



Tajikistan



Last update:	1 April 2010
Author:	
Population:	7,487,489 (July 2010 est.)
Prime minister:	Oqil Oqilov (since January 1999)
President:	Emomalii Rakhmonov (since November 1994; head of state and Supreme Assembly chairman since November 1992)
Governemental type:	Republic
Ruling coalition:	One ruling party – People's Democratic Party (PDP)
Last election:	Parliamentary 28 February, 2010
Next election:	Presidential November 2013
Sister parties:	None

Soon after Tajikistan became independent upon the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, a disagreement emerged among the political forces in the newly established country. A collusion of interests of different Tajik regional elites evolved, with both sides backed by international supporters. The government of Rakhmon, a native of the Kulob region, was supported by the Russian Federation whereas the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), a loose grouping of interests that drew support from the centre and east of the country and was partially coloured by an Islamist agenda, was supported by Pakistan.

INTRODUCTION

Civil war broke out with the rise of Rakhmon (formerly known as Rakhmonov) to presidency in November 1992 and lasted for 5 years, devastating the country until 27 June 1997 when a peace agreement was signed under the guidance of the United Nations (UN) and with the support of the international community. In the 'General Agreement of Peace and National Reconciliation in Tajikistan', the two warring factions agreed upon power-sharing, leaving Rakhmon in office as president, but guaranteeing the legalization of opposition parties and giving to the UTO a representation of 30% in governmental structures. However, the promise of political pluralism has never been adequately realised.

ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

Tajikistan's parliament consists of a lower chamber, the Majlisi Namoyandagon, and an upper chamber, the Majlisi Mili. The upper chamber is indirectly elected.

Parliamentary elections 2005

Elections to the lower parliament took place on 27 February 2005, with a second round of voting in three constituencies on 13 March. The elections took place under a newly amended election law that came into force in June 2004, when a national referendum was held on 56 constitutional amendments, which citizens were obliged to accept or reject as a single package. The key revision gave the president the right to serve two seven-year terms instead of one starting with the upcoming presidential election, making it possible for Rakhmon to remain in office until 2020. Some improvements were made to previous legislation concerning to parliamentary elections, but as they were not implemented the elections again fell short of international standards and failed to meet the key OSCE commitments for democratic elections.



The Majlisi Namoyandagon has 63 members, who are directly elected for a period of 5 years. 22 are elected through a proportional, party list system from a single, countrywide constituency. To win seats, parties must pass a five percent threshold. The remaining 41 members are elected from single mandate constituencies under a majoritarian system. In the single mandate constituencies, candidates must win an absolute majority of votes to be elected. If none of the contestants manages to win an absolute majority during the first round, a second round of voting is held between the two leading candidates two weeks later. For any of the elections to be valid, there must be at least a 50% voter turnout.

Candidates can register for election if they are citizens of Tajikistan of at least 25 years of age. However, a number of additional and burdensome requirements have to be met that are contrary to international democratic standards. Thus, candidates should have completed higher education, had to provide property and income statements, and had to post a deposit of 0, equivalent to 200 minimum monthly salaries, from their own funds. In the single mandate constituencies, the deposit would only be returned to the winning candidate. In regard to the party lists, the deposit would only be returned if the nominating party passed the 5% threshold in the countrywide constituency. These measurements made it impossible to compete in elections for approximately 80% of the Tajik population, and imposed a heavy obstacle to even more. Furthermore, candidates in singly mandate constituencies had to submit at least 500 signatures of eligible voters from the constituency.

The six registered parties that ran in the elections were the People's Democratic Party (PDP) of president Rakhmon, the Communist Party (CP), the Islamic Revival Party (IRP), the Socialist Party (SP), the Democratic Party (DP) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP).

A total of 231 candidates were registered for the elections. 170 candidates registered for the single mandate constituencies. The six registered political parties put forward 61 candidates for the party list contest. Taking together the candidates for the single mandate constituencies and the party lists, the ruling PDP put forward 61 candidates, followed by the IRP with 37 candidates and the Communist Party (CP), who put forward 20 candidates. 80 self-nominated candidates ran in the elections, most of whom seem to have been affiliated with the PDP. 36 candidates withdrew closely before election day, creating considerable confusion amongst voters. There were thus 195 candidates on election day.

The election campaign was peaceful, but grossly biased in favour of the ruling PDP. PDP candidates had more access to public resources than their opponents had, and opposition candidates complained about difficulty obtaining authorization from local authorities to get appropriate venues for their campaign meetings. Organised election meetings were presided over by government officials and members of the PDP, which resulted in official control over the campaign. Although all candidates were entitled to free space in the state media, the majority of attention given to the elections went to candidates of the PDP. Private newspapers critical of the government are increasingly stopped from publishing by the authorities since 2004, with pressure mounting in the days prior to the elections. Court cases and criminal charges against opposition leaders of the Islamic Revival Party, the Democratic Party and the unregistered Taraqqiyot Party in the months leading up to the elections prevented some well known figures from standing for office and effectively diminished the chances of those parties in the elections.

Furthermore, popular knowledge of and interest in the elections appeared to be limited, despite NGOs efforts to create public awareness and involvement. The majority of the population appeared to favour stability over democracy, keeping in mind the civil war that had devastated Tajikistan from 1992–1997. There also appeared to be “an inherent reluctance by much of the population to speak out against or contradict the current political establishment”, which might have to do with public fear for reprisals.

During the voting, a number of serious irregularities took place. In a large proportion of polling stations, ballots were not adequately controlled or accounted for by election officials. Multiple voting was observed on a very large scale, including accounts of one person voting over 500 times. Also, government officials present in the polling stations influenced voters, and several observers from opposition parties seem to have been intimidated and denied access to polling stations. Furthermore, there seems to have been considerable government interference in the counting of the votes.

The official results of the first round were published by the Elections Commission on 29 February. According to these results voter turnout was 92.6 percent. Single rounds had to be held in 3 constituencies. In these



second round contests, PDP candidates won all 3 constituencies.

The official results after the second round, published on 14 March, were as follows:

Party	Percentage of votes	Number of seats via party lists	Number of seats via single mandate constituencies	Total number of seats
People's Democratic Party (PDP)	74.9%	17	35	52
Communist Part (CP)	3%	1	4	–
Islamic Revival Party (IRP)	8.9%	2	0	2
Other parties <5% threshold	0%	0	0	–
Other candidates	0%	0	5	5

Presidential elections 2006

Presidential elections took place on 5 November 2006 under the amended election law of June 2004 that allowed for incumbent president Rakhmon to run for a third seven-year term. The elections, which were denounced as a sham long before polls opened, were contested by 5 candidates of which only Rakhmon had a serious chance to win.

Candidates who wished to register for election were required to submit signatures of at least 5% of the registered voters in Tajikistan. All Tajikistani were allowed to sign in support of only one candidacy. In total, nominees presented together a total of over 1.5 million signatures, which would amount to almost 50% of Tajikistan's approximately 3.2 million voters. This high number of signatures seems highly implausible and casts serious doubts on the signature requirements.

The Agrarian Party fielded Amir Karakulov and the Party of Economic Reforms fielded Olimjon Boboyev. Both parties were established in 2005 and are supposedly government-backed. The Socialist Party, which was split in 2005 after alleged interference by the government, fielded as a candidate Abdulahim Gaffarov, leader of the government-recognised rump movement. Only the Communist Party fielded a relatively well-known candidate, MP Ismoil Talbakov.

Two major opposition parties, the Democratic Party and the Social Democratic Party boycotted the poll out of anger over the constitutional changes allowing Rakhmon to stand for elections on two more occasions, possibly extending his presidency until 2020. The Islamic Renaissance Party decided not to field a candidate due to the death of its leader in August 2006, which dealt a heavy blow to the party.

Despite the presence of five candidates, the election was characterised by a marked absence of real competition. This was partly due to the main opposition parties' choices not to compete in the elections. Some analysts suggest that the mainly little-known candidates were "a show of democracy for domestic and international consumption" (www.opendemocracy.net). The plausibility of this suggestion seems to be even larger when one takes into consideration the fact that all candidates took the campaign trail together, indicating a level of understanding unusual amongst contestants for the presidency. Although all candidates were entitled to free media coverage, the amount of coverage given to candidates was very little. Only the campaign of Rakhmon received genuine attention, including the running of an interview with the president on state television throughout election day. Furthermore, officials from the government led the campaign, raising questions about the independence of the organisation. There was no space for citizens to ask questions concerning politics to the candidates, and election observers were told by numerous citizens that they would not be able to speak up against president Rakhmon out of fear for reprisals.

Election day itself was marked by a number of irregularities, most noticeably the many instances of multiple voting and the presence of government officials instructing people how to vote in many of the ballot posts. Official results announced by the central electoral commission on 6 November showed a 91% turnout and declared Imomali



Rakhmon as the winner with 79.3% of the vote.

Candidate	Party	Percentage of votes
Imomali Rakhmon	People's Democratic Party	79.3%
Olimjon Rakhmon	Party of Economic Reforms	6.2%
Amir Karakulov	Agrarian Party	5.3%
Ismoil Talbokov	Communist Party	5.1%
Abdualim Gaffarov	Socialist Party	2.8%
Against all candidates	-	1.3%

Women in politics

Although there are no legal formal impediments to women's participation in elections, women are significantly underrepresented. This is largely due to the traditional social, cultural and religious norms that preferentially situate women in the home. The 0 contribution to present one's candidacy is an extra obstacle for women to compete in elections, whereas women are generally discriminated upon in terms of pay and are therefore even less likely than men to have such an amount of money available.

Furthermore, family voting is common practice in Tajikistan. In these cases, it is usually the men who vote for all family members. This leaves women with little opportunity to choose a woman whom they feel represented by.

Of the 195 candidates in the 2005 parliamentary elections, 32 were women. All six political parties had women on their lists, but in general their positions were too low to be elected. The PDP and the SDP had women among the first three names on their lists, and the PDP placed women rather evenly throughout its list. 7 women were elected on the party list vote, all from the PDP. Furthermore, women ran as candidates in 12 of the 41 single mandate constituencies, and in 4 instances were elected. The total number of women represented in the lower house is thus 11, representing 17.5% of the seats. No woman competed in the 2006 presidential election.

The government has, however, taken a number of steps to increase the political participation of women, including a new law adopted in February 2005 that encourages representation of both sexes on party lists and membership in election commissions. Unfortunately, the law was adopted too late to be applicable to the 2005 parliamentary elections, and it remains to be seen how it will be implemented. Furthermore, a number of NGOs is actively engaged in raising political awareness amongst women.

Participation of minorities

According to official data, the population of Tajikistan is made up of 80 % Tajiks, 15.5% Uzbeks, 1.1 % Russians and 1.1 % Kyrgyz. However, unofficial estimates put the Uzbek population in Tajikistan at as much as 25%.

There is no overt discrimination against these minority groups, nor are there any formal barriers for their full participation in the electoral process. At the same time, it is noticeable in particular that the large Uzbek minority does not appear to be actively engaged in the political process. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, they did not feature as candidates and political parties did not have messages designed to appeal to Uzbek voters.

It should be noted in this respect that power is distributed on the basis of regional identities rather than ethnicity, and it can therefore be said that apart from the Kulobis all groups in Tajikistan seem to be underrepresented. Most Uzbeks are loyal to current president Rakhmon.

On a positive note, the government of Tajikistan does try to actively engage the minorities in the election process by printing ballots in multiple languages. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, ballots were printed in Tajik, Uzbek and Russian. During the 2006 presidential elections, people could bring out their vote using Tajik, Uzbek, Russian or Kyrgyz ballots.



Parliamentary elections 2010

The most recent parliamentary elections in Tajikistan took place on 28 February 2010.

Results

President Emomali Rakhmon's two-decade grip on power is likely to remain as strong as ever.

According to the Central Election Commission (CEC), president Rahmon's ruling People's Democratic Party won 71.7 per cent of the vote. The Communist Party and the Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) emerged as the main contenders to the ruling party. Both secured some seats in the lower house, the CEC said. The IRP is Central Asia's only Islamist political party that is officially registered. With its young leadership and swelling ranks, the party aimed to use the election to strengthen its representation in the parliament. But despite campaigning hard, IRP leader Muhiddin Kabiri said he was discouraged by what he saw during the election day.

Official results

Party	% Votes	Seats
People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan	71.04	55
Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan	8.20	2
Communist Party of Tajikistan	7.01	2
Agrarian Party of Tajikistan	5.11	2
Party of Economic Reforms of Tajikistan	5.06	2
Others:	3.58	0
-Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan		
-Democratic Party of Tajikistan		
-Socialist Party of Tajikistan		

Total turnout: 90.84%

Statement OSCE observation mission

In a statement that was issued on 1 March, the international election observation mission of the OSCE concluded



that the parliamentary elections took place peacefully, but despite certain small positive steps they failed to meet many key OSCE commitments. The observers noted that higher-level election commissions were more inclusive than in previous elections. But they also highlighted serious irregularities on election day, including a high prevalence of family and proxy voting and cases of ballot box stuffing. "This election saw a certain level of pluralism, but unfortunately the stated will of the authorities to follow democratic procedures did not translate into concrete measures to address the significant shortcomings that marred the campaign environment and election day," said Artis Pabriks, head of the long-term election observation mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Fraud allegations

Next to the criticism of the OSCE, several opposition parties accused the authorities of fraud and complained about a lack of transparency in the vote. Rahmatillo Zoirov, the head of opposition Social Democratic Party of Tajikistan, complained that in Dushanbe his party's observers were made to sit in corners of the polling stations and were unable to keep an eye on the process.

IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

Poverty

Tajikistan is the former Soviet Union's poorest successor state, with over 80 percent of the population living below the poverty line of per month, the average monthly wage being around . From the Soviet Union, Tajikistan inherited economic structures that were heavily dependent on Soviet supply and – trade networks. Transport and other infrastructure were designed with a view to meeting the needs of the Union and not those of the local economy. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the interruption of trade and transfers, the economy in Tajikistan declined enormously. As a result, unemployment in Tajikistan is mounting at an estimated 40%, and most jobs are underpaid. The population relies heavily on remittances of the estimated 20% of the population that is working abroad, usually illegally. Furthermore, Tajikistan has a foreign debt of over billion that it currently tries to tackle with help of the World Bank, having drafted the obligatory Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) setting out a policy of privatization. It remains to be seen if this will be done, and whether this will be done in a fair manner. Other international donors include the UN (UNDP, Unicef) and many other organizations.

Authoritarianism / dictatorship

Since the signing of the 1997 peace treaty, designed to promote a democratic system and cooperation between president Rakhmon and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), Rakhmon has developed increasingly authoritarian tendencies. In spite of the passages in the peace agreement guaranteeing the legalization of opposition parties and giving to the UTO a representation of 30% in governmental structures, Rakhmon has sought increasingly to obstruct the opposition and to enlarge his grip on power. After a number of elections, which were all described as being free nor fair by international election observers, the opposition's share in government functions has fallen from the negotiated 30% to less than 5%.

Power is firmly in the hands of the president, who relies on the militia and the armed forces to keep his grip on power. Both army and police are headed by Rakhmon loyalists and report directly to him. The legislature and the judiciary are both dependent on the president, and judges are poorly trained and underpaid. During the past years, a number of important and influential opposition leaders have been tried with criminal charges, giving a clear indication that trials are politically motivated. Arbitrary arrests are common and there seems to be no limit to pre-trial detentions, with suspects being jailed for over a year before ever going to court. Prison conditions are appalling, and the torture of prisoners and suspects seems to happen on a regular basis, even though prohibited by law. Many suspects are refused to see an attorney.

There is no freedom of speech and there has been a clampdown on independent media, with opposition websites



being closed down before the 2006 presidential elections. The only independent broadcasting station of Dunshabe shut down since January 2006 after having failed to pay licensing fees 80% greater than stipulated in the contract. The government has also become increasingly obstructive towards NGOs promoting democratisation. Furthermore, after the coloured revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan, the government has become even more intolerant of opposition, fearing for public protests.

Clan structures and regional identities

Tajikistan is a mountainous and scarcely populated country in which four regions are only loosely connected. Even nowadays, mountain roads between regions are closed in winter, making it impossible to reach many parts of the country. Over the centuries, this seclusion has led to the formation of strong local identities, a process that accelerated in the 1940s when the Khujandis (from Leninobod region) ascended to top party and government positions in Tajikistan and endorsed localism as the cornerstone of their policy, keeping regional rivalries boiling while reserving for themselves the role of arbiter. This permitted the Khujandis to exercise an undivided rule in the republic until the disintegration of the Soviet Union, channelling allocations from the central budget almost exclusively to the development of their native province. Furthermore, little has been done to integrate the different regions within the countries. Similarly, the civil war of the 1990's was for the biggest part a power struggle between several regional identities, in which the Kulob region eventually gained the upper hand, with Kulobi president Rakhmon now firmly in power.

Furthermore, clan- and family ties are also important in the allocation of the fairly scarce jobs in Tajikistan. Nepotism is a problem throughout the country, caused by massive unemployment intersecting with a culture of extended family obligations. This also counts for government functions.

Efforts to combat nepotism in the state bureaucracy were initiated in February 2004 when the parliament passed a series of amendments to the labour code prohibiting the directors, vice-directors, accountants and cashiers of agencies to be related to each other.

Gender issues and discrimination

Discrimination of women is widespread in Tajikistan. Traditional social, cultural and religious norms that preferentially situate women in the home have become increasingly influential the past years due to the economic crisis of the country. Although legally women share equal civil and political rights, including a fair balance of payment, women are generally underpaid and are often unemployed. Practises of early marriage, polygamy and limitations on the freedom of movement of women are widespread, and domestic violence is on the rise. Furthermore, the level women's education has decreased during recent years, whereas many poverty-stricken families choose only to send the boys to school. At the moment, women make up about 25% of all students in higher education.

In 2005, a presidential law on female representation in local government bodies was passed to increase the number of women active in local politics. Furthermore, quotas have been set to promote the entry of women from distant and mountainous regions to institutions of higher education. However, apart from those two actions, the government has showed little interest in improving the situation of women.

As in the case of women, discrimination of other groups has also increased over the past years. Although discrimination based on ethnicity and language is prohibited by law, ethnic Uzbeks, Russians and Pamiris nonetheless face obstructions in Tajik-controlled government bodies and have difficulties finding jobs due to the widespread practice of nepotism. Furthermore, people with disabilities suffer from widespread discrimination in daily life and high unemployment, despite their large numbers due to the civil war as well as ongoing injuries from stepping on landmines.



Corruption

Tajikistan is one of the most corrupt countries in the world. It ranked 142 out of 163 countries in Transparency International's 2006 Corruption Perceptions Index with a score of 2.2 on a scale from 10 ("highly clean") to 0 ("highly corrupt"). Bureaucrats are chronically underpaid, making them highly susceptible to corruption. Bribes are paid to pass exams, to secure a bed in a hospital and even to evade trials. According to a 2004 survey, 98% of Tajik businessmen have paid bribes to state officials. High government positions are said to be bought and sold.

Although the Tajik government says it is aware of the problem, it has been sluggish in addressing it. Legislation against corruption has been passed in 1999, but has barely been implemented. A few show processes against allegedly corrupt functionaries have been staged, but no serious attempts have been made to address the problem.

The ensuing corruption has also led to serious financial setback to Tajikistan. On 5 March 2008, the Executive Board of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) ordered Tajikistan to repay the fund .4 million for misreporting about the country's financial position by the central bank to secure IMF loans. According to the IMF, five noncomplying disbursements were made to Tajikistan in the period between January 2004 - February 2006 under the three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (PRGF) arrangement. The PRGF arrangement was approved by the Executive Board in December 2002. As the first two disbursements were discharged under the Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI), Tajikistan is expected to repay the IMF the latter three instalments (2005-2006). The Executive Board of the IMF, in its statement released on 5 March, "expressed its regret on the nature and extent of misreporting, and emphasized the seriousness it attaches to the fact that MDRI resources extended to Tajikistan cannot be made subject to repayment." It furthermore decided, taking into account "Tajikistan's very difficult economic circumstances, in particular its balance of payments position as well as the severe humanitarian crisis in the country", to extend the repayment period beyond the normal 30-day period. Instead the money, plus interest, must be repaid by 5 February 2009. The IMF Executive Board statement furthermore says that the Tajik authorities have agreed to undertake a special audit, to be carried out by a recognized international firm, aimed to establish "a reliable foundation for the future provision of monetary data and data on external debt, and to define steps to ensure the future transparency of all financial operations of the National Bank of Tajikistan."

Organised crime, drugs and human trafficking

Organised crime has been on the rise in Tajikistan ever since the civil war of the 1990s, when warlords of both sides started to engage in a booming smuggling business. As Rakhmon has appointed many of his former warlords to high government positions, there appear to be a large number of people involved in organised crime in official functions.

Whereas the borders of Tajikistan are mountainous and difficult to control, smuggling is fairly easy. Furthermore, Tajikistan borders Afghanistan, one of the biggest producers of opiate in the world. Drugs are smuggled via Tajikistan mainly to the CIS countries, although an increasing share of the drugs is destined for Western Europe.

The other main activity of organised crime networks in Tajikistan is human trafficking, primarily for prostitution. Many victims are snared with false offers to work abroad, which they accept due to the enormous poverty in the country that has made it relatively common use for Tajikistani to work outside the country.

The war in Afghanistan

The instability in Afghanistan is of great influence to Tajikistan. When the Taliban rose to power in the 1990's, this was an immediate reason for the international community to increase their efforts to stability in Tajikistan, fearing for a spillover effect. Although most Tajikistani are Muslim, there does not seem to be a particular interest in a theocratic state. However, the shared border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, which is difficult to control, causes a number of problems, especially in the light of the war on terrorism and current instability in Afghanistan.



Most worrying in this regard are illegal border crossings, which frequently take place for a number of reasons. First of all, Tajikistan is a major transit country of Afghan narcotics to the CIS countries and Western Europe. Secondly, there is a chance of extremists crossing borders, using Tajikistan as a base for their activities in Afghanistan. Large amounts of weapons also cross the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

The war in Afghanistan has also led to an increase in interest of the international community in Tajikistan because of its strategic position. In 2003, a cooperation agreement was signed between Tajikistan and the United States by which the U.S. were allowed to establish a military base in Tajikistan in exchange for aid.

Relations with Russia

Tajikistan has been a part of the Soviet Union ever since its creation as an autonomous republic in the 1920's until the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Tajikistan's independence in 1991. Having always been the poorest country of the Soviet Union, Tajikistan relied heavily on the old Soviet infrastructure and allocation models. The newfound independence caused the country's economy to collapse. The sudden drop in cooperation between the different former Soviet Union states rendered much of Tajikistan's infrastructure useless, including processing businesses that depended on raw materials from outside Tajikistan, as the country itself has only limited raw materials readily available.

Tajikistan has therefore relied heavily on the Russian Federation ever since its independence, and Russia has actively influenced Tajik policies, exerting influence both through cooperation and control. Until 2005, Russian troops have been responsible for guarding the Tajik-Afghan border, and Russian troops are still stationed in Tajikistan. Furthermore, Russia has actively intervened in the Tajik civil war from 1992-1997, in which they supported president Rakhmon against the United Tajik Opposition (UTO). However, towards the end of the civil war Russia decided to actively support the peace talks coordinated by the United Nations and as such contributed to a solution to the conflict. In 2003, tensions arose between Russia and Tajikistan over attempts by the government of Tajikistan to strengthen bilateral ties with the United States. However, the Russian military is still present in Tajikistan, having a base in Dunshabe, and cooperation between the two countries has not seriously been effected.

At the moment, Russia is one of Tajikistan's most important international partners through a number of organizations operating in the Former Soviet Countries such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russia is also an important trade partner to Tajikistan. Furthermore, Russia has agreed to write off 0 million of Tajikistan's state debt. Furthermore, by actively supporting his regime and legitimizing his presidency, Russia is of much importance to incumbent president Rakhmon.

Relations with other Central Asian States

Tajikistan borders two of the other four Central Asian States, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Of these, Uzbekistan is of most importance to Tajikistan. Prior to becoming an autonomous republic, Tajikistan was part of Uzbekistan. As such, the two states share a considerable common history. Tajikistan has a large ethnic minority grouping of Uzbeks, whereas a considerable number of Tajikistani is living in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, due to the network of infrastructure in the Central Asian Republics, some parts of Tajikistan are more integrated with Uzbekistan than with the rest of the country. Most noticeably this counts for Leninobod province, the former centre of power of Tajikistan and one of the richer parts of the country.

Furthermore, the Central Asian States cooperate collectively through a number of regional integration mechanisms, most noticeably the Eurasian Economic Community (EAEC), the Central Asian Cooperation Organisation (CACO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).



Relations with China

China is Tajikistan's biggest neighbour and is increasing its influence on Tajikistan both economically and politically. Cooperation between the two countries is developing gradually in a number of spheres, especially in trade, transport and military cooperation.

Currently, China and Tajikistan are working on a big infrastructural project, which aims to revive part of the Silk Road. Furthermore, China has heavily invested in a number of large building projects in Tajikistan, also aimed at increasing tourism in the region. Military cooperation is centred largely on the common border of China and Tajikistan, which extends 430 kilometres. The countries work together to bring a halt to illegal border crossings, in an attempt to stop radicalism and terrorism along the border.

However, China is also seeking to expand its territory into Tajikistan. The country has for long been unsatisfied regarding its borders in Central Asia, and due to its demographic pressure has a keen interest in expansion of its territory by annexing territory of neighbouring states. This has already happened in 2002, when China and Tajikistan concluded a border treaty in which Tajikistan agreed to transfer territory to China in an attempt to settle a long border dispute. Doubts have therefore risen over the exact motives for cooperation of China.

Much of the cooperation between China and Tajikistan takes place within the framework of multilateral organisations, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

Relations with the US

Washington's cooperation with the Tajikistani government signifies the importance of geo-strategical considerations over the US's aim of democratisation. Up until the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks in the US, interest in Tajikistan was very limited, due to the undemocratic nature of the countries' government. US interest focussed on democratisation of the country. Currently, US policy is aimed at preserving the status quo out of fear of further destabilising the region. Furthermore, Tajikistan is of central geo-strategic importance to the US-led 'war on terror' in neighbouring Afghanistan. This has paved the way for US cooperation with the Rakhmon government, in spite of Washington's strong reservations about the state of democracy in Tajikistan.

On 8 October 2001, Tajikistan-US intensified cooperation started with the opening of Tajikistan's airspace to the US air force for humanitarian operations in Afghanistan. This decision by the Rakhmon government immediately prompted Washington to donate a sum of million in aid funds to Tajikistan. In 2003, the US army started to operate from the Kulob airbase, maintaining a military presence of about 200 forces in the country. Since then, US military presence in Tajikistan has decreased again, but the two countries have remained their military cooperation, with the US having established counter-terrorism training facilities in Tajikistan.

Relations with the EU

Relations between Tajikistan and the European Union are structured along the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) that entered into force on 11 October 2004. Although the PCA was welcomed as a significant strengthening between the EU and Tajikistan, EU interest in the country has remained relatively little, which largely has to do with Tajikistan's poor record of democratisation. However, aid has been given to Tajikistan for a number of reasons, most noticeably the extreme poverty of the country and the country's peace-building and development process after the civil war. Furthermore, the EU seeks to help the Tajikistani government with the implementation of the PCA.

Although the EU's interest in the entire region of Central Asia has in the past been quite limited, there are chances for increased cooperation in the future. This has largely to do with the new geo-strategic importance of the region due to the 'war on terror', and with oil and gas present in the region. Current chair of the EU Germany has pledged to put more priority on the region, proposing to come with a new EU strategy on Central Asia. Draft versions of this strategy, which will outline EU policy towards the Central Asian Republics from 2007-2013, indicate an increased



cooperation with the political regimes, including the EU's aim to spend EUR 750 million in aid on the five republics, which will be allocated to projects officially sanctioned by the local regimes.

POLITICAL PARTIES

Opposition parties

Social Democratic Party (SDP)

Chairperson: Rahmatullo Zoirov

The Social Democratic Party is a vocal opposition party to president Rakhmon. It was founded in 2003 by former legal advisor the president Zoirov, who resigned in 2003 over the referendum that increased the possible presidential terms of Rakhmon until 2020. This was interpreted by Zoirov, as by many others, as an increasingly authoritarian approach by the incumbent president.

The Social Democratic party was founded on the remains of the Justice and Development Party, which was banned by the government in 2000. The party aims to establish (social) democracy and the rule of law and actively seeks to advocate human rights. Furthermore, the party actively seeks to establish a united opposition against president Rakhmon, being one of the initiators of the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections established in 2004, and proposing to come up with one single opposition presidential candidate in the 2006 elections. However, the other opposition parties did not support this last proposal.

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the Social Democratic Party allegedly received 0.7% of the votes, and subsequently failed to establish representation. Although the SDP initially planned to field a candidate in the 2006 elections, it decided in the end to boycott the elections due to the obvious fraud of the elections by the president and the government.

Islamic Revival Party (IRP)

Chairperson : Muhiddin Kabiri

The Islamic Revival Party (also known as the Islamic Renaissance Party) grew out of an underground youth organisation in 1978, and it is the only legally existing Islamic party in Central Asia. The party was banned in the 1990's during the power struggle between president Rakhmon and the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), of which the IRP was the (armed) backbone, but was legalised again in the June 1997 peace agreement and turned towards peaceful practices. During the first years after the Civil War, the IRP was the second largest party of the country, but its influence has steadily decreased due to the lack of power sharing by the incumbent president Rakhmon.

The party advocates for an Islamic state through peaceful, gradual change in Tajik laws. According to the IRP, the Islamic state should be achieved stage by stage and in accordance with the wishes of the people of Tajikistan, and within the framework of the constitution.

The IRP draws most support from the rural population. The party has a widespread network of local branches and seems to have relatively many financial means, even though being worked against by the authorities. It is the largest and most influential member of the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections established in 2004. During the 2005 parliamentary elections, the IRP received 8.9% of the votes, and was rewarded 2 out of 63 seats. The party decided to boycott the 2006 presidential elections due to the lack of democratic standards of the elections and the party's intern problems, caused by the IRP's long-term leader Said Abdullah Nuri's death in August 2006. In September 2006, Muhiddin Kabiri was chosen as the new party leader.



Socialist Party (SP)

Chairpersons: opposition faction: Narziyev / pro-government faction: Gaffarov

The Socialist Party was first registered in August 1996, and initially fought on the side of the government in the Tajik Civil War. However, after the civil war ended, the Socialist Party became more and more critical of president Rakhmon, and went into opposition.

The party aims for the establishment of a democratic political culture in Tajikistan and improved living conditions and economic standards for the population of the country. It was one of the initiators of the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections in 2004.

Initially, the Socialist Party existed only of one wing. However, in 2005 a split occurred within the party, allegedly orchestrated by the Tajik government fearing for the popularity of party leader Narziyev, the only possible candidate said to make a big chance if free and fair presidential elections would take place in 2006.

Vosiev, an advisor to president Rakhmon, then established a new faction within the party, led by his ally Abdulahim Gaffarov, who would later be the presidential candidate of the Socialist Party in the 2006 elections. In 2005, the Central Election Committee registered this faction of Gaffarov as the legal faction of the Socialist Party, and refused to register the initial party led by Narziyev. Gaffarov was thus registered as the legal head of the Socialist Party.

In the 2006 presidential elections, Gaffarov received 2.8% of the vote. He was, however, not a serious contestant, as his pro-Rakhmon candidacy merely served to legitimize the elections by providing a multiple candidate choice to the voters.

Currently, the SP is under threat of collapsing as a result of the government-orchestrated rift. It remains to be seen if the opposition faction led by Narziyev will be able to successfully register again in the future.

Democratic Party (DTP)

Chairperson: Masud Sobirov

The Democratic Party was founded in August 1990, and initially focussed on critique of the Communist Party and Soviet officials who retained control over Tajikistan. During the Tajik Civil War, the DTP was part of the United Tajik Opposition. In July 2005, part of the leadership, including then chairperson Yusuf, announced separation from the UTO. This decision was contested by other members of the DTP, and the party thus split into two factions: the Tehran platform of Yusuf, which elected Aman Afzali as its new chairperson, and the Almaty platform of Mahmadrusi Iskandarov.

In 1999, the DTP – Almaty platform was formally legalised after initial protests of the Ministry of Justice, which held that Tajik legislation prohibits the existence of two parties of the same name. The Almaty platform became the most active faction of the party and steadily grew to be the only Democratic Party, and in vocal opposition to president Rakhmon. The DTP aimed for ‘the establishment of a peaceful democracy’, which includes putting an end to the fraud presidency of Rakhmon and joined the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections in 2005.

In early 2005, in the run-up to the parliamentary elections, then DTP chairperson Iskandarov was charged with a number of crimes including terrorism, embezzlement, and illegal possession of firearms. During a lengthy process that extended through the rest of the year to October 2005, Iskandarov was found guilty and sentenced to 23 years imprisonment, despite the apparent lack of evidence for the charges brought against him.

Subsequently, the DTP boycotted the 2006 presidential elections due to the marked absence of democratic standards and anger over the constitutional changes enabling president Rakhmon to stay until power until 2020. Also, the DTP is not represented in parliament.



After the imprisonment of Iskandarov, the DTP's influence has declined rapidly. In 2006, Masud Sobirov established a new 'Vatan' (Motherland) faction within the party. This faction sought increasingly to gain the upper hand in the DTP. Although seen by most members of the DTP as an illegitimate splinter within the party, the Ministry of Justice of Tajikistan has registered Sobirov as the new leader of the DTP and refuses to recognize another leader.

Pro-government parties

People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan (PDP)
Chairperson: Emomalii Rakhmon

The People's Democratic Party of Tajikistan was formed during the Tajik Civil War in December 1994 as a pro-government party. In March 1998, President Rakhmon joined the party and was elected chair. The Party is currently the ruling party of Tajikistan, and has over the past years considerably increased its power over the country. Opposition parties, that were rewarded a 30% share of state functions within the framework of the 1997 Peace Agreement, have been pushed out of official functions in favour of PDP representatives.

During the fraud 2005 parliamentary elections, the PDP allegedly received 74.9% of the votes, and was appointed 52 out of 63 seats. President Rakhmon was re-elected in 2006 with an official 79.3% of the votes.

The PDP considers itself a centrist, parliamentary political party and aims "to unite all citizens of Tajikistan, regardless of language, ethnic affinity, social status or political beliefs ... for the establishment of rule of law and a sovereign, democratic and secular state".

Communist Party (CP)
Chairperson: Shodi Shabdolov

The present-day Communist Party of Tajikistan registered in March 1992. It was created on the base of the Communist Party of the Tajik SSR, which was formed in 1924 and was in power from then until 1990. However, in the 1990s, power was taken over by Rakhmon.

The stated aims of the Communist Party are the 'economic and social construction of the country after the Tajik Civil War'. This should be done within the framework of the 'traditional society based on collectivism, mutual help and respect of tradition and family values'. Furthermore, the CP opposes national or state oppression, and calls for a society based on the 'ideas of peace, justice, equality, brotherhood, cooperation and mutual help'. This would ultimately lead to a new social form, referred to as 'society socialism and communism'. The CP intends to take a neutral stance towards present-day power balances in Tajikistan. It does not necessarily support the regime, but it works together with the PDP in a number of districts.

In the 2005 parliamentary elections, the CP received 13.6% of the popular vote, and was rewarded 4 out of 63 seats. In the 2006 presidential elections, the CP fielded an opposition candidate to incumbent president Rakhmon. The candidate, MP Ismoil Talbokov, received only 5.1% of the votes in the fraud elections, in spite of being the only relatively well-known opposition candidate.

Party of Economic Reforms (PER)
Chairperson: Olimjon Boboyev

The Party of Economic Reforms was established by Olimjon Boboyev in autumn 2005, several months ahead of the



parliamentary elections. From the start, there have been strong allegations that the PER is a so-called 'pocket-organisation', a party loyal to the incumbent president and government, set up to create the idea of a multiparty-system and to distract the neutral and moderately-opposing voters from the real opposition. The problem-free registration of the party at the Ministry of Justice justifies this suspicion, especially since most opposition parties face mounting problems over registration. Also, since its start, the PER has refused to participate in the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections.

The PER has no clear ideology, but advocates for a genuine reform of the structure of the Tajik economy. According to the PER, such a reform is needed in order to support the growth of the economy, most noticeably in the manufacturing of finished products.

During the 2006 presidential elections, the PER fielded its head, the relatively unknown Olimjon Boboyev, as a candidate.

Agrarian Party (AP)
Chairperson: Amir Karakulov

The Agrarian Party was established by Amir Karakulov in autumn 2005, several months ahead of the parliamentary elections, in a similar fashion as the Party of Economic Reforms. It is therefore not surprising that similar allegations of the party being a pocket-organisation are voiced against the AP. Again, the problem-free registration of the party and the party's refusal to participate in the opposition Coalition for Free and Fair Elections serve to justify such suspicions.

The AP has no clear ideological outline, and mainly focuses on the issue of agricultural production. The party advocates for a halt in export of raw materials from Tajikistan, and for the country to switch to the production and export of finished products.

During the 2006 presidential elections the AP fielded its head, the relatively unknown Amir Karakulov, as a candidate.

Unregistered parties

Taraqqiyot – Development Party
Chairperson: Sultan Kuvvatov

Taraqqiyot was founded by Sultan Kuvvatov, who has unsuccessfully tried to register the party since 2001. Kuvvatov briefly was a presidential candidate in the 1999 elections, when he was still affiliated to the Democratic Party – Tehran platform, which later ceased to have any influence. In 2004, the Taraqqiyot headquarters were raided and Kuvvatov was charged with 'insulting the president of the country' and 'inciting interethnic and regional hatred', after he had announced his intentions to appeal to the International Court of Justice regarding the repeated refusal of the Tajik authorities to register the party. In 2005, Taraqqiyot deputy chairman Rustam Faiziyev was also detained on the same charges.

Taraqqiyot is an opposition party to president Rakhmon, but at the moment has little means to voice its critiques.

There exist a number of other unregistered parties, but they are mainly active on a regional level.

* N.B. Most people might know president Emomalii Rakhmon as Emomali Rakhmonov. He has, however, chosen to Turkesize his name as of March 2007, which has led to changes in the name.