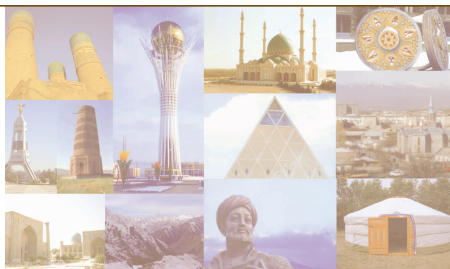


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UZBEKISTAN



NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2009

Bimonthly article

Prof. Farkhod Tolipov*

Highlights

In this period, politics and public opinion in Uzbekistan have mainly focused on domestic affairs with a little geopolitical spice in external affairs. These last two months have for the most part been devoted to the parliamentary elections which were held on 27 December, perhaps the main political event of the year.

Internal affairs

Uzbekistan celebrated Constitution Day on 8 December. Celebrations for this 17th anniversary of the Constitution were more modest than in previous years. In his traditional Constitution Day speech, the President highlighted the “great achievements” of Uzbekistan during the independence period. This mood of political tranquillity was particularly strange given the special “historical moment” – upcoming parliamentary elections three weeks later.

Parliamentary elections for the Legislative Chamber, the lower house of parliament, took place on 27 December. The new composition of parliament is supposed to differ from the previous one with 15 special seats reserved for the country's Ecological Movement. It should be noted that events in the period from September (when the nomination of candidates from political parties started) to mid-December (the election campaign started and programmes of parties were published) were relatively low profile and routine, with practically no serious political motion. Parties were not galvanized into action until 11 December, 20 days after the registration of their candidates, albeit merely taking the simplest form of routine meetings of candidates with the electorate. All the pre-election party platforms proved to be very similar in content,

which explains why the atmosphere in the run-up to the elections was so uncompetitive.

According to official data, over 87% of the electorate voted, although a second round of votes is scheduled to take place in 39 polling stations on 10 January 2010. Public opinion remains more pessimistic than optimistic regarding the future activity of the newly elected parliament, which is expected to mirror the political tradition of the previous parliament.

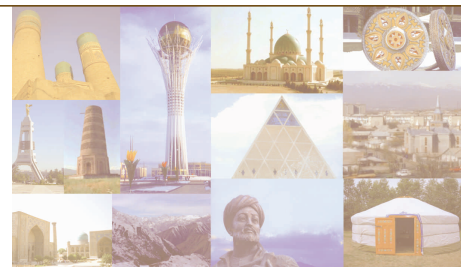
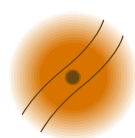
Foreign and International Policy

Deputy Assistant Secretary of State on South and Central Asian Affairs George Kroll visited Tashkent on 21 November and met with a number of officials such as Deputy Prime-Minister Elyor Ganiyev, Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Norov and the Ombudsman Sayora Rashidova. During the meetings discussions focused on interstate relations including the humanitarian sphere. The parties to the discussions negotiated business, education and healthcare issues.

Interestingly, during the press conference with the media, George Kroll expressed his hope that President Barack Obama will visit Uzbekistan, marking the first trip by an American president to this region. This announcement preceded the subsequent announcement by President Obama to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan with the aim of escalating military presence and defeating the Taliban and al-Qaida.

It was also announced that Tashkent would send an official delegation to Washington for launching annual bilateral consultations. It should be noted that Uzbek-U.S. rapprochement in 2009 was the main political tendency of the year. It is symptomatic

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and not accidental that the United States launched its new strategy in the region and improved relations with the key country of the region, ie, Uzbekistan.

On 22 December the Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov visited Tashkent. Interestingly, on the eve of this visit, the Russian President referred to Uzbekistan as its major partner in Central Asia and said that relations with this country will determine the success of Russia's strategy in the region. Lavrov discussed the overall status of bilateral relations and the programme of cooperation for 2010. He touched on three illustrative issues that are being successfully dealt with, namely: the maintaining of the Russian language in Uzbekistan, positive inter-confessional relations and attitudes towards the history of the Great Patriotic War. Lavrov appraised Uzbek-Russian economic relations in positive terms. He mentioned that about 800 Uzbek-Russian joint companies operate in Uzbekistan and that mutual trade exceeded \$2bn.

These two visits by officials of two great powers on the eve of the New Year reflected and symbolized the ongoing tense geopolitical competition between Uzbekistan and Russia, which will doubtless continue in 2010.

Economy and business enterprise

One of the biggest ice-cream producers in Uzbekistan, the Imkon Plus Company, received the \$4m credit from the EBRD for diversifying production and improving production quality as well as expanding the supply network. Masaru Honma, EBRD Director for Central Asia, expressed his satisfaction with the project in that it reflects the growing cooperation between the Bank and Uzbekistan, especially in the current uneasy economic conditions.

The government of Uzbekistan adopted a decision on the creation within the Cabinet of Ministers of three information-analytical departments and the

agency for legal expertise and international agreements. These departments are: integrated information-analytical department on macro-economic development, structural reforms in the economy and complex development of territories; information-analytical department on foreign economic activity, foreign investments and localization of the production; information-analytical department on education, healthcare and social protection.

In his traditional holiday speech on New Year's Eve, President Karimov commented on the economic results for 2009, emphasizing that despite the negative influence of the ongoing recession, Uzbekistan's GDP grew 8.1% in 2009. The volume of foreign investment climbed 33% and real incomes of the population by 26.5%, with average salaries, pensions and stipends up 40%.

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