DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN UZBEKISTAN: DO VALUES MATTER?

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The engagement of the European Union with Central Asia after the dissolution of the Soviet Union was quite modest in comparison with the other global powers already present in the region. Unlike Russia and China which succeeded in developing deep relations with Central Asia by focusing on security cooperation, the EU tried to promote its liberal values such as democracy, rule of law, and human rights.\(^1\)

A more profound stage of the EU’s involvement with Central Asia started with the adoption of the EU strategy for Central Asia in 2007 which focused on the following realms: 1) human rights, rule of law, good governance, and democratisation; 2) education; 3) economic development, trade and investment; 4) energy and transport; 5) environmental sustainability and water; 6) common threats, and 7) inter-cultural dialogue.\(^2\)

As the strategy’s initially envisioned end came in 2013, it can be stated that, with regard to Uzbekistan, the EU’s promotion of democracy was not successful. For example, in the latest report of Freedom House in 2015, the state of freedom

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in the country is labelled as “not free” and ranked on the same level like countries such as North Korea, Somalia, and Eritrea.³

Moreover, according to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) reports on the recently held parliamentary and presidential elections in Uzbekistan, democracy is still problematic and does not meet international standards. The main concerns in this regard were expressed towards the absence of a real political opposition and of genuine competition, the widespread proxy voting, and lack of change in government that has been promoted as the guarantor of peace and stability.⁴ In terms of freedom of the media, the OSCE highlighted considerable problems, especially self-censorship and the absence of media-pluralism.⁵ Freedom House also ranked the press freedoms in Uzbekistan as “the worst”.⁶

Even though Uzbekistan has adopted new laws and decrees in terms of the development of a civil society—such organizations still lack independence. Thus, for instance, the most vivid representatives of civil society—the non-governmental organisations (NGOs)—are heavily controlled by the government and limited in financing their activities. Moreover, the results of a survey conducted for this study revealed that the trust in NGOs is low due to an absence of knowledge on their purposes and functions. Furthermore, the surveyed sample could not distinguish between non-governmental and governmental organizations. Thus, it can be concluded that, in Uzbekistan, NGOs do not have influence on the transition of the country to democracy.

Considering the lack of democratic transformation of Uzbekistan it becomes relevant to assess the EU’s past policy towards the region, in particular as the Council of the EU recently concluded that the priorities outlined in the 2007 strategy are still pertinent, and that the focus on democratisation, rule of law, and human rights still remains of fundamental importance.⁷

In this context, it is relevant to identify the reasons for the failure of the EU’s democracy promotion policy in Uzbekistan. In the academic debate, several reasons have been outlined that are supposed to prevent democracy promotion in Uzbekistan such as the lack of coordinated actions with other actors, the absence

5. Ibid.
of positive and negative conditionality, as well as a non-cooperative behaviour on the part of the Uzbek government.8

However, it can be questioned whether this list is exhaustive. The mentioned factors mainly consider the actors at the macro level and are thus omitting the importance of ‘ordinary citizens’ and their role in resisting Western values. Therefore, this article examines the role of the population in the failure of EU democracy promotion. Its main focus is on revealing ‘Why did the EU democracy promotion in Uzbekistan fail?’ It focuses on the local population’s values assuming that democracy is a norm that is peculiar to the West and incompatible with traditional Central Asian values.9 Consequently the research question implies the following sub-questions: ‘Is there a difference between the Uzbek and Western values?’ and ‘Can values serve as a main obstacle to democracy promotion?’

It is expected that the presented findings will contribute to the academic debate about the failure of democracy promotion in Uzbekistan by introducing an additional explanatory factor. Moreover, it is assumed that the results of the research can be beneficial in terms of reformulating the policy of the EU towards Uzbekistan and reviving its ‘soft policy’ in the region by focusing on populations rather than on governments.

This article starts with a review of the main reasons for the failure of EU democracy promotion. The following chapter provides an overview on the methods used. The subsequent chapter compares the values outlined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights (EU Charter) and the Uzbek Constitution. The main findings are discussed in the following chapter. The paper concludes with the discussion whether values matter in democracy promotion, and provides recommendations for further actions.

**Complexities of Democracy Promotion in Central Asia**

This chapter provides a review and analysis of the main external and internal factors that prevented a successful implementation of the EU democratisation policy.

**Heterogeneous Approaches of Democratisation in Central Asia**

The disjointed policies of the United States and the EU in Central Asia are one of the reasons for the ineffective democratisation of the region. While these actors have common interests in democracy promotion, the United States has

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been concentrating on short-term strategies also labelled 'shock therapy', whereas the EU has a rather gradual and long-term approach.\textsuperscript{10} Moreover, the United States has relied on 'hard policy' while the EU prefers a 'soft power' approach to the Central Asian countries.\textsuperscript{11}

These diverse policies thus had different effects on democratisation in the Central Asian countries. For instance, the model applied by the United States in Kyrgyzstan could not be implemented in Uzbekistan as the latter chose its own path of gradual development with the purpose of avoiding the negative effects of a shock therapy. The 'Uzbek model' of development considered the consistent and stage-by-stage transition\textsuperscript{12} to a democratic state including a market economy and the development of a civil society.\textsuperscript{13} In this regard, the EU's strategy would seem more favourable if it did not stress the normative sides of its policy, i.e. human rights and democracy, which contradicted another principle of the 'Uzbek model'—the priority of economy over politics.\textsuperscript{14} According to this rule, the economy in Uzbekistan had to be developed without any ideological pressure.\textsuperscript{15} Nevertheless, neither the EU nor the United States took this into account while pushing for democratic transformation, and thus interfering with the policy of Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{16}

The varying perceptions of the region by these two actors posed another difficulty. For instance, the United States included Central Asia into its Afghanistan policy due to the common borders, while the EU considered the region as part of Eurasia.\textsuperscript{17} However, the EU's approach is based on a misunderstanding of the Central Asian region, as, for instance, Uzbekistan distances itself from the pro-Russian institutions and concepts such as Eurasia.\textsuperscript{18}

\textit{The Clash of Interests within the EU}

The absence of an homogeneous approach of Western actors can also be traced within the EU itself as the member states' interests do not always align among


\textsuperscript{12} This kind of the "Uzbek model" of development aimed at mitigating the prospective economic and social risks which could be brought by the rapid transformation, considering the fact that people were not ready to readapt to the new conditions after the demise of the Soviet Union.


\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} In this regard the economic development and the wellbeing of the population would further provide a positive basis for the transition of the country to democracy.

\textsuperscript{16} The normative push was more aggressive especially after the Andijan events in Uzbekistan.

\textsuperscript{17} Boonstra and Laruelle, \textit{EU-US Cooperation in Central Asia}, 2.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
themselves and with those of the EU institutions. While Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom support the value based approach towards Central Asia, Germany, on the other hand, stresses the importance of cooperation in the fields of energy and security. This clash of diverging interests adversely affects the whole democratisation policy of the EU in Central Asia.

In terms of Uzbekistan, several factors forced the EU to move towards a more pragmatic approach. The EU’s normatively based policy demonstrated its ineffectiveness in the case of the Andijan uprising, where sanctions barely changed Uzbek policies. The country’s own reaction of closing the American airbase in Karshi and all foreign NGOs demonstrated the government’s strong resistance to any kind of external influence. As these events coincided with the period of the global war on terror and the gas conflict of Russia with Ukraine and Belarus, the question of energy security and the diversification of suppliers became a priority on the EU agenda. Moreover, the break-up of Uzbekistan-EU relations would in turn give other players, such as Russia, China, and Iran, more influence in Central Asia.

As a result, Uzbekistan’s geostrategic position in the region and its role as an energy supplier and guarantor of security forced the EU to reconsider its policy. The main promoter of a pragmatic approach in this regard was Germany that insisted on lifting the sanctions and suspending visa restrictions, while leaving only the arms embargo in force. The pragmatic interests superseded the aim of democracy promotion converting the EU democratisation policy into the “tale of two Europes”.


20. At the general level the interests’ convergence is hardly achieved due to three leading member states’ (Germany, France, and UK) diverging views “on the role of the nation, state and of the EU” as well as the norms and principles which in turn leads to the inefficient implementation of the EU’s external policy. See Charlotte Wagnsson, “The EU as strategic actor, pragmatic ‘re-actor’ or passive pole?,” Swedish National Defence College Paper presented at Third Pan-European Conference on EU Politics, 21-23 September, n.y., Istanbul, accessed 20 June 2015, http://www.jhubc.it/ecpr-istanbul/virtualpaperroom/029.pdf, 7.

21. In 2005 in Andijan there was implemented an attempt to overthrow the existing government. As a response to the social rebellion, the state used force in order to stabilize the situation in the country. As a consequence around 800 people were killed during the unrest. See Vera Axyonova, “The Effectiveness of Sanctions and Regime Legitimacy in Central Asia: Examining the Substance of EU Sanctions against Uzbekistan,” in this 375th issue of L’Europe en formation.


23. Ibid., 77.


26. Ibid.
Inefficacy of Conditionality

The varying approaches of the United States and the EU and the latter’s multiple and contradicting interests prevent an effective use of instruments of democratisation. A successful democratisation depends on a certain formula which includes “consistency, conditionality and consequences.” Conditionality became the major instrument of the EU in its enlargement and neighbourhood policy since the 1990s, but was not used in an efficient way. In order to convert conditionality into a successful tool, it requires “credible and considerable incentives [and] favourable domestic conditions.”

Incentives usually refer to aid and development assistance allocated to the Central Asian states. Due to limited means of assistance and the lack of a clear strategy on the use of incentives they could not work well. Moreover, the absence of certain criteria on which the EU could evaluate progress in democratisation in the countries where it allocated the aid resulted in an even further exacerbation of the existing problems.

The domestic conditions in Central Asia such as widespread corruption and the lack of capacities to effectively implement development and democracy aid also constrained the use of conditionality by the United States and the EU. Moreover, this instrument was ineffective due to the lack of cooperation between these two actors. The missing coordination of the mechanisms on the allocated funds in the realm of civil society also prevented effective use of the conditionality instruments. For example, the EU funding of civil society is more bureaucratic, but there is little awareness of how the funds are used by the NGOs. The United States’ funding of the civil society institutions is less bureaucratic, but the monitoring of funds allocation by the donors is stricter.

Conditionality can be effective when there is a reward that is given only when the requirements are met. However, in terms of Central Asia the rewards were not vital for Uzbekistan. Thus, the ‘stick’ policy did not result in the required reforms. The absence of joint sanctions and the prevailing interests of the EU and the United States in security (particularly in terms of using the military bases in

29. Ibid., 3.
31. Ibid.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid.
the country), trade and energy provided Uzbekistan with the power of bargaining with these actors.

The Influence of China and Russia

The presence of Russia and China in Central Asia and the interests which these actors share with the countries of the region also serve as a barrier to the EU’s promotion of democracy. These countries are not interested in promoting Western values such as rule of law, human rights, and free elections. Instead, they share values such as security and stability. Moreover, they resemble each other to some degree in the nature of their political regimes and their resistance against ‘externally induced coloured revolutions’ which provides these actors with considerable privileges in their relations with Central Asia. This particularly applies to Uzbekistan.

The Central Asian countries’ historic and linguistic affinity with Russia makes the country the most important partner for the region. Apart from being one of the key trading partners, Russia is the main destination for labour migration from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. The contribution of migration to the region’s economies is considerable and varies from 11% to 60% of their gross domestic products.

Unlike the EU, Russia and China do not claim conditionality in order to build strong partnerships with Central Asia. This is most evident in terms of economic cooperation. For instance, the trade turnover of Uzbekistan with Russia as of 2014 composed 6.1 billion US dollars, with China 5 billion US dollars, while for the whole EU it accounted only for 1.68 billion euro. The relations with these actors are supported both at the bilateral level and under the umbrella of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The fact that membership of Russia and China in the SCO balance their influence is welcomed by Uzbekistan. Thus, even when the United States and the EU try to promote democracy in the

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38. Ibid.
country by the use of sanctions, their leverage over the region will be minimal due to the backing of Central Asia by Russia and China.

**The Democratic Apathy of the Public**

An additional obstacle to democratisation policy might arise from the citizens’ resistance to democratic reforms in their countries. Most Uzbek citizens support the *status quo* which provides them with stability on the part of the government at the expense of their personal freedoms. This became evident in the survey conducted for this article which showed that only 10% of the respondents voted in the last election. Moreover, respondents pointed out that they do not take active part in the political life of the country even though 60% of the respondents believe that the government decisions affect their everyday lives.

Central Asian peoples have a common history, religion, customs, and traditions, and they share the same values which are mainly influenced by Islam and their common Soviet past. Moreover, ‘authoritarianism, corruption and cronyism’ can also resolve problems and have the undeniable advantage of being familiar to the people.

Distrust of democracy in the region was originally caused by the Soviet system’s ideology when the Western systems and influence were depicted as a threat. Moreover, the suspicion towards democracy in the Soviet Union was created by fear—the government could not be held accountable to its citizens; instead it protected itself from any activities aimed at regime change by providing protection to its citizens.

The incomplete transformations in Kyrgyzstan where the change of the previous regime to democracy did not improve citizens’ lives also contributed to the emergence of democracy’s negative image. For instance, an opinion poll on the Kyrgyz peoples’ relation to democracy revealed that only 24% of the respondents were satisfied with the democratic transformations, while a majority expressed their mistrust and indifference towards democracy and politics. The surveys conducted for this article confirm these findings—the respondents claimed that the example of Kyrgyzstan shows that the values promoted by the West are not compatible with those of Central Asia, and therefore instead supported authori-

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42. Roberts, “Saving Democracy Promotion”.
43. Ibid.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid.
47. Roberts, “Saving Democracy Promotion”.
48. Ibid.
tarian regimes. Moreover, the majority of the respondents agreed to the statement that democracy is not able to solve the existing problems in Uzbekistan.

Furthermore, democratic rule is associated with a fear of punishment. The United States’ policy of supporting the ‘power of the people’ in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan was a deterrent for the people in Uzbekistan. However, the ‘false hopes’ provided by the United States to the people of Uzbekistan lead to the tragedy of Andijan. This shows that the United States was not aware of the peculiarity of the region, and tried to use a ‘one-size-fits-all’ strategy. Thus, at present, the people of Uzbekistan prefer stability to freedom.

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It can be concluded that democracy promotion in Central Asia failed due to both external and internal factors. However, while analysing which factors were decisive with regard to Uzbekistan; it becomes evident that domestic conditions have a vital role in the failure of the EU policy. While facing such challenges like Uzbekistan’s resistance against any external influence and its common values with Russia and China, it is assumed that citizens’ attitudes prevented an effective implementation of EU democratisation policy.

The hypothesis is that a consensus between government and public opinion concerning the non-adherence to Western values can partly serve as an explanation for the failure of EU democracy promotion in the country. Necessary preconditions are, first, that the population of Uzbekistan agrees that the values promoted by the West are inferior to those of Central Asia, and, second, that it supports the policy of maintaining stability and security in exchange for their personal freedoms. In order to test this hypothesis, the following chapters identify the most important values of Uzbek citizens and reveal whether they can pose a challenge to the EU democracy promotion. The following chapter informs about the methods used to test the hypothesis.

**Methodology**

The present research is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study includes a content analysis of the EU Charter and the Uzbek constitution which was implemented in order to compare both documents with regard to the values included. To generate empirical data on the youths’ political activities, their identity, as well as their attitudes towards the political system, democracy

and values, there was conducted a survey. The survey was complemented by semi-structured interviews with a chosen sample of young people and experts.

**Sampling**

The focus of the surveys was put on the youth of Uzbekistan that makes up more than 60% of the total population.\(^51\) The sample was chosen based on the assumption that young people are the most active part of society that has a large impact on the evolution of democratic rule.\(^52\) The age of the respondents varied from 18 to 30 years old (average age 25). This choice was predetermined by the assumption that this cohort of youth was raised mainly during the times of independence and thus should have different views from those educated during the Soviet period. The sample of the present research includes 15 young women and 15 young men in order to achieve a gender balance. The sample also took into account the place where the respondents received their degrees. Thus, 10 out of the surveyed young people have received foreign degrees and 20 others studied in Uzbekistan. This choice permitted to analyse whether the Western education affected their perception of democracy and values.

![Table 1: Attributes of Chosen Sample](image)

The sample from the structured expert interviews included representatives of three local NGOs, a Member of Parliament of the *Oliy Majlis* (Parliament of Uzbekistan), and one representative of local academia. This sample provided a clear picture of the state and its civil society institutions, the major problems associated with the differences of Western and Uzbek values, and the general situation of democracy promotion in Uzbekistan.

**Process of Research**

The research consists of the analysis of data that was collected through a survey containing 35 questions, which refer to a standard set of items frequently...
used by scholars in order to determine whether certain attitudes pertaining to democratic values are shared by ordinary citizens: internal political efficacy, social and political trust, participation, freedom and liberty and confidence in authorities’ effectiveness in dealing with the country’s problems. This list of variables is not exhaustive and could be supplemented with other important items, but it is presumed that the outlined ones refer to citizens’ attitudes and activities which are essential for democratic life. The analysis also includes data inferred from semi-structured interviews with 4 young men and 4 young women of the surveyed sample, with representatives and experts from government, NGOs, and academia, in order to increase the reliability of the study. Furthermore, the research includes a comparative analysis of the Charter of Fundamental Freedoms of the EU with the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan which reveals whether the values in the official documents of Uzbekistan differ from those of the EU.

The Comparison of the Values in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Uzbekistan Constitution

In order to see whether the values in Uzbekistan differ from those of the EU, this chapter provides an analysis of the main official documents that guarantee the fundamental rights to the citizens—the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the Constitution of Uzbekistan. In table 2, the Constitution of Uzbekistan is evaluated in the light of the main freedoms prescribed in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The table reveals whether Uzbekistan shares the same values as the EU by including the same constitutional provisions. In case there is a difference in the values or their interpretation, it is indicated in the column ‘comments’.

Table 2: Comparison of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU and the Constitution of Uzbekistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Values of the Charter of the EU</th>
<th>Constitution of Uzbekistan</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dignity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human dignity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to live</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to integrity of the person</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibition of slavery and forced labour</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to liberty and security</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect for private and family life</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection of personal data</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to marry and right to found a family</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of thought, conscience and religion</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of expression and information</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Under special conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of assembly and association</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Under special conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom of the arts and sciences</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to education</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to choose an occupation and right to engage in work</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom to conduct a business</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to property</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right to asylum</td>
<td></td>
<td>Regulated by art.23 of the Constitution which provides these rights in accordance with norms of international law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protection in the event of removal or extradition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality before law</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-discrimination</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equality between men and women</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rights of the child</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The rights of the elderly</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integration of persons with disabilities</td>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
On the basis of the above mentioned criteria it can be concluded that Uzbekistan *de jure* has similar values as the EU. Moreover, it can be stated that the Constitution of Uzbekistan provides extended rights to its people, for instance, the right for free medical treatment and free education at secondary schools (Art. 40–41). This is being implemented in line with a strong social policy that was outlined by the president at the beginning of independence in order to secure social justice and stability in the society during the difficult transition period. In the beginning of the 1990s, only 31% of the state budget was allocated to the implementation of social policy, while this now comprises about 50% (34% to education and 15% to healthcare). As a result of such an approach it was possible to increase life expectancy from 63 to 73.2 years which brought Uzbekistan closer to the developed countries’ ranks. Uzbekistan is also one of the few countries which distributes a considerable amount of the state budget to education. This policy ensured the 99% literacy rate bringing it closer to the standards of the EU.

Although the values do not differ in terms of wording, they have some variations in terms of interpretation. This is mainly caused by the influence of local traditions. For example, there can be inferred a tendency towards protection of the collective values such as the right of children to remain under the care of their parents until adulthood (18 years old) and the obligation of adult children to take care of their aged parents. It is a consequence of the old customs called locally as ‘*adat*’ according to which the parents have to take care of their children and the sons have to take care of their elderly parents. The issue of respect towards the elderly is included in the official policy of Uzbekistan, and, for example, the president has declared 2015 the year of “*The care for the older generation*”. It is promoted that care for the older generation is a duty of each citizen which largely distinguishes the local values from those of the EU. In the EU, however, as it was pointed by one of the interviewed experts, more weight is given to the individual values.

This becomes more evident in a comparison of art. 21 of the EU Charter with art. 18 of the Uzbek Constitution: In the Charter it is stated that discrimination is prohibited on the basis of sexual orientation. However, in the Constitution of

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55. Ibid.
56. Ibid.
Uzbekistan, such a formulation is avoided due to its incompatibility with the local religion which stands for the preservation of the traditional family. The discrimination with regard to the sexual orientation also dates back to the Soviet past when a person could be sentenced up to five years in prison for homosexual relations. The same punishment exists in Uzbekistan which, in accordance with the art. 21 of its Criminal Code, imprisons homosexuals up to three years.

Regarding freedom of expression and information, everyone has the right to freely obtain and disseminate information under the condition, however, that it is not directed against the existing constitutional order. This restriction was a response to the threat which was posed by radical religious movements which were active in the early 1990s. By disseminating radical Islamist leaflets, these movements aimed at overthrowing the existing regime and converting it into a 'Caliphate'.

It can be summarised that, although the values in both the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Constitution of Uzbekistan are similar, the interpretation of the rights included have some peculiarities which are influenced by local traditions, customs, and religion.

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The Main Findings of the Study

As outlined in the methodology chapter, a certain set of questions is used in order to assess the adherence to Western and local values. Table 3 displays the results:

Table 3: Attitudes towards Politics, Media and Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The level of trust in the governmental institutions</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>do not trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>have a low level of trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Do government decisions affect your everyday life? |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 60%                                               | have a great influence on everyday life |
| 20%                                               | somewhat affect everyday life |
| 20%                                               | do not affect everyday life |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The level of political activity</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>take part in elections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90%</td>
<td>never take part in elections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The level of trust in the media</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>trust Russian media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>trust European media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10%</td>
<td>trust American media</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How do you identify yourself?</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100%</td>
<td>identify myself with my own ethnicity*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0%</td>
<td>identify myself as Uzbekistan national</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* 21 of the respondents marked Uzbek being their ethnicity, 2 respondents marked Tartar and Korean respectively, and 1 respondent marked Georgian, Kazakh, Russian, Tajik, and Turkish respectively.

The questionnaire also aimed at revealing the attitude of the youth towards democracy:
Table 4: The Level of Adherence to Democracy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Which of the following statements clearly reflects your position?</th>
<th>Democracy is the most desired form of the governance (in number of people)</th>
<th>In some circumstances, authoritative form of governance is preferred to democratic</th>
<th>It does not matter whether the regime is democratic or not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad (Europe, United States)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Uzbekistan</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5: Attitudes towards democracy and its ability in improving the situation in Uzbekistan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question: Which of the following statements clearly reflects your position?</th>
<th>Democracy can solve the problems in our country</th>
<th>Democracy cannot solve the problems in our country</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abroad (Europe, US)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Uzbekistan</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The findings show that the youth in Uzbekistan is inert and takes a rather inactive part in the political life of the country. Even though the respondents do not trust the governmental institutions, they admit their importance for their
everyday lives. The importance of stability and security which is provided by the
government overrides their desire for any kind of change.

After independence, the Uzbek president stated that the population was not ready for democracy; thus, actions were taken to eliminate the political opposition, suppress alternative opinions and ideas and limit the freedom of expression. This largely contributed to the democratic apathy of Uzbek citizens. The interviewed experts also agreed that, at present, people are not ready for any changes simply due to the lack of understanding of the main democratic values and connecting them to anarchy. This opinion was shared by the interviewed young people who associated democracy with anarchy, revolution, and a threat to the local culture and identity. Such conclusions were made on the recent examples of regime change in Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine. Moreover, past events related with the protests against the Uzbek government and the terrorist attacks contributed to the scepticism of the respondents towards democracy, too.

The notion of democracy as a threat to identity was underlined mainly by Uzbek respondents, while the respondents of ethnic minorities were in favour of democracy. But they admitted that it can hardly solve the existing problems in the country. The interviewed academic stated that the Western concept of democracy imposed on Uzbekistan is based on individualism. Thus, it is not compatible with the local culture based on collective values. As a consequence the imposition of the Western concept of democracy can pose a threat to the national identity. This statement was supported by the surveyed ethnic Uzbeks, and particularly by the females, which points at their deeper cultural embeddedness.

Another reason for hostile attitudes towards the Western type of democracy is the Uzbeks' preference for Russian media—which, being the sole source of information, largely affects their perception of Western democracy. As table 3 shows, the majority of respondents trust the Russian media. The most popular channels are “Channel 1” and “Rossiya 24” which are considered to be pro-government media.

Interesting results were obtained with regards to respondents’ place of education. Unlike those who received higher education in Uzbekistan, respondents with American and European degrees supported the idea of democracy and also believed that democracy can change the situation in the country. This result strengthens the point that foreign education acquired in democratic countries can foster democratic transformation. By obtaining a foreign education, the

64. Makai, “European Influence on Former Soviet Central Asia,” 249.
respondents were able to live in democracies. Moreover, they obtained a clear understanding of the concept of Western democracy. Furthermore, the respondents with foreign degrees had a higher level of political participation and interest in local politics which points on their openness and willingness to further reforms.

**Developing Democracy in Uzbekistan: The Values do Matter**

In answering the question ‘why democracy promotion failed in Uzbekistan’ it should be specified ‘whose version of democracy failed’. From the above findings we can infer that the values in Uzbekistan promoted by the Constitution of Uzbekistan have much in common with those in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. However, the interpretation of some of the values provides a clear picture of differences that are influenced by local traditions and mentality. Thus, it can be concluded that the Western idea of democracy failed in Uzbekistan partly due to its incompatibility with the local culture and Uzbeks’ non-adherence to Western values.

Considering that the government and the citizens in Uzbekistan agree with the importance of stability, security, and a ‘gradual’ shift towards democracy, it can be concluded that Uzbek values can serve as the main obstacle to EU democracy promotion.

Nevertheless, this does not mean that loyalty of the people to local values decreases the likelihood of developing democracy. The article found that people oppose institutional reforms due to their fear that they can pose a threat to system stability. Thus, if the EU turns away from a prefabricated model of democracy but respects local values and the sovereignty of Uzbekistan, and encourages the gradual transition to democracy—taking into account that people are not ready for revolutions—there is a higher probability that EU democracy promotion will succeed.

The findings revealed that people who received ‘Western’ higher education are more open to democratic reforms. Thus, the EU’s future policy for the region should focus on education which has the potential of, as a result, diminishing the practices of corruption and nepotism.

Therefore, in order to foster the democratic transformation, four recommendations can be made:

1. **The role of the civil society and academia:** The civil society and local academia should be provided with more opportunities of taking part in the political dialogues. Then it will be possible to get better insights into the pressing issues of the region and to work out credible solutions.

2. **The visibility of the EU:** Due to a lack of knowledge about the EU in Uzbekistan, its visibility should be increased. Special attention in this
regard should be given to the regions with limited access to information and internet. Moreover, opening a cultural centre and a library within the EU Delegation would provide more opportunities for the local population to obtain information on the EU and its values.

3. **Education**: Education and exchange programmes are a strong tool in fostering critical thinking, and should be extended by the EU. The provision of more scholarships to the youth of Uzbekistan would enable more young people to experience European democracies.

4. **Simplified visa regime**: In this regard, the visa issuance procedures should be eased for students wishing to study in the EU.

**Abstract**

The article analyses the main reasons for the failure of EU democracy promotion in Uzbekistan. Following a discussion of reasons given in academic literature, the article proposes an alternative explanatory factor—the incompatibility between Uzbek values and West standards of democracy. After comparing the values expressed in the Uzbek constitution to those of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, findings of an own survey among students in Uzbekistan are presented. It reveals that the Uzbek population shares the same values with the government and considers democratic reforms a potential threat to the country’s stability. However, the article suggested that the more pragmatic approach of the EU towards the region can encourage the country’s gradual shift to Western democracy and gives some concrete recommendations for the EU’s future policy towards Central Asia.

**Résumé**

L’article analyse les principales raisons de l’échec de la promotion de la démocratie de l’UE en Ouzbékistan. Suite à une discussion des raisons invoquées dans la littérature académique, l’article propose un facteur alternatif d’explication — l’incompatibilité entre les valeurs ouzbeks et les normes occidentales de démocratie. Après une comparaison des valeurs exprimées dans la Constitution ouzbek avec celles de la Charte des droits fondamentaux de l’Union européenne, les résultats d’une enquête menée auprès d’étudiants en Ouzbékistan sont présentés. Ces derniers révèlent que la population ouzbek partage les mêmes valeurs que son gouvernement, et estime que des réformes démocratiques sont une menace potentielle pour la stabilité du pays. Néanmoins, l’article suggère que l’approche plus pragmatique de l’UE dans la région peut encourager une évolution progressive du pays vers la démocratie occidentale, et propose quelques recommandations concrètes pour la politique future de l’UE en l’Asie centrale.