

Fake Reforms in Central Asian countries

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In the last two years, some changes have been observed in the countries of Central Asia in the internal policy of tyrannical regimes - somewhere the changes are point-like, and somewhere very real reforms have been announced. This phenomenon attracts attention primarily due to the fact that the easing and reforms do not fit in any way with the policies that the regimes of the region have been carrying out during the last 20 years.

UZBEKISTAN:

Basically, some considerable changes have occurred in Uzbekistan, and they are connected, obviously, with the coming to power of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the successor of the notorious dictator and oppressor of the Uzbek people, Islam Karimov. Since coming to power, Mirziyoyev has carried out many reforms in various spheres of public administration, an electronic reception of the president was opened, where every citizen can complain to Mirziyoyev about some injustice, who, in turn, began to practice publicly criticizing officials for violations. Mirziyoyev also launched the largest anti-corruption campaign in the history of Uzbekistan, which touched untouchables: security agencies, tax police, customs, prosecutors and courts, although in most cases only small employees of these departments were punished. Both former and current high-ranking officials were arrested or removed from their posts, including the head of the National Security Service, Rustam Inoyatov, his deputy Shukhrat Gulyamov, former Prosecutor General Rashid Kadyrov, former Interior Minister Adham Ahmadbayev, as well as their closest partners and associates.

On 14 March, by Mirziyoyev's decree, the National Security Service of Uzbekistan was transformed into the State Security Service, while the parliament, in its turn, adopted the corresponding "Law on the State Security Service" (SSS). The commentary to the decree said: ***"the exclusion from the service's name of the concept of "national security" is related to the need to eliminate a factor that would unduly expand its powers, since any local scale problem could be considered a threat to national security."***

In addition, the changes have affected religious freedoms: calling the *athan* using a loudspeaker was allowed, a decree on the establishment of an Islamic academy was signed, Mirziyoyev initiated the competitions of reciters of the Quran, the post of curator of the National Security Service in the spiritual administration of Muslims was abolished. Also, some prisoners for religious reasons were released from the colonies, and to the women sentenced under similar articles they stopped adding terms (so-called "promotion"). All this was accompanied by a sharp criticism of the times of Karimov's injustice, that this period was left behind, and quite different times have come - times of prosperity and justice.

This demonstrative softening of the domestic policy towards the people helped to increase public confidence in the government and the rapid growth of President Mirziyoyev's popularity, although, of course, his reprisal over political opponents in the person of the Siloviki who terrorized the people during the last 20 years played a special role in this.

Shavkat Mirziyoyev in one of his speeches at the State Awards Ceremony in early December 2017 stressed that 17 thousand out of 57 thousand prisoners were convicted for religious reasons and admitted that many were imprisoned on fabricated criminal cases, adding that intended amnesty was planned to release 10 thousand people. ***"We know that the majority are convicted on the fabricated cases, because of this injustice, they developed enmity and hatred for the regime, at the moment they can pose a threat to the state and society. For this reason, we had to abandon the previously planned number for release from prison"***, he said then.

Observers in Uzbekistan believe that although the presidency of Shavkat Mirziyoyev started with the crushing of some pillars of the former regime and the struggle with the most odious figures of the Karimov era, nothing essentially changed except individuals in the

power and some ways of managing in governance. The authoritarian component of the regime, as well as the repressive practices, have been almost completely preserved.

The struggle against the revival of religiosity and dissent, with the exception of some point-like softening, remained at the same level, but it became enriched and became more diverse and sophisticated. This can be seen in the following:

1) On the one hand, Mirziyoyev is betting on the development of the so-called "moderate Islam" as opposed to the so-called "radical" Islam, i.e. he changes tactics and approach, trying to combine both a power struggle with rapidly growing popularity of ideas of political Islam, and mental struggle. The researcher of the Russia-Eurasia program of the British Institute of International Relations Chatham House, Annette Bor, in an interview with Radio Ozodlik in February this year stated: ***"Lately, many measures have been taken that show the possibilities for Islam and the desire to send it more to a moderate channel ... Mirziyoyev is trying to increase the role of moderate Islam."*** One can also mention here an attempt to develop the Naqshbandi Sufi tariqa in Uzbekistan, which Mirziyoyev publicly announced in 2017.

2) Along with this, despite some easing in relation to suspects and prisoners on religious grounds, yet in itself repressive practices have still been used. An indicator of this was the cruelest torture used by the NSS in March 2018 against elderly Nasiba Uzakova and her pregnant daughter Umida Uzakova. Also, the practice of fabricating criminal cases against civilian activists continues: for example, in the court of the Kuva district of the Fergana region, in February, a lawsuit began over the head of the Andijan branch of the non-governmental human rights organization of Uzbekistan "Ezgulik" Musadzhan Bobodzhonov. The criminal case against him was initiated in November 2017 by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ferghana region under Article 244-1 part 2 "Production, distribution and demonstration of materials containing threats to public security and public order".

The relentless struggle with religious preachers is inspired by Mirziyoyev himself, who stated during his trip to Andijan region: ***"If, for example, there are 20-30 stumbled in five mahallas, five of them are ardent (extremists), they will not turn away from the chosen path. They need to be deprived of citizenship, I'm ready for it."***

After being appointed to the post of the head of the State Security Service (NSS), Ihtiyor Abdullayev commented on the Law on the State Security Service as follows: ***"Instability in neighboring states, activation of terrorist movements, the return of our compatriots, the growth of the number of people, including people with bad intentions, entering our country in connection with the opening of borders, as well as religious literature of an extremist nature, which they bring to the country, indicate that the previously known threats still exist. This is manifested in the fact that some people, misunderstanding the freedom of religion, are trying to enter into different currents. ... The activation of some forces that consider themselves to be opposition, their attempt to legalize their activities, shows that they are trying to enter the country, trying to violate the stability existing in it. ... The fact that citizens of Uzbekistan, workers in the territory of other states, in most cases fall under the influence of extremist currents, is one of the main danger factors. It can not be assumed that all foreign investments entering the country are beneficial. None of the above should not be left out of our attention."*** This was reported by IA Ozodlik on 30.03.2018.

All this points to the preservation of the old vector and repressive methods in the internal policy of the regime. Human rights defenders are unanimous in that renaming the NSS into the SSS did not in fact introduce any tangible changes in the structure of the special services, except for the acquisition of full control by Mirziyoyev over the country's main special service. Article 12 of the new law "On the State Security Service" prohibits state bodies, other organizations and officials from interfering in the activities of the State Security Service. And Article 37 does impose the immunity to the SSS officers during the service: "A serviceman of the State Security Service can not be held criminally liable, detained or detained without the consent of the prosecutor of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, the region

and the city of Tashkent, respectively."

In addition, not so long ago Mirziyoyev signed the law on ratification of the agreement between Turkey and Uzbekistan on extradition. The law was adopted by the lower house and approved by the Senate in early June. Experts note that this agreement says only one thing: Mirziyoyev continues the vector of Karimov for the forced return of opponents of the regime from abroad, and the facts of extradition were not long in coming. On 22 June, the Turkish authorities secretly handed over to Uzbekistan 38-year-old Erkin Avazov and 34-year-old Abdullah Ermatov, they are accused of religious extremism in their homeland, on 20 July, Zakir Rakhimov was extradited to Uzbekistan, he is wanted on suspicion of involvement in the organization, Islamic Movement of Turkestan, Uzbekistan 24 reported. Also, 48-year-old Bahridin Khudoinazarov is expected to be extradited, Ozodlik reported referring to Khudoinazarov's relatives. Bahridin Khudoinazarov, who is considered the student of the famous Andijan theologian Abduvali-kori Mirzaev, was brought to Uzbekistan in the list of persons wanted on suspicion of attacks on the constitutional order, the report said.

The latest events in Uzbekistan finally tore off the masks with the so-called reforms.

After the announcement by the new president of large-scale reforms, under pressure from the public, the regime had to cancel the secret ban on visiting mosques for persons under the age of 18. Being delighted and believing in the thaw, active Muslims decided not to stop at this and began to demand from the spiritual administration of Muslims to solve the issue related to wearing headscarves and hijab in public places and primarily in educational institutions, even this idea was supported by some imam-khatybs of the mosques. However, as it turned out, the regime realized that, with its populist actions, it was too encouraging for the people, and reforms can end with the people raising their head and raising the banner of Islam again, as it happened in the 1990s.

And therefore, a rapid collapse of a significant part of the reforms in the religious sphere happened very quickly. So, the Uzbek television closed several Islamic broadcasts at once, in most regions they stopped reading the azan (*athan*) by the loudspeaker, in several regions of Uzbekistan, active imam-khatybs were dismissed from their posts under various pretexts. Also in July, another post of deputy chairman was created in the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Uzbekistan, while the former deputy of the National Security Service Dilshod Hoshimov was appointed a new deputy, he was personally awarded with the medal "Zhasorat" (for courage) by Islam Karimov who is known for his hostility towards religion.

Innovations in the sphere of Internet control also indicate in favor of preservation of the authoritarian nature of the regime, So, in order to combat the so-called "extremism" the new president's team proposes to create the so-called "Office for the Prevention of the Distribution of Extremist Ideas via the Internet" (a local analog of Russian Roskomnadzor), which can officially block any Internet resource, including news sites, on suspicion of extremism.

What is important, with the new authorities coming to power, Russia tries as soon as possible to take under its influence Uzbekistan under the guise of strengthening Russian-Uzbek relations, and Mirziyoyev, who, traditionally back in the days of Karimov unlike Rustam Azimov, was considered a closer figure to Russia, does not resist to it. For example, on 5 April, 2017, during Mirziyoyev's visit to Moscow, he was met at the highest level in the Kremlin, as the First Channel reported:

"In the Kremlin, a particularly solemn welcome was prepared for Shavkat Mirziyoyev. He was welcomed by the guard of honor, the highest status of international meetings in diplomacy. Vladimir Putin received the guest in the St. George Hall. After the execution of the hymns of the two countries – the ceremony of introducing ministers and heads of the major companies. And this is far from mere formality, as the Russian president noted. After all, the present participants of the delegations of the two countries have been preparing this meeting in the past months. This is a really serious, new step in the development of Russian-Uzbek relations, Putin said. Military-technical cooperation between the two countries in the coming years, as

the presidents noted, will only expand. It's not just about deliveries of Russian weapons to Uzbekistan, but also about the training of Uzbek officers in Russian military universities. All this is stipulated by the new interstate agreements. But much more important is the cooperation of the two countries in other areas, primarily in the economy. It should be noted with satisfaction that an unprecedented package of documents was signed following the results of our talks. This is a joint statement of the presidents of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Russian Federation, as well as more than 550 agreements and contracts in the economic, investment, energy, military-technical, cultural, humanitarian and other spheres. At the same time, the total amount of the portfolio of joint trade investment projects exceeds \$15 billion, Mirziyoyev said."

It should be separately mentioned that neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, like wishing to keep pace with the leading Uzbekistan in Central Asia, also began to create some visibility of reforms.

KYRGYZSTAN:

In Kyrgyzstan, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, who succeeded his ally Almazbek Atambayev as president, began to build himself a man "from among the common people." So, for example, on 14 April, 2018, Jeenbekov blatantly refused a special board to travel to Osh for the funeral of his brother and flew by regular flight from Bishkek to Osh along with ordinary passengers. "This trip was of a personal nature," the president's press service commented at the time. Also on 7 May of this year, a similar action was committed by Prime Minister Abylgaziev, who refused a special flight and flew an ordinary flight with a working trip to the south of the country. In addition, for the trips of the President of Kyrgyzstan to the mosque for the Friday prayer in Bishkek, they stopped blocking the road traffic, as was the custom, the presidential motorcade is now on a par with other road users. After that, many people got an impression of Jeenbekov as a "simple and honest president." He also signed the decision of the Security Council of Kyrgyzstan "On Actual Measures to Combat Corruption in the Judiciary, Supervisory and Law Enforcement Agencies", thereby launching a large-scale anti-corruption campaign, which resulted in the arrest of ex-Prime Minister Sapar Isakov in the investigation of criminal cases on the modernization of the capital CHP, of an ex-mayor of Bishkek Kubanychbek Kulmatov and a parliament deputy Osmonbek Artykbaev. Prior to that, seven former top managers of the energy industry, including the former head of Energoholding Aybek Kaliev, the former general director of OJSC Electric Stations, Salaydin Avazov, were detained. It is also noteworthy that Sooronbay Jeenbekov himself, who was then the head of the Kyrgyz government, accepted the commissioning of the capital heat station.

In general, Kyrgyzstan is gradually moving, or rather, Russia is moving it towards what is happening in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The colonial domination of Russia is felt every year more and more. The Russian military base in Kant in the south of Kyrgyzstan is constantly being strengthened under various pretexts. On June 19, one of the deputies of the Russian parliament said during his trip to Kyrgyzstan: ***"The base (the Russian base in Kant - ed.) is located in a unique place. The base within the framework of the CSTO and bilateral cooperation fulfills a strategic task ... We want to strengthen, expand the components on this base, which will cover the south."***

Both the previous and the current president of Kyrgyzstan do not hide their incredible loyalty to Russia. ***"Russia is our strategic partner and our most important ally ... Russia is also a military and political ally for us,"*** Jeenbekov said in March 2018.

The news about corruption in the higher echelons of power does not cease, not speaking about the lower levels of officials. Local observers note that, like in the rest of the region, in Kyrgyzstan, the fight against corruption is conducted exclusively for populist purposes, and not with a sincere intention to end this disease.

The fight against Islam is conducted by dividing the Islamic forces into loyal and disloyal

to the government, by supporting, for example, not the political current in Islam in the face of Jamaat Tablig, which operates freely in the country. In addition, in 2015, during a press conference, the former President Atambayev warmly spoke about this jamaat. Also, the current president of Kyrgyzstan, Sooronbay Jeenbekov, hardly taking his post, announced the development of moderate Islam and the fight against unconventional Islam. ***"It is necessary to strengthen the work on raising the educational level of the population in the religious sphere, to tighten control over the implementation of a unified curriculum in all madrassas and other religious schools. The State Commission should intensify its interaction with religious organizations, SAMK, state authorities in the regions. It is necessary to inform the population of the basis of traditional religion,"*** said Jeenbekov, according to Sputnik news agency. Also at a meeting with the head of the State National Security Committee, Abdil Sergizbayev, December 4, 2017, Jeenbekov ordered to strengthen the fight against radical Islam, saying: ***"But, as these threats are long-term, it is necessary to strengthen preventive measures among adherents of radical trends, pay close attention to the spread of extremist ideology in social networks, to strengthen work on information counteraction to terrorism and extremism, to develop a unified strategy."***

In early July, the Kyrgyz authorities announced their plans to amend the law "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations." According to the amendments, minor children will be allowed to visit the mosque only accompanied by parents or with their permission, and all prayer rooms will be registered.

"We shift responsibility in this area to representatives of a religious organization: if a minor comes to work for them, they should be aware of whether he has permission from his parents or not," explained Zakir Chotaev, a deputy director of the State Commission for Religious Affairs of Kyrgyzstan. He also added: ***"Responsibility for this falls on the religious figure. On the other hand, parents should also take responsibility for the participation of their children in religious rituals, should know where their children are. And there are cases when children play truant and take part in religious activities."*** This was reported by Nastoyashcheye Vremya.

Some naive residents of the country were sincerely deceived by the clever moves on the part of Jeenbekov, and, in the hope of easing the pressure on Islam, they decided to support the new president, expressing in relation to him some loyalty in return for a request to release those imprisoned for religious activities. However, it is expected that their hopes have not been fully justified, which, in principle, is not surprising given the fact that Jeenbekov is Atambaev's protege, and both of them are the proxies of Russia, which instructs their puppets in Bishkek to fight against Islam in Kyrgyzstan.

TAJIKISTAN:

As for Tajikistan, where there was no change of people in power, unlike Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, in President Rahmon's behavior, nevertheless, in recent years there has been a desire to demonstrate his "nationality" and "justice". Rahmon took on public criticism of state officials and began at every opportunity to chastise them for incompetence in the performance of assigned tasks, all of which is covered in detail by the state media. So, after sharp criticism, Rakhmon dismissed the Minister of Finance and the head of the customs service. He also announced a large-scale anti-corruption campaign and even sacrificed several high-ranking officials for efficiency. One of such victims of presidential reforms was, for example, the head of the Investigation Department of the Agency for State Financial Control and Fight Against Corruption of Tajikistan Firuz Holmurodzoda. Rahmon also made some staff changes.

Rahmon began in his public speeches to demand that the heads of oblasts and districts stop lavish and solemn ceremonies during his trips to the regions. For example, on 24 June of this year, during a trip to the Sughd region, Rahmon sharply criticized the local authorities for the solemn ceremony of his meeting with the involvement of students and schoolchildren.

That is, he demonstrated his innocence and sincere discontent towards the magnificent events in his honor. **"Why do not you understand the words? How many times do I have to repeat that during visits by the president to cities and districts of the republic, boys and girls should not be taken to the streets? Can you see, people are shivering from the cold. Do you have a conscience?"** - he severely reprimanded the embarrassed officials, who for 25 years had been accustomed to meeting the so-called "leader of the nation" exactly in this manner, and in no other. "The officials silently listened to the president's censure, lowering his head," - describes those events portal "Akhbor" with reference to an anonymous source.

And in February 2017, Rahmon, after the appointment of his son Rustam Emomali for the post of mayor of Dushanbe, publicly announced to him his instruction. **"Do not have dinner in the homes of businessmen. Do not go to restaurants. Go into the homes of workers, old men, widows. They will be happy to give you the best they have. They will consider it an honor to meet with the head of the city. Reduce prices for the people. Provide them with decent work, transport, electricity. Never be rude to your subordinates. Talk to them in a cultural manner,"** - he publicly admonished his son. Observers point out that in all speeches of the President of Tajikistan, one can clearly see theatrics and arrogance.

In addition, on May 30, 2018, Rahmon announced the beginning of the construction of an Islamic university in Tajikistan, and in Dushanbe, they began construction of the largest mosque in Central Asia. Analysts believe that the announcement of more radical reforms in the country is reserved for the time after Rustam Emomali's coming to power, which, apparently, will take, according to Rahmon's plan, the president's chair in the near future. This will allow the newly-minted president to retain power and quickly gain popularity among the people.

Observers believe that attempts to present Rahmon as a reformer who has directed domestic policy toward easing is nothing more than a tribute to a dangerous time when nations around the world rebel against tyrants one by one, and many of them eventually find themselves severely punished for their own atrocities. Among other things, political scientists see this as the preparation of the ground for the easier appointment of Rustam Emomali to the post of the head of the state in the near future, who, in turn, raises his rating to the people by ennobling and expanding the city of Dushanbe for credit money.

Rahmon possesses an absolute power in Tajikistan, over which even the law does not have force, which leads to constant self-indulgence and further degradation of the personality of the president, who was distraught from power. The personality cult of Rahmon is confessed to the regime so much so that when mentioning his name in the Tajik media it is obligatory to write his full status, which he himself established - "The founder of peace and unity, the leader of the nation, the respected Emomali Rahmon." Officials, government and public figures write about him absurd poems, comparing him with the Prophet Isa (peace be upon him), and with the companion of Prophet Muhammad, Ali (may Allah be pleased with him) This is also noted in the report of the international human rights organization Freedom House, which included Tajikistan to a group of countries with autocracy.

As for the corruption of this regime, its level is reflected in the report of the international organization Transparency International, published in June 2017, where it is noted that Tajikistan ranks 152 among 175 countries in terms of corruption, and according to experts at least every second resident of the country at least once in his life gave bribes.

Regarding the state of vassalage between Rahmon and Russia from the very beginning of his coming to power, as well as the strong dependence of Tajikistan on Russia today - there is also strong evidence. In an interview with EurAsia Daily, the Tajik expert Temur Varki said: **"Tajikistan not only remains dependent on Russia, but this dependence is increasing, despite the growing dependence on China."** It's not a secret that in Tajikistan, the 201st military base is deployed - Russia's largest military facility beyond its borders, as well as the Russian colonialists own a military airfield in Ayni. In addition, Russia

annually conducts large-scale military exercises in the mountains of Tajikistan using heavy equipment and aircraft. In Tajikistan, Russian organizations are active, they are engaged in the propaganda of Russian culture, one of them is the Russkiy Mir Foundation.

As for the fight against Islam in Tajikistan, over the past few years the regime has increased pressure on Islamic attributes and Islam in general. This is evidenced by the adoption of the law on the prohibition of wearing hijab in public places and, as a consequence, holding constant raids against women in hijabs. Tajik prisons are overcrowded with residents of the country, arrested for religious and political reasons, including those who were convicted of committing namaz (prayer) not according to the Hanafi madhhab. The situation in places of deprivation of freedom is deteriorating every day, prisoners are forbidden to pray in the morning, explaining this with the violation of the regime, and if someone is caught in the fact that he took a bath before announcing a rise from sleep at 6:00 am - he is punished. Scoring of terms for prisoners on religious grounds (so-called "promotion") began to acquire a massive character, that Rahmon's regime tries not to advertise.

Thus, after reviewing the above-mentioned facts regarding the so-called reforms and the true situation of the political situation in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, it becomes clear the falsity of the developments in these countries.

Most experts and analysts are of the opinion that all these pseudo-reforms are dictated by several factors:

1) It's no secret that in the past few years, countries with authoritarian regimes have been experiencing political crises, and this is happening both in Muslim and non-Muslim countries. Obviously, every ruler draws conclusions from what is happening;

2) The management model called "twisting nuts to crunch" exhausts its safety margin in Central Asian countries and the main geopolitical players today do not need a revolution in the region, especially in Uzbekistan, where more subtle approaches are needed.

3) Any change of the ruler for the acquisition of popular love and the strengthening of his power during the initial period requires populist measures, which today can be observed in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In Tajikistan, however, pseudo-reforms occur, rather, by inertia with neighbors and are aimed at maintaining the existing situation.

The key idea that more and more people in Central Asia is aware of today is that for a long time the peoples of the region have been in a state of colonization, direct, military, or indirect - political and ideological. And after all, in fact, for more than a century and a half our peoples have been ruled by people who were placed above us by our own enemies, and are ruled by a system that contradicts our culture, religion and 12-century history. The history, which states that when our peoples lived in a single state with all Muslims according to the inspired system of Islam, the greatest scientists, politicians, generals and enlighteners emerged from our number. Today, our peoples are associated with labor migrants and unskilled labor at all - this is exactly what the colonialists prepared for us, once again they put cruel oppressive tyrants over us, so long as our breasts are not filled again with fresh breath of Islam and we are not reborn in our past grandeur. So shall we naively seek a solution in non-existent "democratic reforms", instead of returning to adherence to the highest truth, our spiritual sources and to what has conditioned our greatness in the past?

The second righteous Khalifah (Caliph) Umar ibn al-Khattab (may Allah be pleased with him) once said: "إنا كنا أذل قوم فأعزنا الله بالإسلام فمهما نطلب العزة بغير ما أعزنا الله به أذلنا الله" ***Verily, we were a humiliated people, Allah has exalted us through Islam; therefore no matter how we strive to achieve greatness otherwise than by means of what Allah has exalted us - He undoubtedly will humiliate us***".

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