan in alliance with the Kulab clan were rivalling the Karategina (today Rasht) and the Pamir clans, who use pro-democracy and pro-Islam slogans. The fast withdrawal from the conflict and the peculiar isolationism of the Pamir clan, as well as the gradual marginalisation of the Leninabad clan by the Kulab clan caused that during the 1997 peace accords it was the Kulab clan and, to a smaller degree, the Karategina clan who ensured themselves the best positions in the country.

¹³ E.g. the difficulties in communication between Sughd and the rest of the country cause that residents of the region more often go (especially on business, which is the main purpose of trips) to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Russia or even the Persian Gulf countries than to Dushanbe. The situation is similar in the case of GBAO, where the roads are only open in the summer season, and the trip takes more than ten hours.

¹⁴ The problem is supposed to be partly resolved by building, together with Iranians, of a tunnel under the Anzob Pass and the Zaravshan Mountains.

¹⁵ Turko Dikaev, Tajikistan: Radical Group Uncovered in South, RCA No. 271, 17-Mar-04, www.iwpr.net

¹⁶ Attempts to impose officials from Kulab have ended in a tragedy.

¹⁷ They both were field commanders during the civil war.

¹⁸ Cf. www.akdn.org

¹⁹ Cf. *inter alia* Case Study on Tajikistan Pamir Private Power Project, <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTTAJIKISTAN/Resources/Tajikistan.pdf>

²⁰ The hydropower resources of Tajikistan are estimated to be 520 billion kWh, quote Interfax-Kazakhstan.

²¹ Among other events, the opening of the First Microfinancing Bank in Tajikistan on 5th July 2004 by AKDN branches, in most part used the ability to receive credits from EBRD.

²² Cf. Gonzalez Esfandiri, "Central Asia: Drug Addiction Is On The Rise (Part 1,2), 22.06.2004, www.rferl.org

²³ Cf. Daniel Kimmage, "Labor Migration and Tajik-Russian Relations", 14.06.2004, www.rferl.org

²⁴ It is worth mentioning that the Tajik-Russian agreements concerning the Russian military base, the status of the border guards, the strategic Russian investments in Tajikistan, being the trouble spot in the mutual relations, were concluded in June 2004, following a number of spectacular Russian actions: the campaign in the media, direct "hooligan" assaults, etc. aimed against Tajik immigrant workers.

²⁵ Even in the Soviet times, professional activity of Tajik women was of a totally marginal meaning.

²⁶ Paradoxically, this does not mean establishing of pro-Russian sentiments: on the contrary, the immigrants and their families emphasise the intensifying racism of the Russian society and the hostility of the state structures, which contributes to the strengthening of the Tajik and Muslim identity.

²⁷ The USA, satisfied with the fruitful cooperation with Tajikistan, support them, even at the expense of the declared objectives of democratisation of the region, e.g. by supporting the president's electoral law draft, regardless of the opposition protests, in July 2004, which seems to be a not well thought-out step.

²⁸ In this context, the meaning of Tajikistan as transit country for drug, weapons and people smuggling from Afghanistan to Russia and the West and the need of greater involvement of the EU in this issue are increasingly more often noticed.

Cf.: Justine Walker "The Withdrawal of Russian Border Guards In Tajikistan: Implications for Drug Trafficking And Islamic Militants?", Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst, June 30, 2004 oraz Stephen Blank, "Russian Forces In Tajikistan: A Permanent Presence?" Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst, 16 June, 2004.

²⁹ Stephen Blank, "India's Continuing Drive Into Central Asia", Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst, 20 January, 2004.

³⁰ Sultonbek Aksakalov, "A New Silk Road? Tajikistan-China Border Crossing Opens", Central Asia – Caucasus Analyst, 02 June, 2004.

³¹ Pakistan, has expressed its serious interest, also in this year, in investments in the Tajik hydropower engineering sector. A part of such projects were taken over in June by Russia, anxious of losing them. Currently, Iran is engaged in investing in Tajikistan's hydropower engineering sector (hydroelectric power plant in Sangtud).