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STATE-BUILDING PROCESS IN UZBEKISTAN: MANY MILES TO GO ÖZBEKİSTAN'DA DEVLET İNŞASI SÜRECİ: KATEDİLMESİ GEREKEN UZUN YOLLAR

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Abstract

This study examines the developments in post-Soviet Uzbekistan in the field of state building. With the dissolution of USSR, newly independent states struggled to function as independent nation-states since the transition efforts from Communism to post-Communism created an uncharted area for the post-Soviet societies. Transition studies gained widespread attention with the democratization of Latin America and Southern Europe. However, it became evident that current transition literature which solely focuses on democratization and marketization lacks the explanatory power on transition process of post-Soviet states due to the Soviet legacy which left its marks not only in terms of democracy and economy but also on national-identity and religious affairs. Therefore, it is argued that a quadruple transition model which focuses on democratization, marketization, stateness and nationality is more appropriate to analyze the developments in post-Soviet states. In Uzbekistan, transition process was operated by Islam Karimov until 2016. Contrary to some other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan enjoyed a more stable transition process mostly due to Karimov's authoritarian rule. However, after more than two decades, it is difficult to consider Uzbekistan neither as a full democracy nor as a market economy. Moreover, the struggle between so-called radical Islamist groups and the government poses serious threats to the stability of the country. Lately Shavkat Mirziyoyev's presidency following the death of Karimov created a more fertile ground for further democratization of Uzbekistan. Considering these developments, this study evaluates state-building policies of Uzbekistan in five topics regarding nation-building, democratization, marketization, religion and foreign affairs. It is argued that despite relative stability and progress, Uzbekistan is far from being an example of successful transition.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Uzbekistan, transition, state-building, Karimov, Mirziyoyev

Öz

Bu çalışma Sovyet sonrası dönemde Özbekistan'ın yürüttüğü devlet inşası politikalarını incelemektedir. SSCB'nin ayrışması neticesinde bağımsızlıklarını ilan devletler bağımsız ve modern birer ulus devlet olarak fonksiyon göstermekte zorlanmış, komünizm sonrasına geçiş çabaları halkı ve yöneticileri alışık olmadıkları konularla tanıştırmıştır. Mevcut ekonomik ve siyasal sistemden bir başka sisteme dönüşümü anlatan geçiş çalışmaları, bilhassa Latin Amerika ve Güney Avrupa'daki demokratikleşme hareketleriyle birlikte araştırmacıların ilgi odağına girmiştir. Fakat, yalnızca demokratikleşmeye ve market ekonomisine geçişe odaklanan mevcut geçiş çalışmaları alan yazınının, eski Sovyet ülkelerinin dönüşümlerini açıklamakta yeterli olmadığı görülmüştür. Bunun sebebi, Sovyet mirasının, ülkelerin sadece yönetim biçimlerini ve ekonomilerini değil, aynı zamanda ulusal kimliklerini ve dini ilişkilerini de etkilemiş olmasıdır. Bu sebeple, eski Sovyet ülkelerinin yeniden inşa sürecini incelerken, demokrasi, market ekonomisi, devlet kapasitesi ve millet inşası konularını kapsayan dörtlü bir geçiş modelinin kullanılmasının fayda sağlayacağı öne sürülmüştür. Özbekistan'ın geçiş süreci 2016 yılına kadar İslam Karimov tarafından yürütülmüştür. Bazı Orta Asya ülkelerine nazaran Özbekistan, Karimov'un tutucu politikaları sebebiyle göreceli bir istikrara kavuşmuştur, ancak tam bir demokratik rejime ya da işleyen bir market ekonomisine sahip olduğunu söylemek oldukça güçtür; radikal İslamcı olarak adlandırılan gruplarla hükümet arasındaki mücadele istikrarı tehdit etmektedir. Son dönemde, Karimov'un ölümüyle başkanlığa seçilen Şevket Mirziyoyev'in önderliğinde Özbekistan'ın demokratikleşmesi için daha uygun bir ortamın oluştuğu inancı yaygınlaşmıştır. Bu gelişmeler çerçevesinde, bu çalışma ulus inşası, demokratikleşme, market ekonomisine geçiş, din ve dış ilişkiler konulu beş başlıkta Özbekistan'ın devlet inşası politikalarını değerlendirmektedir. Sonuç olarak, görece istikrar ve ilerlemeye rağmen Özbekistan'ın halen başarılı bir geçiş örneği teşkil etmediği değerlendirilmektedir.

Keywords: Özbekistan, Geçiş Çalışmaları, Devlet İnşası, Karimov, Mirziyoyev

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Arka Plan: Bir devletin mevcut siyasi ve ekonomik yapısının köklü birtakım dönüşümler geçirmesi, Siyaset Bilimi literatüründe geniş bir çalışma alanı oluşturmaktadır. 1970'ler sonrasında Latin Amerika ve Güney Avrupa'daki dönüşümlerle başlayan çalışmalar, SSCB'nin dağılması ile birlikte bağımsızlıklarını ilan eden devletlerin siyasi, iktisadi ve toplumsal alanlarda nasıl değişimler geçireceği sorusu etrafında yoğunluk kazanmıştır. Dönüşümün genellikle sorgusuz bir biçimde otoriterlikten demokrasiye ve kapalı ekonomiden market ekonomisine doğru bir seyir izleyeceği öngörülmüştür. Bu öngörünün sebebi ise 1991'in hemen sonrasında liberalizmin gerek siyasi arenada gerekse akademik camiada geri dönüşü olmayan bir zafer kazandığı inancıdır. Orta Asya'da yer alan eski Sovyet ülkeleri, bağımsızlıklarını ilan ettikleri tarihlerde Sovyet inşası devlet-toplum ilişkilerine, merkezi planlamayla şekillenmiş ekonomilere, Stalin döneminde tanımlanmış sınırlara ve yapay olarak oluşturulmuş ulusal kimliklere sahiptiler. Bu sebeple bu ülkelerin modern küresel sisteme adaptasyonunda, önceki dönüşümlerde incelenen demokratikleşme ve market ekonomisine geçiş gibi olağan başlıkların yanı sıra, çalışma alanını yeni boyutlar ekleyerek genişleten devlet inşası ve ulus inşası konuları da ön plana çıkmıştır.

Çalışmanın Amacı: SSCB döneminde bölgenin merkez ülkesi olarak nitelendirilen Özbekistan hem toplumsal hem iktisadi anlamda dikkat çeken bir geçiş süreci izlemektedir. Henüz 2016 yılında sona eren çeyrek asırlık İslam Karimov yönetimi, kimi çevrelerce istikrar kaynağı olarak görülürken, bir diğer kesime göre ise demokratikleşmenin ve devletin fonksiyonel hale geçişinin önünde önemli bir engel teşkil etmiştir. Devletin ekonomik alandaki varlığını muhafaza etmesi, Özbek ekonomisinin kontrollü bir geçiş yaklaşımı adı altında kapalı bir sistem olarak kalıp kalmayacağı tartışmalarını canlı tutmuştur. Ulusal kimlik arayışının, modern bir ulus-devlet inşası gayesinden ziyade, Karimov'un kendi liderliğini ve kültürünü ülkesinin toprak bütünlüğü ve meşruiyeti ile birleştirerek sürdürmek maksadıyla kullandığı bir araç olduğu yorumlarıyla sıklıkla karşılaşılmaktadır. Öte yandan, diğer Orta Asya ülkelerine kıyasla daha köklü bir yerleşik nüfus kültürüne ve İslam geçmişine sahip olan Özbekistan'da, radikal İslamcı oluşumların sıklıkla terör eylemlerine yöneldiği ve Karimov rejiminin Özbekistan İslami Hareketini en önemli ulusal tehdit unsuru olarak nitelendirdiği bilinmektedir. Bu durum, dini faaliyetlerin devlet denetiminde sürdürülmesine yol açmış ve din özgürlüğü tartışmalarını beraberinde getirmiştir. Son olarak, bölge üzerindeki büyük güçlerin rekabeti, Özbekistan'ın dış politika yapım sürecini etkilemekte ve ulusal bağımsızlık tartışmalarını gündemde tutmaktadır. Karimov döneminde Özbekistan'ın komşularıyla gergin ilişkilere sahip olduğu gözlenirken, büyük güçlerle ise daha faydacı bir ilişki biçiminin ortaya çıktığı öne sürülmektedir. Bu tartışmalar ışığında bu çalışma, Özbekistan'ın bugüne değin geçirmiş olduğu dönüşümü inceleyerek, gelecek reformlara dair kısıtlayıcı ve kolaylaştırıcı faktörleri ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır. Buna ilaveten, Karimov'un vefatı ile liderliği devralan Şevket Mirziyoyev'in ülkenin dönüşümü için neler vadettiği irdelenmeye çalışılmıştır.

Çalışmanın Yöntemi: Bu çalışmada, Özbekistan'ın yaşadığı dönüşümü daha detaylı bir biçimde inceleyebilmek maksadıyla Taras Kuzio tarafından kavramsallaştırılan Dörtlü Geçiş Yaklaşımı'ndan faydalanılmıştır. Bu yaklaşıma göre, eski Sovyet ülkelerinin dönüşümü yalnızca demokratikleşme ve market ekonomisine geçiş ile sınırlı kalmamakta, aynı zamanda devlet inşası ve ulus inşası gibi konuları da kapsamaktadır. Bu yöntem kullanılarak Özbekistan'ın dönüşümü Ulus Devlet İnşası, Demokratik Devlet İnşası, Seküler Devlet İnşası, Market Ekonomisine Geçiş gibi alt başlıklarda incelenmiş, aynı zamanda dış politika hakkında Bağımsız Devlet İnşası ve yeni bir liderliği irdeleyen Şevket Mirziyoyev Dönemi alt başlıkları da çalışmaya dahil edilmiştir.

Bulgular: Çalışma neticesinde Özbekistan'ın modern devlet inşası sürecinin henüz devam etmekte olduğu görülmüştür. Devlet tarafından oluşturulmaya çalışılan üniter ulusal kimliğin önünde güçlü bir klan kimliğinin varlığını sürdürdüğü tespit edilmiştir. Karimov'un 25 yıllık iktidarının demokratik reformların yayılmasına engel olduğu, sivil toplum faaliyetleri, medya ve rekabetçi bir seçim sistemi gibi konularda ülkenin zayıf bir performans sergilediği görülmüştür. Ekonomik anlamda Karimov'un yürüttüğü kademeli geçişin, serbest piyasaya nihai geçişe imkân tanımadığı, yönetici kligin ekonomiyi sıkı bir şekilde kontrol ettiği, pamuk üretiminin halen ülkenin temel gelir kaynaklarından biri olduğu ve bunun felaket boyutlarındaki çevresel etkilerinin giderilmediği göze çarpmaktadır. Karimov yönetiminin her türlü İslami örgütlenmeyi terör kisvesi altında sert politikalarla bastırdığı ve bunun ılımlı İslamcı kesimleri de etkilediği tespit edilmiştir. Bu durum, devlet-toplum ilişkilerinde onarılmaya güç yaralar açtığı gibi, radikal kesimlerin daha da radikalleşmesine ve ılımlı kesimlerin yer altına çekilmesine yol açmıştır. Özbekistan'ın modern anlamda bir devlet kimliği sergilediği en belirgin alanlardan birisi dış politika olmuştur. ABD, Rusya ve Çin gibi ülkelerle çıkarları uyduğu takdirde iş birliğine yanaşan Karimov, büyük güçler arasında esnek bir politika izleme imkânı bulmuştur. Öte yandan komşularıyla ilişkilerini nispeten gergin bir görünümde sürdüren Karimov, bölgesel iş birliği noktasında Özbekistan'ın öncü bir rol oynamasını engellemiştir.

Sonuç: Bu çalışmadan iki önemli sonuç çıkarılabilir. Öncelikle, Özbekistan'ın dönüşümünün gerek küresel gerek yerel pek çok faktörden etkilendiği ve hem Sovyet döneminden kalan miras, hem de günümüz şartlarının oluşturduğu kısıtlamalar nedeniyle arzulan seviyeye gelemediği ortaya konmuştur. Mirziyoyev'in, akademiye yansıyan ilk raporlar neticesinde, komşularıyla daha ılımlı ve halkına yönelik daha diyalog yanlısı bir tutum izlediği söylenebilir. Bu sebeple, demokratik dönüşüm başta olmak üzere, devletin kapasitesini arttıracak ve devlet-toplum ilişkilerini daha ideal bir görünüme kavuşturacak reformların gerçekleştirilmesi umudu sürmektedir. Diğer bir sonuç ise teorik çerçeveye alakalıdır. Modern uluslararası sisteme adapte olmak isteyen devletlerin dönüşüm sürecini incelerken, araştırmacının ayrı ayrı başlıklardaki ilerlemeleri dikkate alır biçimde fakat nihayetinde bütüncül bir tablo ortaya koymasının gerekli olduğu ortaya çıkmaktadır. Aynı zamanda, bir teorinin varsayımları belirli bir ülkenin toplumsal dönüşümünü incelemek maksadıyla kullanılırken, o ülkeye ait yerel toplumsal şartların dikkate alınması gerekmektedir. Dönüşüm çalışmalarının geleneksel unsurları olan demokratikleşme ve market ekonomisine geçiş yanı sıra, ulusal kimlik, din ve dış ilişkiler gibi diğer faktörlerin bu sürece olumlu ve olumsuz etkilerini de tespit etmek mümkün ve gereklidir. Günümüz anlayışında modern bir ulus devletin, demokratik bir hükümet ve bir piyasa ekonomisi gerektirdiği genel kabul görmekle birlikte, Özbekistan örneği, ulusal kimliği sağlamlaştırılmadan, dinin toplumsal rolünü sorunsuzlaştırmadan ve uluslararası arenada nispeten bağımsız bir rota çizmeden geçişin tamamlanmasının zaman alıcı olduğunu göstermektedir. Bu nedenle, güncel geçiş çalışmalarının sınırlarını genişletmek ve daha kapsamlı hale getirmek önerilmektedir.

INTRODUCTION

Beginning with the democratization in Latin America and Southern Europe after 1970, transition from one political and economic system to another became a grand research agenda for political scientists. Afterward, the breakup of the USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics) added new independent states into this research area (Huntington, 1991; Linz & Stepan, 1996). Early studies mostly addressed democratization and marketization processes, while ignoring the issue of stateness and nationality. Focusing on democratization and marketization was logical considering the fact that Latin American and Southern European states already had a functioning state system and a somewhat national identity (Kuzio, 2001, p. 168). When the Soviet Union disintegrated, and the communism fell in Eastern Europe, the issue of stateness and nationality emerged as new dimensions of transition studies. However, at the early stages, stateness and nationality were gathered under one dimension of transition, therefore the idea of triple transition emerged (Offe & Adler, 1991). Triple transition model, which comprises democratization, marketization and stateness, was indeed an adequate theorization for newly emerged European states such as Poland, Czech Republic and Hungary given the fact that these states had already possessed a sense of nationality (Kuzio, 2001, p. 169). However, it became evident that the lack of a unique national idea cripples democratization process in some post-Soviet states. For example, it is argued that the divided nature of the society in Belarus resulted in unconsolidated national identity, thus an authoritarian regime (Eke & Kuzio, 2000; Radzik, 2001, p. 39; Way, 2005, p. 233, Ioffe, 2007). According to Kuzio (2001), democratic developments are closely related to the strength of national idea since “nationhood generates collective power, creates a ‘we’...enables mobilization and representation and produces people who are ready to make the highest of sacrifices for a political community...” (p. 170). Therefore, lack of national identity seriously prevent democratization and “mobilization for the goals of political-economic modernization” (p. 173). For this reason, transition literature evolved into a quadruple transition that includes democratization, marketization, state-building and nation-building.

The model of quadruple transition is particularly illustrative in post-Soviet Central Asia since these states were freed from the Soviet authority under which their democratic tendencies, economic priorities, and nationalities were pre-determined. As a matter of fact, Central Asian states with their artificial borders drawn by Stalin had to deal with more problematic issues due to the fact that even the origins of their nationalities were under debate (Critchlow, 1991; Abashin, 2006; Ubiria, 2016). In this regard, building their states was a challenging task as they have to deal with establishing not only their national identities but also market economies and state institutions in a hostile environment surrounded by both external and internal threats at the same time. On the other hand, the post-Soviet transition can hardly be conceptualized with a single formula that is expected to explain the whole process of transition with its strict set of rules and instructions. After more than 25 years, it became clear that Central Asian states, including Uzbekistan, failed to transform their crippled countries into fully functioning democracies. In the case of Uzbekistan, for instance, some unique features necessitate enhancing the quadruple transition with new elements. Only then, it is possible to comprehend the true scope and the shortcomings of the transition process in the country.

Uzbekistan has some unique features that separate it from other Central Asian states. First of all, unlike other neighboring states, Uzbekistan was able to maintain stability inside its borders. The stability of Uzbekistan, however, mostly attributed to the authoritarian policies of Islam Karimov who ruled the country until 2016 (Murtazashvili, 2012). As a former UN Secretary General asserted restraining freedoms created an “illusion of stability” in Uzbekistan (Saipov, 2015). In this context, the state-building process in Uzbekistan has gone hand in hand with Karimov’s personality as a result of his long-term presidency and wide-spread influence. Secondly, due to the Arabic invasion of the region around the 8th century, Islam gained a substantial acceptance in Uzbekistan’s sedentary population. Although using Islamic past as a unifying tool was accepted by Karimov, radical versions of Islam, particularly Salafî oriented ideas, posed a serious threat to his regime (Khalid, 2003). Another factor which affects Uzbekistan’s transition process is

that, contrary to some other Central Asian states, Uzbekistan had limited technology to exploit and sell its natural gas and oil (Ruziev, Ghosh and Dow, 2007). At the same time, its fertile lands, once served as the cotton base of USSR, were polluted by chemicals and industrial waste (Ataniyazova, 2003). Therefore, Uzbekistan had to create a unique development strategy in terms of its economy. Since 1991, all these factors have shaped the politics of state-building and contributed to the designing of the modern Uzbekistan.

In this study, politics of state-building in Uzbekistan will be investigated with a significant emphasis on the factors mentioned above. In order to better comprehend these factors and their effects on the post-Soviet transition of Uzbekistan, main elements of the overall transition literature, which traces developments in terms of democratization, marketization, stateness and national identity, will be employed. Considering the fact that the state-building is the main theme of this study, the issue of stateness will be evaluated in general rather than being investigate within a separate topic. Moreover, in order to better scrutinize the Uzbek transition experience, the role of Islam and the foreign affairs of the independent Uzbekistan will also be investigated along with the topics of democratization, marketization, and nation-building. The state of the transition under the new President Shavkat Mirziyoyev will also be investigated within the scope of these five elements of transition. Therefore, this study is divided into six parts which are exclusively devoted to the issues of nation-nationality, democracy, economy, religion, foreign affairs, and the leadership of Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

1. NATION STATE-BUILDING: REMEMBERING FATHERS

Among all other dimensions of the state-building process in Post-Soviet Central Asia, establishing and consolidating national identity is the most important one. The importance stems from the fact that Central Asia was designed by Stalin as “national in form, but socialist in content” (Kudaibergenova, 2014, p. 161). The reason behind the delimitation is a matter of debate among scholars. According to Critchlow (1991), delimitation was brought to agenda as a result of Stalin’s need for native cadres along with the *korenizatsiya* policy (p. 14). For others, the reason was either the aim of *divide et impera* (Ubiria, 2016, p. 1) or “to weaken the pan-Turkic identity” which would have sparked instability and national sentiments in the region (Kudaibergenova, 2014, p. 161).

Nationalities of these countries were considered as artificial by most scholars (Ubiria, 2016, p. 4; Critchlow, 1991, p. 14) to the extent that the differences in language, history and alphabet were over-emphasized. For some others, however, calling the process as totally artificial is not quite accurate (Abashin, 2006). Despite regarding the delimitation as “a product of Soviet engineering”, Finke (2014) contended that Uzbekness was generally accepted by the local population in an understanding of “common residence and shared cultural expression” instead of a genealogical one (p. 3). He further reported that the identity formation of Uzbekistan, a combination of sedentary people and nomads, and also an interaction between Turkic speakers and Iranian speakers, is still an ongoing process, which has been in effect for centuries (pp. 238-239).

According to Abashin (2006), Soviet ethnos theory which supports the idea that “nation is the highest stage of development of an ethnic community” is being used by the leaders of the post-Soviet Central Asian states with the aim of “constructing national ideology and modern nation-state”. Smith (1998) pointed out three tendencies in the course of nation-building which are *to essentialize*, *to historicize*, and *to totalize* (pp. 15-16). Consequently, it can be argued that nation building processes in Central Asia generally include the rejection of Soviet historiography; the creation of national heroes, myths, festivals; the promotion of titular languages, new alphabet, new flags, renaming significant objects, places and areas (Akçalı, 2003, p. 415; Kudaibergenova, 2014, p. 160). Above mentioned approach seems particularly reasonable for a community that has a glorious past, yet went through times of forced insensitivity to it.

Even before the independence, Uzbek demands over national identity were something that the Soviet regime had to handle. Despite having an “artificial” nationality, Uzbeks have carried Uzbek passports, studied in Uzbek language, read Uzbek newspapers for decades, thus “the idea of being Uzbek has become internalized” (Critchlow, 1991, p. 15). During Brezhnev era, Uzbeks were pressing for less Russian language and less Russian officials in daily life (Critchlow, 1991, p. 22-23). Similarly, during Gorbachev era, Uzbek elites “pressed for greater autonomy” as a response to the Soviet policies that caused an environmental disaster on Uzbek lands (Critchlow, 1991, p. 137).

With the independence, nation-building policies started to be implemented by Uzbek leader Karimov. In terms of national symbols, Uzbekistan removed its Soviet past from its coat of arms and the flag. In the coat of arms, the hammer and sickle were replaced by the mythical bird *Khumo* which symbolizes nobility and happiness. In national flag, there are four main colors of which blue represents the Timur’s flag, and green, at least informally, represents Islam. There are also twelve stars and a crescent which reflect again the influence of Islam (Kudaibergenova, 2014, p. 166; Bohr, 1998, p. 145).

Timur was chosen as a national hero and replaced the statues of Lenin and Marx. In Uzbekistan, there are eleven monuments and a museum that were built for the memory of Timur (Bohr, 1998, p. 146). Why Uzbekistan preferred Timur as the national figure is a question of debate. For some, the decision was made in order to exploit Timur’s “international recognition”, or “to create a cult of personality by proxy” (Kudaibergenova, 2014, 169; Bohr, 1998, p. 146). For some others, this choice is related to Timur’s image as “a local boy” rather than a nomad invader (Finke, 2014, p. 238). Nevertheless, the main logic was to create a bond with an astonishing warrior in order to glorify the Uzbek national identity by feeding it with an extra six centuries of existence.

Language policies that would promote Uzbek as the official language were applied in order to undo Soviet past and further strengthen national identity. Uzbekistan officially replaced Cyrillic alphabet with Latin in 1993 (Akçalı, 2003, p. 415). In 1996, a resolution which provided the basis for renaming territories and other objects with an emphasis on “historical and national features” was signed by Karimov who noted that “the names of objects that serve the old order and communist ideology deflect the people from the concept of independence” (Bohr, 1998, p. 147).

The process of nation-state building was not as smooth as it seemed. As it is the case for all other countries, Uzbek national identity is formed by two diverse identities that are supra-national and sub-national. While supra-national identity refers to the Turkic and Islamic identity, sub-national identity refers to the clan/tribe and regional/local identity. These diverse identities affect the idea of a unitary nation by framing the population into smaller units.

First of the problems mentioned above is the clan which has a great significance in Uzbek politics. Khazanov (2011) claimed that power groupings based on locality and tribal identity still play a great role in both everyday relations and political structure (p. 28). Collins (2003) agreed with Khazanov and showed that that clan identity is much more dominant than Uzbek identity in Uzbekistan. It is observed that citizens still live according to local traditions and clan rules instead of Uzbek laws. Yet, despite being an obstacle in nation-building process, the supremacy of clan identity over ethnic identity maintains stability in Central Asia by preventing ethnic conflicts. However, clan identities “lead to division and competition”, therefore they “are not officially recognized” (Morozova, 2005, p. 76).

Islam’s role is somewhat more complex. Although Islam is regarded as one of the “integral parts of the cultural heritage”, more radical forms of it started to gain popularity especially around Fergana Valley (Akçalı, 2003, p. 419). Wahhabism, a fundamentalist view of Islam, was declared as one of the main threats to the state by Karimov. Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), a terrorist organization linked to Al Qaeda, operates in Uzbekistan with the aim of replacing Uzbek state with an Islamic one (Akçalı, 2003, p. 420). Although radical Islamists might pose some threats to the nation state, Collins (2003) suggested

that clan identity is so dominant and devoted to traditional values that it could even prevent Islamic terrorism by regarding these radical tendencies as “foreign” versions of Islam (p. 182).

Kudaibergenova (2014) suggested that such policies on nation-building is highly “dependent on Soviet legacy” and are used for political aims by Soviet-educated elites. Soviet-era practices such as promoting titular nationality instead of a multi-ethnic composition clearly shows the Soviet effect on Central Asian leaders (pp. 160-162). The role of elites in a nation-building process based on the dominance of titular ethnicity is also mentioned by some other studies (Akçalı, 2003; Collings, 2003, p. 180). Similarly, Khalid (2003) argued that Uzbek nationalism was used by regime for legitimization (p. 587).

Despite these problems and sub-national identities, Uzbekistan was able to provide an idea of unitary nationhood for its citizens. However, both clan identity and Islamic tendencies might disrupt the process of nation building in the long run.

2. DEMOCRATIC STATE BUILDING: A GLOOMY PATH

Transition to democracy and consolidation of it is a process of which a final destination cannot be predetermined. In other words, even the most democratic states have miles to achieve, regulations to make, and laws to implement. Yet, as a minimum criterion, some institutions should be improved or established anew if the initial aim is to prevail democracy. These institutions are legal and political frameworks that include but not limited to contesting political parties and regularly held elections; a functioning media; and civil society.

As in all Central Asian states, in Uzbekistan too, the transition to democracy as a part of state-building process requires cumbersome steps which are difficult to take due to both Soviet legacy and a lack of political culture (Kangas, 1995, 271; Khazanov, 2011, pp. 20-21). Moreover, Kangas (1995) argued that the lack of democratic participation is a direct result of state-building and power consolidation process which forces state leaders to focus on “stability and filling the power vacuum” instead of democratic reforms (p. 271).

The non-democratic election process and lack of political parties constitute a serious threat to the future of the democratization. Karimov had been the sole ruler of the country since 1989 when he became the leader of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan. He got re-elected several times and campaigned successfully for an extension of his term from five to seven years (Norris, 2008, p. 201). After Karimov’s death, Shavkat Mirziyoyev was appointed as the interim president and then got elected as the president in 2016.

In Uzbekistan, the stability of the country and the political destiny of the Karimov were represented as variables that affect each other directly. Kudaibergenova (2014) pointed out that Central Asian leaders, including Karimov, were pictured themselves as the only persons that could maintain “stability and unity” (p. 163). Indeed, Karimov emphasized the ongoing process of development several times (Beachin & Kevlihan, 2015, p. 505). His emphasis might signal the bond between the fate of the country and of himself. In such a status-quo, a political change is the weakest possibility.

In almost all Central Asian states, there are loyal opposition parties that rarely criticize the government, weak opposition/alternative parties that operate under strong pressure from the government, coach parties that consist of just a small number of supporters, and also ineffective umbrella parties that are proved to be unsuccessful. In Uzbekistan, opposition parties do not exist due to regime’s oppression on them. Two movements, Birlik, and Erk, were especially important at the early 90’s (Stevens, 2007, p.53). Birlik Popular Movement, founded shortly before independence, split into two and created Erk as a result of the differences on the preferred strategy. Erk Democratic Party, according to Stevens (2007), sought to maintain existing political system rather than changing it entirely (p. 53). After the Presidential

election of 1993, activities of the opposition parties were restricted even more and the leaders were sent into either exile or prison.

Although “real” oppositional parties were banned, elections are regularly being held in Uzbekistan. While some other scholars contended that elections under authoritarian regimes are being held in order to either discourage oppositional forces by mobilizing mass support or to extend the life of autocracies, and to meet the international expectations, Beachain and Kevlihan (2015) pointed out that the reason behind the regularly held elections in some Central Asian states including Uzbekistan, is to consolidate power, and further maintain stability of the regime (p. 496). Nevertheless, despite the existence of elections, campaigning for them is usually restricted. Rallies and electoral materials are not permitted, nor is the outside funding legal (pp. 500-501). In this sense, elections “do little from a democratization perspective. However, from a state-building perspective this combination of muted campaigning followed by high voter turnouts on election day” strengthens the existing regime (pp. 501-502).

Press freedom is one of the most visible principles of democracy. Media is so important that it can even be regarded as the fourth power along with legislation, executive, and judiciary. Central Asian press, however, have never experienced a full freedom. According to Shafer (2011), under Tsarist rule, Russians, who had financial resources and political connections, controlled the press and directed it in a way which would support official policies (p.20). During Soviet era, press acted as a propagandist, and as an educator with the aim of strengthening communist regime (Shafer, 2011, p. 19). Shafer (2011) further pointed out that Soviet-era practices in the press such as “interpretive and persuasive reporting” which attempted to promote communist ideology are still visible in Central Asia. However, the aims of these practices were evolved into “nation rebuilding, the creation of national identities and strengthening governmental control” (p. 20).

In terms of press freedom, Uzbekistan ranked 166 out of 180 countries in World Press Freedom Index in 2016 (Reporters Without Borders, 2017). Although censorship is prohibited and the right to obtain information is guaranteed under Uzbek constitution, the content of the media is under heavy control (Freedom House, 2015), and a political permission is needed to be granted before opening a newspaper (Norris, 2008, p. 202). Apart from state-controlled newspapers and media outlets, there are only a few private media agencies and independent journalists in Uzbekistan who generally report under self-censorship or threat (Norris, 2008, p. 201; Freedom House, 2014). Uzbekistan is accused of with the assassination of Alisher Saipov who was reporting on human abuses in Uzbekistan before being killed (Freedman, 2011, p. 186). Another example of journalists under pressure is Solidzhon Abdurakhmonov who was sentenced 10 years in prison for selling drugs. It should be noted that he was arrested by traffic police shortly after his coverage of the corruption in the traffic police (Freedman, 2011, p. 194). Especially after Andijan uprising, some journalists had to flee the country in order to protect their life including Galima Bukharbaeva who was hit by an assault rifle bullet only to be saved by her notebook (Freedman, 2011, pp. 189-190). Even the longest-jailed journalists in the world, Muhammed Bekjanov and Yusuf Ruzimuradov, were working for the Uzbek newspaper Erk until they sent into the jail in 1999 (Freedom House, 2015).

The situation of civil society does not look promising either. Civil society, for many scholars, regarded as the main pillar of democracy. Despite the emphasis on the role of civil society and the Western initiatives in country, active participation and the role of civil society is severely restricted. Stevens (2007) investigated civil society into two diverse entity, Political Society, and Civil Society, in order to explain the differences between rhetoric and practice. Civil society consists of single interest groups that do not directly demand from the state. However, they seek to achieve their goals via political society which itself take the mission of influencing state policies through parties, legislation processes, and elections. In a liberal democratic order, these societies are expected to work in coordination with each other as complementary entities. However, in Uzbekistan, civil society is almost equal to NGOs which

“tend to look down upon and distance itself from oppositional political society” that such NGOs, contrary to political society, have a social partnership with state and comply with it (p. 55). Moreover, civil society in the form of NGO has become a sector that relies on international funds. Thus, members of these NGOs are reluctant to take risks and to move into political sphere which would result in getting banned and losing international funds. As a result of this division among the civil and political societies, rather than developing democracy, much effort was devoted to strengthening NGO sector and most of the international funds were directed into improvements of this sector.

Another reason for the ineffectiveness of civil society is the role played by clans. As a result of the clan based interaction, citizens struggled to develop an individual-based society (Khazanov, 2011, p. 30). Therefore, “these groupings [clans] became an organization principle of informal networks built in the state structures” (p. 31). Khazanov (2011) concluded that NGOs are “isolated from the rest of society”, thus they ignore the realities of the society in which they exist due to Western influence on them (p. 31).

The problem with democracy in Uzbekistan is that citizens are not leading the struggle for their right as a result of complex dynamics. Oppression of the state, the dominance of clan identity and the lack of awareness harm the process of democratization. State, in this case, is the solely in charge of granting rights and limiting them as well. Therefore, democratization in Uzbekistan is a one-sided process.

3. STATE WITH A MARKET ECONOMY: FAILED GRADUAL TRANSITION

With the beginning of the Post-Soviet era, Central Asian states looked for policies that would integrate them into the market economy. After more than two decades, the transition is not complete and regional cooperation is only limited. There are some reasons behind this slow-paced transition to market-oriented economy. This part will focus on these problems in the case of Uzbekistan.

Transition to the market economy is particularly important for Central Asian society. For more than two centuries, economic dynamics were controlled by Russians, and natives were neglected. With the independence and market liberalization, Central Asian citizens started to take part in business life (Özcan, 2010, p. 2). However, market liberalization took place in a Soviet era framework, which hardly liberalizes the market and merely serves the elites. Moreover, Western-oriented transition methods were proved to be less effective for their neglect of the unique developments in Post-Soviet regions (pp. 2-4).

Uzbekistan’s location made it a trade hub for centuries. For its relatively large and skilled population and political stability, it was expected to perform better in terms of economy (Özcan, 2010). Despite early successes (Spechler, 2005, p. 191; Spechler, 2007, p. 198; Ruziev et al., 2007), Uzbekistan is far from being a complete market economy today. As it is showed in some studies (Spechler, 2005; Spechler, 2007; Ruziev et al., 2007), Uzbekistan’s early efforts in transition process were more successful than other Central Asian states. This success is highly related to concerns over the “prevention of output loss”, “strong social protection” and “modernization through industrial sector” (Ruziev et al., 2007). In order to overcome these concerns, Karimov regime followed gradual transition policy in which state would ease its control over economy gradually (Ruziev et al., 2007). In other words, the pace of the transition is determined by the Uzbek leadership. Instead of a shock therapy which had devastated Russian economy, Uzbekistan preferred a “step-by-step transition in which the role of the state is crucial” (Spoor, 1993, p. 143). According to Spoor (1993) controlled transition was necessary due to “complex dependency relations” with “previous centre (Russia and Ukraine)”. Spechler (2005) argued that Karimov’s gradual transition policy emerged out of his fear over Western directed shock therapies which would harm Uzbek economy along with the Uzbek national identity (p. 193). Despite achievements of this controlled transition, continuity of the state’s dominant position has been the main obstacle for the transition process in the long run (Ruziev et al., 2007, p. 26)

Between 1990 and 2015, Uzbekistan’s GDP (Gross Domestic Product) increased from \$13.3 billion to \$66 billion and GDP per capita rose from \$650 to \$2.100. The share of the sectors in economy also

changed. Between 2005 and 2014, the share of agriculture decreased from 29 percent to 19 percent; industry increased from 29 percent to 33 percent; and services increased from 41 percent to 47 percent (World Bank, 2017; United Nations, 2017). Although the share of private sector in GDP is currently 45 percent, that share has not changed since 1997, a fact which confirms the arguments of Ruziev and friends. (Özcan, 2010, 22; Ruziev et al., 2007, p. 25).

Privatization and price liberalization constitute the most challenging issues for Uzbek economy. The state still governs exclusively, and liberalization was conducted under the control of Karimov himself. The danger that Uzbekistan's market economy faces is the influence of the president and his relatives on many lucrative sectors. Before his death, Karimov and his daughter Gulnara were in control of many companies. Even the less significant sectors were under control of distant relatives of ruling elites. In addition to this, Karimov's regime utilized its political force in the form of coercive bureaucracy with the aim of further strengthening its economic well-being. What is worse for the economy is that middle stratum entrepreneurs were left out of the system. This weakened the transition and created a shadow economy (Özcan, 2010, pp. 43-45).

The cotton industry still plays a vital role in Uzbek economy in the sense that more than half of the Uzbek population earns its living from this traditional resource. Despite its importance, the sector is in trouble for both partial price liberation and lack of improvement on irrigation systems (Özcan, 2007, pp. 27-29). Pricing of cotton is the main problem for the farmers. Farmers have to sell a percentage of their products to the state from a cheaper price than market prices. Only then, they are free to sell what is left according to market prices. However, the problem is that "private sector is not allowed to buy it directly from farmers" since cotton is classified as "strategic good". Therefore, farmers have to sell their products to "state-owned cotton marketing chain" from "a higher than state-order price" but "much lower than the world market price" (Ruziev et al., 2007, p. 20). This example clearly shows the mentality of privatization policy of Uzbekistan. Apart from pricing, cotton lost its privileged position in state's development strategy. The aim of the Uzbek leadership has been to develop through industry. Therefore, improving the industry has been the main priority (Spechler, 2005, p. 193). To support industrial development, cotton incomes were directed into industry that in turn negatively affected cotton sector (Ruziev et al., 2007).

Large-scale privatization is under strict control. As a part of the de-collectivization policy, the status of kolkhoz and sovkhoz farms were changed in which some of them became joint-stock companies, and some other were leased partially. However, state still has the last words on the land ownership issue (Spoon, 1993, p. 152). Additionally, state controls the majority of some companies such as Uzbek Airlines and steel producer Uzmetkombinat. Except tourism, light industry, and small business, some sectors such as telecommunication, energy, mining, and banking were not fully liberalized (Özcan, 2010, pp. 27-29).

In short, Uzbekistan's path to the market economy is expected to face more obstacles along the way as its elites control the main dynamics, and kinship, rather than individualism, dominates the market. Except for a brief period, so-called gradual transition seems to be replaced with a selective transition in which only the leadership decides what to and how to liberalize with a significant consideration of its own well-being.

4. SECULAR STATE BUILDING: A DILEMMA

Among all Central Asian states, Uzbekistan is considered to be under the most serious threat from radical Islamist movements. Yet, at the same time, Islam has been seen as an indispensable identity of the newly independent state. To overcome this dilemma, Karimov sought to build a nation state with a secular identity, while at the same time promoting the traditional role of Islam and denouncing radical versions of it (Hanks, 2016). In this sense, Islam has both constructive and destructive impacts on the process of state building in Uzbekistan.

In order to understand the role of Islam in this process, two major issues, namely the rising trend of radical Islam and the state policies regarding it, must be addressed as well as the historical background of the development of Islam in the region. The region has a significant Islamic history dates back to the 8th century. Beginning with the conquest of the land beyond the Amu Darya which was named as Mawarannahr, Islamic culture started to flourish around the region. Bukhara and Samarkand were the most important centers of the early Islamic civilization (Yemelianova, 2010). During this era, Hanafi school of Islam were predominant in the region mostly because of its tolerance for pre-Islamic rites and norms (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 213). After Tsarist Russia took the region under control in the middle of the 19th century, Islamic culture was subjected to both harsh and liberal policies changing from time to time (Yemelianova, 2010, p. 18). At the early stages of the Civil War, Central Asian Muslims were seen as “tactical allies” by Bolsheviks (p. 22). Bolsheviks assured Muslim that their “beliefs and usages...are forever free and inviolate” (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 9). However, Stalin’s policies, for example replacing Arabic alphabet with Latin, and then with Cyrillic, implementing national delimitation, closing down mosques and madrassas, were all against Islamic culture of the region (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 9; Yemelianova, 2010, p. 22). Second World War necessitated some moderate policies in order to prevent a break-up and organize a “multi-ethnic... nation-wide resistance to Nazi invasion” (Yemelianova, 2010, p. 22). These policies included the establishment of SADUM (Spiritual Board of Muslims of Central Asia) tasked with conducting the Islamic activities (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 10). However, these improvements were not enough for the Muslims who were determined to maintain life-cycle events such as birth, circumcision, marriage and death in an Islamic way. Therefore, Sufi pirs, imams, shayks became active around the region and their activities were called as Parallel Islam.

After the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, radical Islamist ideas began to emerge around the Fergana Valley (Yemelianova, 2010, p. 25). Soviet regime sent Central Asian soldiers into Afghanistan to fight against Islamic fighters, a move which was proved to be ineffective. It was a fruitless operation because Central Asian soldiers realized that their “enemies” were Muslims and some of them had Central Asian origins (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 13). As a result, a huge number of soldiers have switched sides, and some others “became particularly receptive to the principles of Salafi Islam” upon their returns (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 217). Against the “passivity, theological incompetence, and low moral standards” of Old Imams, a new phenomenon, called Young Imams who were prone to the idea of a more visible Islam in both daily and political life, started to come into view (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 217). In the middle of these developments, foreign parties mostly from Gulf countries began funding “Salafi-oriented” groups which were located heavily around the Fergana Valley (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 14). These groups, operating mostly underground, were in opposition to local Islam, thus they were under careful observation by the regime (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 217-218).

After the independence, Islamic revival has become even more visible. Especially around Fergana Valley, an area which was heavily affected by the changing economic circumstances, poor life standards, lack of governmental policies and “ideological confusion”, people were pushed into “informal social networks” including radical Islam (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 218). In addition to this radicalization trend, *Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami*, an organization seeks to topple the secular government in order to establish an Islamic state run by shari’a materialized in Fergana Valley around 1990’s. Hizb al-Tahrir gained popularity as a result of its “skillful propaganda, the simplicity of its salvation message and its tolerance of traditional folk Islam”. The organization declared itself as non-violent, yet the Karimov regime sought to repress and crush it since the ultimate aim of the Hizb al-Tahrir was to change the regime (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 223-225). A more radical, jihadist organization, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), was formed in 1996 by two Uzbeks who formerly fought for Al-Qaeda emerged as a serious threat to Karimov regime. Unlike Hizb al-Tahrir, IMU was prone to violent activities in order to oust the Karimov regime and replace it with a strict Islamic state (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 222).

As a response to all these developments, Karimov banned all Islamic movements, imprisoned pro-Salafi imams and replaced Young Imams with traditional imams who were loyal the Karimov. Against IMU, Karimov followed harsher policies. With the US invasion of Afghanistan, many IMU fighters perished as a result of the US-led operations and most of them left the Uzbekistan for Pakistan (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 222-223). Karagiannis (2010) pointed out that Karimov's priority was to eliminate Islam-oriented political initiatives (p. 24). Accordingly, some prominent figures including IRP leader Abdullah Utaev, Abduvali Mirzoev and Nematjon Parpiev were either disappeared or had to flee the country. Even the first mufti after independence, Mukhammed Sodyk Yusuf, had to leave the country temporarily (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 25).

Karimov's policy regarding Islam had two dimensions. In addition to repression over political and radical Islam, he promoted Islam as a cultural heritage of Uzbeks (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 23; Hanks, 2016). Indeed, Karimov's policy was to make use of the spreading Islamic ideas in a way that would strengthen the independence of its country (Salmorbekova & Yemelianova, 2010, p. 219). Islam, then, were meant to be a uniting factor that would foster the process of state building. Consequently, rather than an Islamic state, Karimov's aim was to establish a secular state with a considerable emphasis on Islamic heritage (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 14). This approach was most obvious when Karimov made his inauguration with both Quran and constitution at hand (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 23) Therefore, such a conceptualization of Islam was named as elite level Islam in which state regulates the main dynamics of religion and hinders over-radicalized ideas.

In the course of building a secular state, Karimov's emphasis on a "nationalized form of Islam" helped him to consolidate power (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 37). Islam, as a unifying factor, was widely used in Uzbekistan in Karimov's era. As noted before, Uzbek flag includes Islamic symbols crescent moon and stars. Early banknotes also had Islamic pictures, however, later these symbols replaced with Timur, probably as a response to increasing radical Islam (Karagiannis, 2010, p.15). Parallel with the developments, Sufism was used as an instrument against political Islam and as a reminder of "humanist tradition of Uzbek nation" (Khalid, 2003, p. 587). Karimov revived the bonds with Sufism by renovating Sufi shrines and inviting some Naqshabandi representatives to the country for visiting and observing elections (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 15). Khalid (2003) insisted that "the revival of Islam... does not necessarily subvert the authority of the nation state" instead the revival itself is "profoundly national", "secular" and "apolitical". However, Khalid also noted that anti-fundamentalist policies help the regime to avert criticisms from Western states, thus enable it to have closer relationships with them (p. 591). According to Hanks (2016), Karimov used "the myth of a threat of radical Islam in Uzbekistan" in order to repress political opposition and civil society with the aim of consolidating his power (p. 509). Therefore, Western states' approval of Karimov's repressive policies against Islamic society cripples civil society and democratization of Uzbekistan (p. 509).

Yet even today, Ferghana valley is under strict control by the government. There are check points and security forces in large numbers, as well as increased surveillance mechanisms (Karagiannis, 2010, p. 27). Islam is a sensitive issue in Uzbekistan. On one hand, it contributes to state building process by reminding Uzbeks the cultural bonds they have, on the other hand, it's radical versions destabilize that process. Uzbekistan implements policies towards Islam while taking both dimensions into consideration.

5. INDEPENDENT STATE BUILDING: PRAGMATIC CHOICES

For more than two centuries, Central Asia has been the area on which great power rivalries took place. The destiny of it was shaped by "Great Games" of which the first one was between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain in the 19th century, and the second one is among a number of nation-states including Russia, United States, China, Iran, Turkey, India, Japan. Yet, in this New Great Game which was originated after the dissolution of USSR, some international organizations also participated such as the NATO, the EU (European Union), the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe),

the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organization), the EEU (Eurasian Union), the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) and so on. In addition to such new external actors, five new republics as regional actors with both common and diverse characteristics involved in this recent struggle, thus a more complex hub of relations in the “New Central Asia” emerged (Kavalski, 2010, pp. 6-10).

The new situation, unlike the first great game, is more complex not only for the number of actors but also for the motives and the existence of a bargaining power of the Central Asia states. Russia’s declining power status coupled with the interests of new external actors “encouraged the newly independent states of Central Asia to engage more proactively in diversifying their strategic partnership”. However, due to “tensions and divisions” among Central Asian states, regional cooperation without an external power does not look promising. Instead, as in the cases of the EEU, the CSTO and the SCO, Central Asian states moved toward alignments with external powers and established “virtual regionalism” or “protective integration” in which while external power has restricted dominance, regional actors maintain the stability of their regimes without enhancing an even deeper cooperation (Kavalski, 2010, pp. 11-12). The restricted dominance of external actors, instead of a hegemonic dominance, occurs from “the simultaneous attempts by external actors to influence Central Asian patterns”. Such simultaneous attempt forces “them to continuously align and re-align themselves with various other actors”, thus “produces some paradoxical alliances between them”. During this interaction, no single actor dominates the region (Kavalski, 2010, p. 19).

Kavalski’s argument seems perfectly capable of explaining the actions of regional actors, including the shifting position of Uzbekistan toward different external global powers. Uzbekistan, under the leadership of Karimov, has engaged in this new great game in a pragmatic way. In other words, Karimov sought to exploit the complex dynamism of the region in order to legitimize its own status and to further solidify Uzbek statehood. Moreover, as stated by Kazemi (2003), Karimov’s concerns over the sovereignty, political stability and step-by-step economic transition shaped his “fluid” policy choices vis-à-vis global players. His pragmatic approach included a break away from Russian influence in order to obtain regional leadership (Akçalı, 2003, p. 413), alignment with United States after 9/11 with the aim of preventing Islamic incursion (Kazemi, 2003, p. 208), getting closer to Russia after Andijan uprising to secure his post (Fumagalli, 2007; Gleason, 2006), and intensifying relations with China as a response to Moscow’s dominance (Schaefer & Whitney, 2015).

Uzbek-U.S. alignment emerged as a result of Karimov’s fight against radical Islamist, namely Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In addition to this shared motive, Uzbekistan’s policy of “nuclear free zone in Central Asia” and its “cool relation with Iran” facilitated such an alignment (Kazemi, 2003, p. 208). For U.S. policy makers, Uzbekistan’s political stability has been seen as a crucial part of the operations in Afghanistan in the context of War on Terror. Practically, Uzbekistan’s location made it an ideal place to supply U.S. operations in Afghanistan. Karshi-Khanabad base, also known as K2, were handed over to U.S. forces as a result of an agreement between Uzbekistan and the United States in 2001 (Cooley, 2007, p. 68). After the deal, U.S. concerns over democratization were muted. Therefore, issues related to human right abuses were neglected and regime gained legitimacy in its fight against radical Islamists along with all other oppositional groups (Akbarzadeh, 2004, pp. 282-283; Cooley, 2007, pp. 71-73).

Despite mutual needs, the alignment process lasted until the allegedly Western supported groups raised their voices against Karimov regime in 2004 and 2005. After the Andijan “massacre” in which regime forces killed hundreds of protestors, US-Uzbek relations deteriorated. In fact, even before Andijan, U.S. pressure on democratization constituted obstacles in bilateral relations. Therefore, these criticisms, combined with Color Revolutions in post-Soviet lands, pushed Karimov regime into the arms of Russia (Fumagalli, 2007, pp. 256-257). After Andijan events, the US insisted on an international investigation of the incident. However, Uzbek leadership blocked U.S. involvement in the case (Gleason, 2006, p. 50) and

terminated the agreement on K2 military base (Cooley, 2007, p. 77). Accordingly, U.S. forces left Uzbekistan at the same day in which Uzbekistan signed Treaty of Allied Relations with Russia (Fumagalli, 2007, p. 253). Since Karimov's realignment with Russia occurred just after U.S. criticism over democratization, the argument which summarized Karimov's action as "enlisting new allies to prop up regime" seems suitable (Gleason, 2006, p. 50).

After aligning with the United States, and Russia, late Karimov pushed his country into a closer distance with China in order to "create some spacing between Tashkent and Moscow" (Schaefer and Whitney, 2015, p. 291). Consistent with the pragmatic approach, Uzbekistan left CSTO which is a Russian dominated organization and joined into the SCO and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to better utilize Chinese investment motives (Schaefer & Whitney, 2015, p. 296-299).

All in all, Uzbekistan's dynamic foreign policy further strengthens its independence. However, in addition to strengthening its independence, authoritarian regime gains legitimacy by exploiting the motives of both global and regional powers. In the long run, such a policy has the potential of weakening developments on democracy as it was observed during Uzbek-US alignment and detachment.

6. A NEW LEADERSHIP: SHAVKAT MIRZIYOYEV

Shavkat Mirziyoyev is a well-known figure in Uzbek political life. In fact, he can be considered as a member of the local nomenclature. Born in 1957 in Zaamin district of Jizzakh region, Mirziyoyev received his bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering, and his PhD in Technical Sciences from Tashkent Institute of Engineers of Irrigation and Mechanization of Agriculture. He also worked as an academic and later became vice rector at the Institute. In 1990, he started his political career as a deputy of Supreme Council. From 1992 to 2003, he served as governor in various districts beginning with a small district called Mirzo Ulugbek and ended with the great region of Samarkand. He was also a deputy at the Parliament between 1995-2003. In 2003, Mirziyoyev was appointed as the Prime Minister by Karimov and served as such until 2016 when he was assigned as interim President by the Parliament after Karimov's death on September 2, 2016 (United Nations, 2016). Mirziyoyev's assignment as interim President was unusual because of the fact that Senate leader Nigmatilla Yuldashev should have become interim President under current regulations. However, both chambers of the Parliament decided to approve Mirziyoyev as interim president in a joint session (BBC, 2016). On 4 December, Presidential election was held and Mirziyoyev elected as president with %88 of the votes (Pettersson, 2017, p. 252). OSCE report on the election noted that "the campaign lacked competitiveness and voters were not presented with a genuine choice of political alternatives" (OSCE, 2016, p. 2).

In 2014, a Carnegie report listed Mirziyoyev as a possible successor to Karimov along with Karimov's daughter Gulnara and National Security Chief Rustam Inoyatov (Malashenko, 2014, p. 1). In late 2014, however, Gulnara Karimov faced with corruption allegations which resulted in losing her seat as the ambassador to the UN. Gulnara's position further deteriorated when it was revealed that she is under house arrest. By 2017, it became clear that Gulnara is no longer a part of succession race and transferred to a Tashkent prison (Fergananeews, 2017). In the same report, Mirziyoyev was portrayed as being loyal to Karimov and having a powerful support from his Bukhara-Samarkand clan. Yet, his lack of relations with Western-minded Uzbek elites seemed a negative factor for his presidency (p. 10). Karimov's sudden death and Mirziyoyev's presidency was unexpected for many scholars. Moreover, there was no clear indication of Mirziyoyev's agenda that would enable scholars to make predictions about the future of Uzbekistan.

Scholars expressed contending views on this new phase of Uzbekistan's transition process under Mirziyoyev. Omelicheva (2016), who argued that Karimov's authoritarian regime stayed in power through legitimizing discourses particularly on national independence and economic development, contended that Mirziyoyev's early announcements which praise Karimov era policies give signals of sticking with the method of discursive legitimacy. In the early days of Mirziyoyev's presidency, Hanks (2016) suggested that

Mirziyoyev “has offered no indication of a departure from his predecessor’s policies” (p. 510). Particularly on Islam, Hanks noted that Mirziyoyev is expected to follow Karimov-era policies which promotes Islamic heritage of secular state while denouncing radical Islamic tendencies at the same time. Ziegler (2016) too expects no change in Uzbekistan’s overall path during the Mirziyoyev’s presidency. He contended that having backed by NSS chief Inoyatov, Mirziyoyev is likely to follow Karimov era authoritarian policies that neither political nor economic liberalization seem possible. However, Avci (2018) argued that Mirziyoyev’s aim is to implement his reforms without destroying Karimov’s image in the public. Therefore, it will take time to observe the usefulness of Mirziyoyev’s reforms. Aydın (2017) argued that Mirziyoyev promises a departure from Karimov era practices and political and economic improvements with his early actions. However, it is essential to wait and see the outcomes of his policies.

After one and a half year under Mirziyoyev, it is still highly premature to reach a final verdict on his policies. Nonetheless, there are strong signals of a reform-minded president. Mirziyoyev announced a series of reforms including liberalization of the currency, strengthening relations with neighbors, freeing political prisoners, and encouraging the media for a more critical stance (BBC, 2018). It has generally been observed that some improvements have been achieved and a new rhetoric has emerged in regard to post-Soviet transition period of Uzbekistan particularly on democratization and market economy.

In the context of democratic state building, Mirziyoyev’s early policies signaled a meaningful change compared to Karimov. Mirziyoyev began his term by taking some serious steps to establish a less-problematic state-society relationship in Uzbekistan. He declared 2017 as the “Year of Dialogue with the People and Human Interests” which aims to build strong bonds with the citizens and to enable them to express their problems (UZA, 2017). Moreover, Mirziyoyev started a new practice in which he discusses the achievements of the previous year and puts out the plans for the next one. The first of such address was given in late December 2017, lasted for four hours and attended by the parliament members, foreign diplomats, reporters and Uzbek citizens. In his address, Mirziyoyev stated his determination for the reforms on various aspects including state security services, finance, justice, and diplomacy (Putz, 2017). For example, he admitted that legal system is far from ideal by stating that “The courts have not yet become a place of justice in any cases. We can’t say that the activities of all the staff in these agencies are fully mobilized to protect the constitutional rights of citizens.” (Putz, 2017). In a nutshell, newly elected president was able to begin his career as a new voice for Uzbek citizens.

Under Karimov, state functioned as an extension of Karimov’s clan. The effectiveness of the state relied directly to Karimov-era elites. Therefore, it is no surprise to observe some profound changes in bureaucracy when a new figure took over the leadership. Mirziyoyev directly challenged Karimov-era elites particularly those in bureaucracy. During his yearly address, Mirziyoyev criticized the Uzbek National Security Service for excessive power it holds by stating that “every ordinary issue has been regarded as a threat to national security which led to the groundless expansion of the agency’s powers” (Putz, 2017). In February 2018, Mirziyoyev dismissed Rustam Inoyatov who has been the head of National Security Service for 23 years. The dismissal of the powerful security chief has been regarded as consolidation of power and also an act that would stir reform agenda of Mirziyoyev (Putz, 2018a). Inoyatov was one of the longest serving bureaucrats in the independent Uzbekistan second only to Karimov himself. His power comes from the intelligence service that controlled and repressed even the tiniest details of the daily life. Moreover, Inoyatov was mostly known as opposed to Mirziyoyev’s reform plans (BBC, 2018). In order to implement financial reforms, Mirziyoyev also ordered the replacement of some bureaucrats at the Ministry of Finance. In his yearly address, President urged his finance minister Kuchkarov to replace some of the staff with younger citizens “who love and care about Uzbekistan”. As a result, nearly all department heads were removed from their duties (Agayev, 2017). The change among finance and security elites prove two things. Mirziyoyev consolidates his power in a traditional way by replacing Karimov-era structure with his own. It also shows that Mirziyoyev prepares state structure in order to implement his reforms swiftly.

In terms of economy, Mirziyoyev's reforms were more obvious. His policies are more promising than Karimov's to achieve a market economy. Uzbekistan has signed trade agreements with a number of countries including China (23 billion \$), Russia (16 billion \$), South Korea (9 billion \$), Turkey (3.5 billion \$), USA (2.8 billion\$), Kazakhstan (1 billion \$), Afghanistan (500 million \$), Kyrgyzstan (200 million \$). These trade agreements are expected to provide 56 billion \$ to Uzbek GDP in total (Avci, 2018, p. 5). Additionally, Uzbekistan started to follow floating currency regime instead of fixed one and removed the restrictions on the trade of foreign currencies that limit the amount of foreign currencies that can be bought by individuals and companies. Moreover, now exporters do not have to sell a quarter of their hard-currency revenue to the government (RFERL, 2017).

As mentioned above, Karimov promoted nationalism so that it could legitimize its own regime. Despite his efforts to create an Uzbek identity, the dominant organizations that mobilize masses were the clans and mahallas. Karimov portrayed himself as the rough, crude, yet protective father of all Uzbeks. Contrary to Karimov, Mirziyoyev behaves his citizens in a more kindhearted fashion. Two leaders have different ways of communicating with the citizens. For instance, Karimov is known for his unfavorable stance against Uzbek migrant labors in Russia, despite the fact that labor migration to Russia not only curbs the unemployment rate in Uzbekistan but also contribute to the Uzbek GDP. Karimov accused Uzbek migrants in Russia for being lazy and sweeping the streets and squares of Moscow for a slice of bread (Eurasianet, 2013). On the other hand, Mirziyoyev's reaction to a bus fire which killed 52 Uzbek labor migrants on their way to Russia was more humane: "It's not for nothing... that these people are going through torment and suffering in foreign countries. These poor people too, after all, have their hopes before God, to feed their children and bring some money back to their fathers... They were so young... And all of them from Uzbekistan. We are so deeply saddened" (Putz, 2018b). In short, Mirziyoyev differs from Karimov in terms of both the leadership style and the idea of national identity. His leadership has potential to enrich the civic nationalism and state-society relations.

In addition to internal affairs, Mirziyoyev also sought to strengthen Uzbekistan's relations with neighboring countries. He made five visits to Kazakhstan, three visits to Turkmenistan, one visit to Kyrgyzstan and a historical visit to Tajikistan. Particularly his visit to Tajikistan sparked huge expectations for regional cooperation given the fact that Karimov's last state visit to Tajikistan took place in 2000 (Putz, 2018c). After the visit, two leaders announced that no unsettled issue left between "two sister republics" (Eadaily, 2018). Lately, Mirziyoyev visited Kazakhstan on March 15 and was awarded the Order of Friendship by Nursultan Nazarbayev. Kazakh leader praised Mirziyoyev's efforts on strengthening bilateral relations (Kazinform, 2018). It has been mentioned that Karimov successfully applied balancing maneuvers among great powers. The outcomes of his policies were somewhat productive. While Uzbekistan's dynamic alignment strategy preserved its independence, it also helped Karimov to maintain his authoritarian policies. Mirziyoyev began visiting great powers with Russia in April 2017, then China in May 2017 and lastly USA in May 2018. It is generally argued that Mirziyoyev seeks to follow a proactive foreign policy in the region and a multipolar approach to Uzbekistan's affairs with great powers (Kudrathodjaev, 2018). Although United States desires to enhance military/security cooperation with the Uzbekistan, Mirziyoyev is expected to avoid strong military presence of any great power in order not to provoke other regional and great powers (Kudrathodjaev, 2018). Increasing Chinese investment in the region is a promising source of prosperity for Uzbekistan. Especially One Belt One Road Initiative of China creates great interest in Uzbekistan. Mirziyoyev signed bilateral agreements with China to expend the cooperation in trade, energy, transportation, agriculture, science, and technology (Pannier, 2017).

Notwithstanding the improvements on various aspects, it is particularly important to comprehend the differences between rhetoric and action while assessing Uzbekistan's state building process under Mirziyoyev. Although international observers have appreciated Mirziyoyev's agenda for "a democratic state and a just society", much steps are yet to be taken (Williamson & Swerdlow, 2017). Exiled dissidents too acknowledged the promising words of Mirziyoyev. However, doubts remain on the possibility of

structural changes (Niyazova, 2017). For example, using forced labor during cotton harvest, a Karimov-era practice, was not abolished in Uzbekistan. During cotton harvest, almost one million people including students and teachers are obliged to work in the fields. Early reports suggested that Mirziyoyev would abandon this practice and let students and teachers to be excluded from forced cotton harvest. However, it is reported that many people are called on to work at the cotton fields by the authorities once more (Niyazova, 2017; Williamson & Swerdlow, 2017). Another problem that requires immediate actions is the application of exit visas. Mirziyoyev announced that with the abolishment of exit visas, Uzbek citizens will be free to leave country without permission. However, this regulation will be valid only after 2019 (Williamson & Swerdlow, 2017).

Mirziyoyev's presidency began with high hopes for a more progressive Uzbekistan in terms of democratization, and a more coherent Central Asia in terms of regional cooperation. However, hopes might quickly turn into false promises in a region of constant failures. Therefore, despite the improvements and promises, problems in the regions prevent us from portraying a clear image of Uzbekistan's future.

CONCLUSION

As it has been mentioned throughout the text, state-building in Uzbekistan is an unfinished process. There are certain problems that need to be solved. Despite keen state policies that promote Uzbekness, enduring clan identity as a subnational factor hinders the process of creating a unified national identity. The lack of democratic practices is another problem preventing Uzbekistan from engaging with the world. After Karimov's one man rule for 25 years, now Shavkat Mirziyoyev is ruling the country. However, expectations for democratic reforms have not been met yet. Religion in the form of radical Islam threatens the state itself since violent Salafi groups seek to replace secular regime with an Islamic one. Karimov was able to secure the stability by applying harsh policies against those groups, however, these policies also targeted moderate groups and any other opposition factions that in turn caused unrest among the population. In terms of economy, Uzbekistan performed below expectations. Karimov's gradual transition policy was handled poorly and exploited by ruling elites. The cotton industry was negatively affected by policy choices that prioritize industry over agriculture. Moreover, the effects of the environmental disaster in Uzbekistan, which started to take its toll decades ago still undermine the cotton production. The issue of creating an independent country might be regarded as the most significant source of success. Uzbekistan was able to secure its independence thanks to its pragmatic foreign policy. In this foreign policy framework, Uzbekistan switched sides among United States, Russia, and China occasionally and preferred temporary alignment rather than full dependence. However, conducting such a foreign policy creates unpredictability, and it is therefore risky. Chinese

It should be noted that the future of Uzbekistan will be determined by the new leadership and its reactions to such problems. Yet again, regardless of the leader, issues related to Islam, clan identity and democracy might be the main reasons of conflict for a foreseeable future.

Lastly, this study showed the usefulness of using more than two elements of the transition in the post-Soviet geography. In addition to the traditional elements of the transition studies, namely democratization and marketization, it is important to examine the issue of national identity and other factors such as the religion and the foreign affairs. Although it is true that building a modern nation state in the 21st century requires a democratic government and a market economy, the case of Uzbekistan demonstrated that transition is hard to complete without consolidating national identity, solving the role of the religion, and conducting an independent foreign policy. For this reason, it is advisable to expand the limits of current transitology and to take into account the local factors.

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