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International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES)

Final Project Report

REPUBLIC OF TAJIKISTAN

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Preliminary Assessment of Political Parties (1998)
(in English)

PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT ON POLITICAL PARTIES – TAJIKISTAN

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OVERVIEW

From June 23rd until July 2nd, we had the opportunity to visit and consult with the leaders or representatives of political parties and national movements of Tajikistan.

The groups are as follows:

1. The Peoples Democratic Party
2. The Socialist Party
3. The National Movement "Jumbish"
4. The Democratic Party (Almaty Platform)
5. The Communist Party
6. The Party of Justice
7. The Islamic Revival Party
8. The Party of Justice and Development
9. The Movement of National Unity and Revival
10. The Congress of People's Unity
11. La'li Badakhshon
12. The Democratic Party.

Many of groups have provided us with party platforms, newsletters, by-laws and newspapers and the list of materials received is attached to this report.

Some parties have been unable to be reached but we will continue to attempt to contact them and supplement this report before the arrival of the Assessment team.

OSCE is also gathering information on political parties and will assist in the translation into English of the party platforms and other materials.

The following text will contain the name of the party, its leader and the representative with whom we met as well as the information provided by each interviewee.

A. The People's Democratic Party

Leader: Emomali Rakhmonov (President)

Interviewee: Kakhramon Ashurov (one of the founders)

Ashurov came to Dushanbe from Moscow to organize the People's Democratic Party. He indicated that the Organizing Committee worked for a year and a half before the first Founding Congress.

When asked how the leader was chosen, he went into a long discussion about the history of the Tajikistan. He said the West does not understand the East and then proceeded to discuss Alexander of Macedonia through Arab invasions.

After he was back on track, he told us that Dostiev had been the past chairman and there was no competition for the post. The fourth Party Congress was held April 19th, 1998 and Dostiev stepped aside and President Rakhmonov was chosen as leader of the Party. There was no competition as he is the President of Tajikistan.

The Party has offices and representatives in all cities and regions of Tajikistan and their primary function is to explain the party platform and the Constitution to the people in their regions.

Their platform and by-laws were published in 1993 and the basis ideology is to stress the need for a Parliamentary type system to build a civil society with a strong market economy and to develop a social and democratic state.

Their political doctrine is to make poor people rich, unlike the Communist Party that he claims wants to make rich people poor.

Until there is a law on a multi-party system, he did not indicate any party he would seek a coalition.

There was no indication from him in any particular areas his party draws the most support. He states that when the ballots are open, then they would know the answer. The main concern in all areas is peace, so the social issues of feeding and clothing the people can be addressed.

When asked about the new Election Law, he said a draft is ready but no one has seen it yet, it will be considered on the next session of the Majlisi Oli. Although he has not seen this draft, he said we would give it the support it deserves.

Free and fair elections depend on the support of international organizations but the people need to change their totalitarian views.

B. The Socialist Party

Leader: Safarali Kenjaev

Interviewee: Safarali Kenjaev

Kenjaev was chosen as party leader at the Founding Congress in 1996. There was no competition for this 5-year position. He did indicate he expects competition for the post in the future. The Founding Congress had one thousand members and it has risen to 21,000.

The party has offices in forty-two regions and cities and the representatives work closely with people to advise them their rights, ensure their human rights are not violated and to create new members and individual sections of the party in small villages.

Each region has a list of its members but there is no centralized list. Party members are issued ID cards and pay a membership fee if they can pay. Students, pensioners and invalids are admitted without a fee. So far, 11,000 ID cards have been issued but due to lack of funding the full 21,000 do not have ID cards.

The party program and by-laws were adopted at the Founding Congress and have been published. There will be a September congress to adopt the program with possible changes.

The platform is to promote all forms of ownership unlike the Communist Party. They support small and medium-size business as well as all religious groups. They firmly believe in the protection of the rights of all the people.

The major support of the party is in Leninabad region but claim support in Gissar, Tursun-Zade Dushanbe as well as Garm and Kulyab.

There is a party newspaper entitled "Unity".

He feels there can be no free and fair elections if there are guns. If there are still armed people, his party will not participate as the elections would not be fair. The participation of international organizations is mandatory to his party. In his opinion, ballots must be printed in other countries or there will be no elections. The international observers must be fair and honest. He suggested as in Chechnya that voters' fingers be painted so they cannot vote more than once. He stressed the importance of the participation of all parties in the elections.

He has published a book on the civil war in Tajikistan and uses the money from the sale of the book for the party.

He indicated that there is a draft Law on the election but no one has seen it yet. He stressed the fact that the Majlisi Oli has 70-80% of its members in support of the Government.

C. National Movement "Jumbish"

Leader: Mukhabatov

Interviewee: Olim Muminjonov

The Congress for this movement was held in Moscow in 1997 and Mukhabatov was chosen leader on a democratic basis. There were no other candidates.

The movement has offices and representatives in almost all cities and regions and they often communicate by telephone. The representatives work on organizational issues and explain the work of the movement to the people.

There is a list maintained by the Central Soviet in Moscow as is the platform and documents. The leader is also currently in Moscow. They claim 10,000 members. The movement publishes newspapers and newsletters.

He did not discuss the platform in general but indicated all platforms are basically the same only the implementation is different.

His party intends to implement their platform in all parts of Tajikistan without regionalism.

They would form coalition with parties whose programs are close to theirs which is to create a truly Constitutional Democracy. He indicated the Congress of People's Unity as well as the Socialist Party have similar views. He said there are some aspects of the Communist Party that are also similar. He stressed the need for a multi-party system.

The movement draws support from Leninabad, Kurgan-Tyube as well as all major regions, including Khatlon, Badakhshon and Dushanbe.

To influence regions where support is low, he suggested the use of the mass media. Their plan is have their leader on a television program explaining their programs and objectives. He also indicated representatives going to these areas and meeting with the people.

There is, of course, a need for a new election law but it must be published for all to view. He talked about applying to the Majlisi Oli and president if a new Election Law is put forward that is not a good election law.

There is only a chance for free and fair elections if the peace agreement is implemented and guns are withdrawn from the population.

D. The Democratic Party (Almaty Platform)

Leader: Jumaboi Niyozov

Interviewee: Sattorzoda

The Democratic Party (Almaty Platform) is not registered and banned as other parties belonging to the UTO. A Congress was held in Almaty June 5th, 1995 and Niyozov was chosen chairman as well as four deputy chairman, 11 board members and 9 members of the Presidium. The chairman was elected for a two-year term and Congresses were to be held every two years. But that has been suspended due to the ban. Sattorzoda called the other Democratic Party "group 221", which is their registration number. He indicated the other party left the main ideals of democratic principles.

Niyozov was elected without competition as he was the leader in the Leninabad organization and spent 21 months in jail.

The party has offices or representatives in 69 regions, including schools, factories and individual residences. Their main aim is to explain the party ideology and recruit new members.

The party maintains a list of members and there is a strict registration. The party consists of 3,500 members.

The platform is in writing and adopted at the 95 Congress. The basic ideology is to create a civil and democratic society. The parties in Tajikistan are differentiated into 4 categories in their view. Parties created on ideological principles such as the Communist Party, the Islamic Revival Party and their Democratic Party; the second is parties based on personalities like the parties of Dostiev (People's Democratic Party), Party of Kenjaev (Socialist Party) and Party of Abdulajanov (Party of Popular Unity of Tajikistan). There are also regional parties and the fourth would be single-issue parties such as the Party of Political and Economical Renewal of Tajikistan and the Party of Justice.

This party is different because it is based on the principle of democracy with an explicit party structure in all districts, regions and cities. Parties without a firm ideological base will not last.

He indicated his party would form coalition with parties that follow democratic principles.

The main support comes from Leninabad region but the party has good support in Dushanbe and areas outside the regions of republican subordination. The party has not been active in Kulyab because all their offices were destroyed.

To attract other areas, they must stress ideology over personality and have access to the mass media.

He indicated the new Election Law had been started but ceased because of the slow progress of the peace agreement in particular the recent problem with the Political Party Law.

It is the same story with proposals to the Constitution. That has not yet been approved by the full CNR and its future in Majlisi Oli is in question. He hopes for assistance from international organizations in this regard.

Free and fair elections can only be accomplished if they are organized and prepared for in a democratic fashion with assistance from international organizations.

He indicated that even though the second stage of protocol has been reached, the Majlisi Oli is creating obstacles. It seems in his opinion, the Government wants to create a one party system with all their efforts targeted to the elections.

E. The Communist Party

Leader: Shabdolov

Interviewee: Shabdolov

The Congress is the highest organ of the party and all delegates participate in selecting the leader of the party. The Congress is held every 5 years and the last one was held in 1996. Shabdolov was the party chairman in 1992 and elected again in 1996 without opposition.

The party has support in all regions of the country and is comprised of 70,000 party members. There are representatives in all 67 regions but are only functioning in 62 because the other 5 are controlled by the opposition.

The main work of representatives is to prepare for the pre-election campaign and continue to educate the people on the party ideology and other political activity.

Their main ideology is to support the peace process and work towards a market economy. He stated that he does not believe Kipling's view that the East and West are separate entities. He stressed the need to adopt both Muslim and Western values to create a lawful and just society with economic renewal and peace.

There is a strict registration procedure to insure a membership of good citizens.

The new platform was adopted at the 1995 Congress. He mentioned again the need for human values and a struggle against materialism, nationalism, racism and extremism.

He would form coalitions with the parties and movements that are democratic and also striving for economic renewal and peace as well solving other social problems.

Elections cannot be free and fair until there is a lawful society. Even now officials break the law. The President confiscated the property of the Communist Party which he considered an unlawful act and has appealed to the international organizations as well as the Constitutional Court of Tajikistan. He believes the confiscation violates the Constitution of Tajikistan.

Only when there is a lawful society and election assistance is provided by IFES and other international organizations can there be free and fair elections.

F. Party of Justice

Leader: Karimov A.

Interviewee: Karimov A.

Karimov the leader of the party was chosen at the Congress of 1995 from 2 candidates and re-elected at the 1997 Congress when there were three candidates for the post. The losers for the position became members of the political council.

He wondered if financial assistance was to be given by the assessment team and I advised the team would analyze the need for education and training in the future. The

group has representatives in twenty areas of Tajikistan and their main work is to advertise the party and seek new members.

The party platform was adopted in 1995 but he did not have one with him. He said the basic platform was to promote different types of ownership and other economic reforms. The party stressed that only the party who wins in free and fair elections should govern.

He claims a few thousand members and that they do keep a list but it is an internal document.

His party differs from others because his party has no former or present government officials. The members are teachers and workers, not politicians.

Support for the party is in all regions.

He would consider coalitions but would not say with whom. As to support for his party, he emphasized the need to appeal to new members by mass media and round tables.

The same was said when asked about free and fair elections. He indicated the need to involve the mass media and use of round tables.

G. The Islamic Revival Party

Leader: Himmatzoda Muhammadsharif

Interviewee: Himmatzoda Muhammadsharif

Present: Sattorzoda

The first Congress was held in 1991 and Himmatzoda was chosen as chairman and the other candidate was made deputy chairman. The Congress had 2000 delegates.

The party has representatives in all areas and most cities and is comprised of common people and teachers.

All representatives took part in the elections of 1991 but it was felt that the observers at the polling stations were in agreement with the government.

The role of the representatives is to increase party membership by spreading the platform to the people at local, city and regional conferences.

Every local office has a list of members but there is no master list.

The platform was adopted at the Congress and a copy was presented to us. The main feature of the platform is to develop Islamic culture.

The party has not been able to hold another Congress and if circumstances allow, another Congress may be held and there may be some changes to the platform.

The one objective that unites all parties and movements in the UTO is peace.

Every party has a little different ideology but most Tajiks are Muslims and even the Communist Party is no longer an atheist party. The Peoples Democratic Party and the Democratic party pay close attention to the religious aspect.

Himmatzoda stated they would accept other parties into the UTO and plans on keeping the same UTO coalition.

The IRP had been out of Tajikistan for 6 years and unable to hold congresses or conferences. They are still not allowed to be active but the representatives in all areas are ready to begin work when circumstances allow. Their representatives all in over 30 regions and throughout Leninabad.

The military problem is not yet solved and the party has not yet been able to start activities and there may be too little time before elections. Perhaps, the government is stretching the time on military issues.

No one knows when the elections will take place but the preparation of the Constitutional amendments must come first. All parties should be legalized before the referendum and in his view, the party needs 5 to 6 months to prepare for elections.

He believes the new Election Law depends on the Constitution. There is no separate section that relates to elections and although proposals for changes to the Constitution have been agreed upon by the legal and political sub-commissions there is still a dispute within the full CNR. The government wants changes only to the sections on the Parliament, Elections and Referendum.

Free and fair elections can only exist if all parties are allowed to exist. There can be no bans and all parties should be equal in the pre-election campaign. If only the government can utilize the mass media and radio and other parties have no access there cannot be free and fair elections. The main concern of the party is the inability to visit the regions and meet with the people to explain the objectives of the party.

The party wants the UTO to have 25% of the seats on the CEC and the Government to have 75%. However, the 75% should not only be from the Peoples Democratic Party but other parties that signed the Agreement on Public Accord.

In order for the elections to be free and fair there must be strict supervision by international observers to prevent falsification. There can be no free and fair elections where there are guns.

If a deputy commander in one area kills a great deal of people in a district and then is elected in that district, there is no logic that this commander had support of the people.

Himmatzoda indicated he had been receiving death threats for being too outspoken.

H. Party of Justice and Development

Leader: Zoirov Rahmatullo

Interviewee: Zoirov Rahmatullo

The Founding Congress was held on March 18, 1998 and is to be held every four years. Zoirov was elected Chairman without competition.

There are approximately 1,250 party members.

The party does not recruit students and only people with university degrees as initially it wants to organize a highly trained intelligent staff that can then be trained on political and legal issues to eventually teach and recruit students and non-professionals.

The main goal of the party is to raise the intellectual potential of the people. Zoirov believes there is a crisis in intellectual development, even in the government. Educated people must get involved and participate in the society. He wants members between 25-40 who have not been involved in the conflict.

The party is active in 31 regions but plans on utilizing the months of July and August to visit the regions and organize. In September, the plans are to conduct 2 to 3 day seminars in the regions.

There is a membership list and the platform was adopted at the Congress. The basic principle is to create a lawful, legal and political state.

Zoirov did not wish to compare his party with other parties. But in his view, his parties relies on development of human resources. He stressed the need for the educated people to develop society.

He would always support a coalition with any party with progressive views and puts social interests over their own interests. Before he founded the party he wanted to form a coalition. He believes the party should be initially 30% lawyers and the other parties just had their own interests.

The vast majority of the support is around Dushanbe but also in the Vakhsh valley, Khorog, Kofarnihon and the Leninabad region.

Zoirov stated he was working on an Election Law and recently discussed this with Khamidov and Aliev of the legal sub-commission. He believes there is a need for a general election law and about half of that has been worked out. The general election law should be united with the election law on presidential, parliamentary and local elections.

In order to ensure free and fair elections there must a law on suffrage. The ballots must be printed outside of Tajikistan. He indicated the method of nominating candidates must be outlined fully and the fact that self-nomination was very dangerous. He felt only parties should nominate candidates and this should be done at party conferences and congresses.

There must be both international and domestic observers present at the polling. Each party should have an observer at each polling station.

Most importantly, there must be the absence of guns and uniformed men and there must be a strict law to prohibit guns and uniformed people at the polling station.

I. Movement of National Unity and Revival

Leader: Rakhmonov Emomali

Interviewee: Mirzoshoev S.

Mirzoshoev was the chairman at the organizing committee of this movement and a Congress was first held in July 1997. There were 600 representatives from throughout Tajikistan and a Council of 51 were elected. The Council is composed of scientists, writers, poets and members of different parties. President Rakhmonov was elected Chairman although he had not sought the post.

The movement has offices and representatives in all regions and their main function is to promote a general republican state and unite all party movements under a non-government slogan. He said members of his movement do not seek governmental positions and it attracts religious people as well as people disappointed with political parties who are for peace and unity of all peoples of Tajikistan.

There is no master list of members but lists are kept locally in the regions. Mirzoshoev estimated membership of 300,000 in the Leninabad region where the leader Saifuloev is very strong. The membership throughout Tajikistan is 900,000. The movement receives financial support for enterprises and firms and the Leninabad region publishes its own newspaper.

The difference between this movement and other parties and movements is that his movement has no political ambitions.

If there is to be a new Election Law the leadership of his movement can participate in its creation and unite the people behind the present Constitution. He stressed the movement had no legislative initiative.

The Constitution states that Tajikistan is a democratic and civil state and free and fair elections can be held if the President and the government can gather the weapons and bring killers to court.

The influence of money on elections can create problems, as there are new Tajiks with money and suspicious pasts who provide the poor with oil and bread to buy their votes.

The influential political parties should play an honest game. The IRP should not bring the Koran and ask people to swear upon it.

The building where we met once belonged to the Communist Party but now is called "The Palace of Unity" and Mirzoshoev was just named director of the facility.

J. Congress of People's Unity

Leader: Turaev Saifiddin

Interviewee: Hakimov Shokirjon

The Chairman was chosen one year ago by the Council of Founders but the Congress has twice been prevented from meeting in Dushanbe. The first time last winter was due to guns and this spring the movement was advised not to meet by the Hukumat for security reasons.

They maintain a list of members and have representatives mainly in Leninabad but also Tursun-Zade, Gissar, Dushanbe and in the South.

Their basic platform is to create a true democratic society with democratic institutions and remove corruption and organized crime from Tajikistan.

Once his Congress is allowed to meet, there may be changes to the platform.

When asked about the Election Law, Hakimov expressed his desire to have his Congress meet after the amendments to the Constitution are published to determine their position on the election. He has his own concept paper on elections and believes free and fair elections can be held if there is truly a fair and democratic law. He believes in a maximum of 9 parties involved with the views of 4 national movements taken into account. There must be great involvement of international observers and the allocation of space and time with mass media must be in equal proportion.

There also must be civil education program to inform the people.

K. La'li Badakhshon

Leader: Amirbekov Atobek

Interviewee: Amirbekov Atobek

The party was founded in 1990 by its leader but because of the civil war many members left Tajikistan in 1992-93.

Atobek stressed his party is a nationwide organization and had offices in every region. However, most support is in Badakhshon. Many of his supporters left the country and many have been prosecuted. He indicated he is the only one to have received amnesty.

The party ideology is to create an independent democratic society with rule of law.

At the present time, the CNR has not been working on an Election Law but has been more concerned with the recent law on political parties. He stressed the need for the ban on political parties to be lifted prior to any referendum on proposed changes to the Constitution.

He felt free and fair elections can be held under certain circumstances. The international organizations must take Chechnya as an example. There must be strict control by international organizations such as OSCE and ballots must be created outside the country.

L. Democratic Party

Leader: Yusupov Shodmon

Interviewee: Abdurazakov Habibullo

Yusupov the chairman of the party was basically the party organizer and was chosen in 1990 in the Founding Congress without opposition. The party organizers were mostly intellectuals many of whom left the country at the outbreak of the civil war.

Before the war, there were party officials throughout the country composed of intellectuals who were educating the population on the development of democratic principles as opposed to those principles of the Communist Party.

There are no offices or representatives presently because the party is banned according to him. At one time, there was a list of party members and members were issued ID cards but because of the present status of the party, he is unsure if the list of members still exists.

At this time, there are many platforms associated with the Democratic Party. There is an Almaty platform, Teheran platform and Dushanbe platform.

However, in 1990 there was a United Democratic Platform which sought to create a free and democratic system without extremism of any kind, a society with freedom of speech and mass media.

The Democratic Party has been oppressed by the Communist Party and the State. The people do not know the essence of democracy.

The Constitution states that Tajikistan is a democratic and civil society but this is, in his words, just on paper as there are no democratic people in government that understand democracy.

The party may consider coalitions if the Majlisi Oli and president allow it to exist.

Many of the 10,000 members died, fled the country or were arrested. Most of the support was in Dushanbe but also in the bigger cities like Khojand, Kulyab and Khorog. However, there was a massive propaganda campaign in the mass media in Central Asia and Russia to portray the Democratic Party in a bad light and many people were influenced by the propaganda.

At the present time, he does not believe elections could be free and fair in any way.

Conclusion

In general, most of those interviewed were candid in their responses and appreciated the opportunity to discuss their parties and movements in some detail. However, due to the recent situation on the Political Party Law, there remains a somewhat tense situation in Dushanbe.

None of the banned parties can resume their activities as the ban remains in effect. It appears that the ban will remain until the next session of the Majlisi Oli in late August or September, when the Majlisi Oli will consider the changes in the law presented to them from the President which was a compromise reached by the Special Commission.

It would be best to reserve commentary on each individual interview and party until the assessment team arrives and can be briefed personally in this respect.

The list of documents on the parties is attached to this report as well as an interview with Ismailov, Minister of Justice and Dostiev, Co-chairman of the CNR.