

# **Political Islam in Central Asia – Opponent or Democratic Partner?**

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# Political Islam in Central Asia – Opponent or Democratic Partner?

## 0. Introduction

### 0.1. The Shadow of Afghanistan

The question of what security policy repercussions will result from the gradual transfer of political and military responsibility to the Afghan authorities from 2011, concerns foreign policy circles in the Central Asian states neighboring Afghanistan. Above all, they are worried about the consequences this could have for the power relationship between the Taliban and Tajik, Uzbek and other national groups in the north of Afghanistan and about which of them will gain the upper hand in the north. It has not been forgotten that the Taliban were once in power there from 1996/97 until 2001. The consequences even affected the neighboring countries. Thus, they influenced the settlement of the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and extremist Islamic powers, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IBU), created a military hinterland. From there, they invaded Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000 and provoked bloody battles. Right up to the present day, the Taliban grant these powers refuge and tolerate their raids into neighboring Central Asian states.

### 0.2. The domestic potential for conflict

The overriding concern in the Central Asian states is, however, of a domestic nature: At least in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, we are dealing with a significant potential for conflict, including an extremist Islamic underground. No one knows exactly how strong this is. However, considering the high backlog of socioeconomic and political problems in these countries, one must take into account that they can fall back on a significant mobilization potential in the Muslim majority population. That this underground is aiming at a violent change in the power relationships is sufficiently known. Renewed domination by the Taliban in Afghanistan – even if it is only in the northern part of the country – could contribute to its mobilization.

The situation becomes more explosive as a result of the lack of a moderate Islamic counterweight to the extremist orientation. Such a counterweight must be built up by reformist powers aiming for the consolidation of their new states. There are such powers – we met them at our symposia in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Mostly they belong to the younger generation and are characterized by a symbiosis of their professions of Islamic values and national interests. That they are of no political consequence, is due primarily to the fact that the secular rulers block the way to their having status as legal political actors. Only in Tajikistan has the “Party of Islamic Rebirth” (PIWT) been able to (successfully) fight for a legal status through the agreements on ending the Civil War; it is represented in Parliament as the opposition party. But it, too, continues to be faced with considerable resistance from the state powers. However, since the extremist underground cannot be done away

with, without the establishment of genuine alternative Islamic movements, there is no alternative to its legalization as a political actor and its inclusion in the national dialogue.

In a broader perspective, it matters that the “Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian Security Community”, which was declared for the first time at the December 2010 OSCE Summit, cannot be realized as long as we do not succeed in upgrading the relationship to the “Islamic factor” politically to a *modus vivendi* in the sense of peaceful co-existence. This is particularly the case for the critical space of the Caucasus, the Caspian Basin and Central Asia.

### 0.3. Challenge for Europe

This challenge could bring together all those powers who are interested in maintaining stability in the Eurasian space: secular and reformist Islamic powers in the region, the European body politic in general and especially the OSCE as the only comprehensive Eurasian organization for security and cooperation. They should concentrate first on finding solutions for those problems whose causes lie in more or less subjective and, therefore, changeable positions. Essentially, this involves the harmonization of relationships between the secular state power and Islamic institutions such as mosques, madrasses, universities, political parties and movements. In an initial step, this means confidence-building, the reduction of the enormous mutual mistrust and the complete guarantee of religious freedom.

Furthermore, the fundamental question about the relationship to political Islam in the Eurasian space needs to be clarified. A productive approach to dealing with this must take into account the multiplicity of interests, civilizing characteristics and religions as well as national and ethnic interests. Islam is not only a religious, but also a socio-political dimension, which cannot be excluded from political life. The OSCE could play an important role in the creation of such an understanding. But to do so, it must go beyond its current approach, which limits itself to concentrating on the guaranteeing of freedom of religion within the framework of general human rights. Without in the least curtailing the importance of religious freedom, it could be asked how the Islamic factor can become an element of the cooperative security and stability strategy of the OSCE

The present *Working Paper* is aimed at securing understanding for such an approach. We have no intention of presenting a detailed empirical analysis of Islamic political organizations or of Islamism in Central Asia. Rather, we want to examine the tendency of a rapidly increasing appeal of political Islam in Central Asia and its causes. Subsequently, we will analyze the effects of this on secular-Islamic relations and apply ourselves to the question of how this could be reformed in a constructive, stability-oriented sense. Thereby we will draw on experience which the Center for OSCE Research (CORE) at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg, as well as the author personally, have gathered over ten years of secular-Islamic dialogue work in the region.

# 1. On the Development of (political) Islam in Central Asia

## 1.1. Islam, political Islam, Islamism, Islamic Factor – Definitions

In this study, the term “*Islamic factor*” is used as a generalized technical term. It incorporates pragmatic Islam, political Islam, the Muslim population, Islamic organizations, parties and movements. Thereby, at the same time, we avoid a certain vagueness in the definition of the term “*political Islam*”<sup>1</sup> which can be observed in both the western and the Islamic discourse.

In the Islamic context, also including our Central Asian activities, we have been confronted both with the rejection of this term (“There is only one, indivisible Islam”) and its conscious articulation (“Islamists”). For pragmatic reasons, we wanted to bypass this dispute by coming to an understanding with the Islamic partners on a common terminology – as “political representatives of Islam”. Our Islamic colleagues, who initially rejected the term “political Islam”, were able to live with this compromise. They agreed to it conscious of the fact that they, as the political representatives of Islam, must advocate for their religion in a unity of religious and political goals *and* means. Thereby, they saw themselves in harmony with the holistic religious and societal perception of “their Islam” in accordance with which the godly cannot be separated from the worldly and religion cannot be separated from the political.

Strictly speaking, there is, consequently, no apolitical Islam. Thus with the use of the term “political Islam”, we also emphasize terminologically the central element without thereby neglecting the holistic nature of Islam. For, whoever ascribes to Islam – as also to other religions – a peacemaking, humanistic power, may not deny it the possibility of articulating itself politically as well.

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1 The term, political Islam (al-islam as-siyāsī) is interpreted in different ways. It is used for such political groups, “which want the state to introduce Islamic law, as recorded in the Koran and in the tradition on the acts and words of the Prophet Mohammed and expand it to all areas of public and political dealings” Stefan Wild, *Islam und Moderne*, in: *Wirtschaft und Wissenschaft*, 4/1997, p. 16. Steinberg and Hartung determined that „Islamism denotes the same as the equally widespread terms ‘political Islam’, ‘fundamentalism’ or – mostly used in the French-speaking world – ‘integrism’. [...] As a rule, Islamists differ from non-Islamist Muslims in that they preach their own interpretation of Islam as a political program and equate the positions of those who are of a different opinion with unbelief – at least implicitly.” Guido Steinberg/Jan-Peter Hartung, *Islamistische Gruppen und Bewegungen*, in: Werner Ende/Udo Steinbach, *Der Islam in der Gegenwart*, 5th printing, Munich 2005, p. 681–695, here: p. 681. The Russian orientalist, Vitaly Naumkin, Director of the Orient-Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the Russian Federation, defines “political Islam” in the sense, that “religion and politics are inseparable from each other, which is reflected in the concept of the Islamic state”. Vitaly Naumkin, *Islamski radikalizm v zerkale novych koncepci i podchodov* [Islam in the Face of new Concepts and Approaches], Moscow 2005, p. 8 (this and all further citations from the Russian are my own translations). Alexei Malaschenko of the Carnegie-Center Moscow defines Islamism in this way: „Islamism – that is not a sickness of Islam, but rather an on-going reaction to lost history [...] Islamism – that is at the same time political action as well as a mass consciousness and naturally an ideology.” Alexei Malašenko, *Islamskaja alternativa i islamističeski proekt* [The Islamic Alternative and the Islamist Project], Moscow 2006, p. 201.

## 1.2. The growing influence of Islam among the population

In the year 2000, 63 percent of the Kazakh, 82 percent of the Uzbek and 79 percent of the Tajik population professed the principle “there is no God besides Allah.”<sup>2</sup> The majority of the Muslims professed their belief in the Hanafi school of Islam, with the exception of the Shiite Islamists of Pamir in Tajikistan.<sup>3</sup> It can be assumed that the aforementioned information is out of date and the adherence to Islam has grown significantly since then. In Tajikistan, some 94.8% of the population considers itself Muslim according to the results of newer sociological studies by Saodat Olimowa and Musaffar Olimow.<sup>4</sup> Both come to the conclusion that the “ad valorem significance of religion has increased remarkably. Islam comes into its own in Tajik society primarily as a moral value system, as convictions and views, which determine the self-worth of the individual.” According to Olimowa/Olimow, 96% of those they surveyed let the decisions they make be guided by religious considerations. They estimate the religious activities of the population as comparatively high. 73.7% of their respondents visit the mosque relatively regularly, 50% pray 5 times a day and 76.2% fast during Ramadan.<sup>5</sup>

The Islamization of the population is expressed not only in numbers, but also in the growing readiness to follow Islamic behavioral rules.<sup>6</sup> Thus shopkeepers in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are willing to accept financial losses by stopping the sale of alcoholic drinks. In some areas of the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek, young believers watch out that the laws of Islamic slaughter are being observed. One can find the first few restaurants which no longer serve alcoholic drinks on the grounds that that “does not conform to the rules of the Koran.” Weddings in accordance with Islamic custom, the wearing of the Islamic headscarf and observing Islamic holidays are

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2 Cf. Central Asians Differ on Islam’s Political Role, but Agree on a Secular State, Department of State, Office of Research, Opinion Analysis, 6 July 2000, M-95-00.

3 The Hanafi law school in Islam goes back to Abū Hanifa (d. 767). It is widespread primarily in Turkey, Central Asia and the Indian subcontinents. “Besides the four legal bases of the Koran, sunna (the second source of religious dealings according to the Koran), *ijmā’* (consensus) and *qiyās* (argument by analogy), the Hanafites recognize two additional means of finding justice: the *ra’y*, personal communication, customary from time immemorial, as well as the *istihsān*, that which is considered an appropriate solution with respect to society” Steinberg/Hartung, loc. cit. (Note 1), p. 65. Ismailis, also known as the Sevener Shias: At the heart of this teaching “stands the clear distinction between the generally accepted revealed writings available to all believers [...] and the religious commandments laid down in them [...] and those unchanging truths, hidden in the writings and laws. This is made accessible through an interpretation of cabbalistic nature.” The historically most significant Ismaili dynasty was the Fatimid (909-1171). Today the Ismailis are led by Karim Aga Khan. Ismailis live in countless countries of the Near East and Middle East, India, Afghanistan and in Islamic Africa. Their affiliation with Islam is contested primarily by Sunni Muslims. Cf. Ralf Elger (Ed.), *Kleines Islam-Lexikon*, Munich 2008, p. 148/149.

4 Interview with Saodat Olimowa and Musaffar Olimow of the research center “Shark” in Dushanbe, December 2010. The chairman of the Tajik “Committee for Religious Matters”, Abdurrahim Cholikow, in an interview with the news agency, Asia Plus, on 11 July 2011, estimated the number of Muslims in Tajikistan at 7.5 million, which would correspond to the total population of the country. The interview is available at: <http://news.tj/ru/news/ne-stoit-sozdavat-stereotipy-cho-to-v-tadzhikistane-vse-zapreshcheno>.

5 Interview with Olimowa/Olimow, loc. cit., (Note 4).

6 Ibid.

increasing everywhere. National business organizations donate to Islamic institutions and the practice of Islamic banking is becoming increasingly widespread. Also the growing influence of Islam is no longer limited only to the socially less well-off population sectors, but is spreading in student circles, among the intelligentsia as well as in the small and middle entrepreneurship. Above all, however, it encompasses the majority rural population.

In Kyrgyzstan, which was formerly considered to be traditionally less religious, “the bulk of the population [...] between 30 and 64 years of age, tend today to identify with a nationally oriented Islam.”<sup>7</sup> And even in Kazakhstan, which was considered to be less receptive to Islam, sociological studies meanwhile refer to the “increased value of the scope and the depth of piety among the population.”<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, it is said there: “A growing number of not-yet ideologically consolidated youth and school children fall under the influence of preachers of a fundamentalist Islam [...] Within a foreseeable time, this can lead to the alienation of segments of the economic and politically important population potential of Kazakhstan and to the creation of a new generation of religious fanatics.”<sup>9</sup>

All in all the appeal of Islam to the population is increasing markedly and is shaping their ideological and also, to some extent, their sociopolitical concepts.<sup>10</sup> No less important, however, is the reverse of this process: the more broadly Islam becomes socially rooted, the thinner becomes the secular layer, which was artificially applied from the outside during the Soviet period and upon which the secular state understanding of the ruling elites, as well as that of significant parts of the secular intelligentsia, is based. In other words: The social bases of secularism are being thinned out. The integration of Islam into the society as an ideological and sociopolitical factor makes it a constitutive element of the state building processes of young states, which are, by no means, complete. This new quality, which meanwhile characterizes the Islamic factor, can no longer be ignored.

### 1.3. Transformation and Islamization

The ascent of Islam in Central Asia is not primarily the result of agitation of missionaries. Rather, it is the result of a series of intertwined economic, political and

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7 Aman Saliev, *Sovremennaja rol' islama v obščestvennom političeskom prostranstve Kyrgyskoi Respubliki*, [The Role of Islam in the sociopolitical Space of the Kyrgyz Republic], Moscow 2009, p. 122–153.

8 A.G. Kosičenko/W.D. Kurganskaja/A.N. Nasynbaeva, *Vzaimootnošenie religi v Respublike Kasachstan, Naučno-issledovatel'ski otčot, Zentr gumanitarnych issledovani* [Religious Relationships in the Republic of Kazakhstan: Research Report of the Center for Humanitarian Research], Almaty 2006, p. 35.

9 Ibid.

10 The Kazakh study cited above confirms this: “The role of religion [...] appears most clearly from day to day in the spheres of values and morals. The believers want their influence to increase further, especially in this respect. At the same time they welcome the fact that religion is making itself felt more strongly in the cultural and social area, but does not include politics.” Kosičenko/Kurganskaja/Nasynbaeva, loc. cit., (Note 8), p. 153.

historical factors. In this connection it should be kept in mind that Central Asia was historically counted among the most eminent centers of Islamic religion and teaching. Even during the Soviet period, Islam continued to live as a “system of religious moral principles and daily ritual exercises” which was also seen as “definitely an alternative to the existing system.”<sup>11</sup> This means that the social basis of Islam never completely dried up. However, the fact that its “reanimation” could occur at an historically unprecedented tempo of only twenty years, can be attributed, to a great degree, to the transformation processes in Central Asia which the West decisively influenced.

The complicated character of transformation and state building in Central Asia arises from the overlapping of three processes: first, the transformation from the Soviet system to a capitalist market economy, second, the creation, for the first time, of modern states in Central Asia, and third, the search for national identities. The concurrence and the mutual suffusion of these processes create internal contradictions and societal tensions. Hereby, the specific transformation approach of the West and its international financial institutions played an aggravating role. These aimed at reshaping all political, economic and societal systems in, as it were, a “frontal attack” with simultaneous transformations in order to adapt them to the western model. The former US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, characterized this frontal strategy in a lecture in 2000 in Tashkent with the words: “The best method of taking a bitter pill is to swallow it whole.”<sup>12</sup>

Right up to the present day, most of the Central Asian societies have been unable to cope with this shock therapy. The “revolutionary installation of an entrepreneur class”<sup>13</sup> through the sweeping privatization of state enterprises and cooperative property, the forcing through of neoliberal market instruments, as well as the almost complete liquidation of the social security systems, were so destructive that poverty has, meanwhile, become the major social problem in Central Asia. Today, the entire region is confronted with a fundamental deterioration of the social living conditions. Thereby, it is not only the individual negative parameters, such as low per capita income, great poverty, high unemployment or poor social security systems that are of consequence. Rather, this is about the qualitative leap into mass social exclusion and division in the societies. In a 2011 evaluation of the social development indicators in the period since the beginning of the transformation, the UNDP describes these profound effects in as follows:

*“The Social Exclusion Index shows that people in Central Asia face a particularly high risk of social exclusion. Economic growth has not led to the creation of decent jobs for the large rural populations of Central Asia, leading to widespread underemployment, large concentrations of rural poverty, and the emergence of labour migration – internal and external – as a dominant coping mechanism. Economic exclusion, in turn, contributes to exclusion from social services, due to the inability of the people with low-incomes to make*

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11 Rainer Freitag-Wirminghaus, Rußland, islamische Republiken des Kaukasus und Zentralasiens, in: Ende/Steinbach, loc. cit. (Note 1), p. 277–304, here: p. 282.

12 Speech by Secretary of State, Madeleine K. Albright, at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, Tashkent, 7. April 2000 (author’s own translation).

13 Claus Offe, *Der Tunnel am Ende des Lichts. Erkundungen der politischen Transformation im Neuen Osten*, Frankfurt/M. 1994, p. 60.

*informal payments, which augment the extremely low shares of GDP spent on health. Economic exclusion is in many cases being passed on to future generations, as urban/rural differences mean, for example, that children are denied access to decent secondary schooling, and may face pressures to stay at home to help with the household. Younger children lack access to pre-school education, which would help give them a good start and make up for disadvantages they may face at subsequent levels of education. Lack of investment in social infrastructure has left rural populations without guaranteed reliable sources of energy, heating, or running water, compounding income and employment insecurities.”<sup>14</sup>*

According to this report, 32 percent of the population in Kazakhstan and 72 percent in Tajikistan are currently considered to be “socially excluded”.<sup>15</sup>

An extensive “informal work sector” has developed, which already comprises more than 50 percent of the labor market in Central Asia.<sup>16</sup> Those employed in it work without formal employment contracts, insurance or pension rights. The latter means that poverty will expand even more in the future. It is from this social stratum that residents of slum-like developments on the outskirts of the city, which surround the urban centers with their potential social crisis zones and their often mixed ethnic composition having a high potential for conflict, are recruited

From the background of this socially problematic situation, the turning of the young generation to Islam and to Islamic forms of opposition increases in significance. The Central Asian states have an ever-younger population, which, on average, grows by 1.7 percent annually and within which meanwhile, 30 percent are younger than 15 years of age. This structural problem becomes apparent, first and foremost, in youth unemployment, which is estimated to be over 20 percent in the Central Asian states, with the exception of Kazakhstan.<sup>17</sup> A quarter of the Kazakh population has been born since 1991. In Kazakhstan, 33 percent of children (0-14 years) and 28 percent of youth (15-29 years) are social excluded; in Tajikistan it is 73 and 72 percent.<sup>18</sup> In 2005, the percentage of children in households with an income of less than 2.5 USD a day per capita was 90 percent in Kyrgyzstan, 80 percent in Uzbekistan and 75 percent in Tajikistan.<sup>19</sup> The proportion of the 15-29 year olds among the 1.5 million Tajik labor migrants is 53 percent.<sup>20</sup> Of the unemployed in Tajik agricultural sector, 83.6% are under 40 years of age.<sup>21</sup>

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14 United Nations Development Programme, Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS, Beyond Transition. Towards Inclusive Societies, UNDP Regional Human Development Report, Bratislava 2011, p. 50, at: <http://europeandcis.undp.org/home/show/BCD10F8F-F203-1EE9-BB28DEE6D70B52E1>. The report summarizes under “social exclusion”: “poverty, lack of basic competencies, limited employment and educational opportunities, as well as inadequate access to social and community networks and activities.” (Ibid, p. 8).

15 Cf. Ibid, p. 38.

16 Cf. Ibid, p. 25.

17 Cf. Andrea Schmitz/Alexander Wolters, Revolutionen in Zentralasien? Der „Arabische Frühling“ als Herausforderung für die Region, in: Zentral-Asien Analysen 43-44/2011, p. 2-5, here: p. 2.

18 Cf. UNDP Regional Human Development Report, op. loc. (Note 14), p. 43.

19 Cf. Ibid., p. 18.

20 Cf. Chojamachmad Umarov, Krisis v Tadžikistane [The Crisis in Tajikistan], Dushanbe 2010, p. 217.

21 Cf. Ibid., p. 218.

When making a realistic appraisal of Islamic politicization, this unacceptable quality of life for the population also requires keeping in mind the social basis, which arises from the sociopolitical consequences of the transformation development. This is also an important aspect because it protects us from the illusion that the social basis of Islamization can be done away with in the foreseeable future. This is illusory because the consequences of that radical transformation moved significant segments of the population to seek refuge in particular traditional structures, which are the only ones that still offer the ordinary population a certain degree of social security, personal honor and dignity. This has also stimulated the strong revitalization of the entire system of clans and extended families in the last decade and a half.<sup>22</sup> Integral components of these structures are madrases, private Koran schools and other questionable forms of providing an Islamic education, which is characterized mostly by its low intellectual level and even its underground character. There, both *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*<sup>23</sup> and *Salafiyya*<sup>24</sup>, with their agitation for social justice - supported by the critical socioeconomic conditions - and against violence and corruption, await the people. From them, the believers also learn about Islamic alternatives, Islamic asceticism and Islamic ways of life.

The majority of the population was at the mercy of a development – not only in an economic but also in a political sense - that they could not influence. They were given no opportunity to have a democratic say in the decisions about the sociopolitical orientation of their young state, about the character of its political order or about other reforms. The political control of the transformation processes lay with powers which did not aim at a more just society either from a social or from a political perspective. The new political power, like its Soviet predecessor, remained undemocratic. It proved to be centralized, authoritarian and, only in a limited sense, pluralistic and was unable to provide any national identity-giving ideology. In the

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22 “The strong tradition of family or ‘clan’ ties and community structures [...] became more important [...] during transition. [...] they also contributed to the non-transparent capture of political and economic power by various clans. Appointments to positions of political and economic responsibility tend to be allocated on the basis of trust and patronage, rather than through competitive selection. [...] Power structures are based on a delicate balancing of the allocation of privileges and power between clan structures to maintain political and social stability and the lack of dissent by rival clans. Apart from contributing to political exclusion, this balancing arguably contributes to the inability of economies to benefit from the efficiencies of market systems. It also encourages a preference for economic growth models that guarantee rents (unearned income) and control over rent allocation to people in privileged positions.” UNDP Regional Human Development Report, loc. cit. (Note 14), p. 50.

23 The *Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami* (“Islamic Freedom Party”) is a radical Islamic movement oriented to the idea of the establishment of an Islamic caliphate in Central Asia and, up until now, uses non-violence. “The protest by HuT [Hizb ut-Tahrir] against the government is not, however, only of a religious nature. Many young people see in the Islamic opposition, the only possibility to express their will and to show their dissatisfaction with the social situation. The government, on the other hand, uses HuT [...] as a ‘bogeyman’ and a symbol for Islamic terror” Marie-Carin von Gumpfenberg/Udo Steinbach (Eds.), *Zentralasien: Ein Lexikon*, Munich 2004, p. 303.

24 The *Salafiyya* is a movement of Reform Islam, which declares the „first Muslims [...] as a model for a new Muslim community. Thereby, it does not mean that the life of the original Islamic community should be restored but rather that the ‘spirit’ of these Muslims should be taken up to establish an order that is appropriate in the present. The Salafiyya became an inspiration for countless reformists and fundamentalists in the Islamic world.” *Kleines Islam-Lexikon* 2008, loc. cit. (Note 3) p. 284

area of religion, it continued the old Soviet understanding of secularism. That separates the state from the religion of its population, while the original European understanding of secularism separates state and *church* as institutions from each other.<sup>25</sup> The new secular state subjugated religious life, regimented religious freedom and perceived Islamic political representatives as opponents.

#### 1.4. The Politicization of Islam

Under these conditions, politicization of broad sectors of the population is virtually unavoidable. It can, therefore, be understood as a “normal” phenomenon. Thereby, it is not the politicization of the religious sphere that proves to be the central problem, but rather its *radicalization*, which can lead to a violent societal conflict. One can agree with expert opinions, which assume that the politicization of the religious sphere “was caused primarily by social factors and not managing elementary development problems [...] for lack of will and the inability [...] of the state power to solve the problems growing out of backwardness, poverty, unemployment and corruption. The border regions to Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz and Tajik parts of the Fergana Valley, the north and west of Tajikistan, the south of Kazakhstan and the western parts of Kyrgyzstan are particularly affected by this.”<sup>26</sup> The Kyrgyz participants at the CORE Symposium in November 2008 in Bishkek were of the opinion that “a struggle over ‘the Islam resource’ has broken out and the process of its politicization cannot be stopped. Rather, one is confronted with the question of which side better understands how to use this resource for its own ends: internal or external powers. Fears of a confrontation between the state power and religion were assessed as real. In the mid-term (5–7 years) it may be expected that subversive tendencies could gain the upper hand. Considering the inevitability of such a development, the most important task would be steering the politicization of religious circles into peaceful channels.”<sup>27</sup>

In addition to religious freedom, the social question is the central driving force for relevant segments of the population in their search for an alternative to their critical living conditions. “The growing protest potential among ordinary people is less politically than socially colored” observed Kadyr Malikow, the director of the Kyrgyz Independent Analytical Research Center on Religion, Law and Policy. The people “do not support primarily political solutions, such as those for democracy or human rights. In the first instance, it is about the daily concerns that every citizen

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25 “Secularization, in the original sense a legal-political term, denotes the state take-over from the 16th to the 19th century of property, territories or institutions in church hands [...] In an everyday political sense, secularization today means the strict separation of state and church, but in no way an anti-religious society. [...] Fundamentally, it means that secularized societies have individualized the search for meaning and self-assertion.” Peter Precht/Franz-Peter Burkard (eds.), *Metzlers Philosophie-Lexikon*, 2nd expanded edition, Stuttgart/Weimar 1999, p. 520.

26 Moskovski gosudarstvennyj universitet imeni Lomonosova, *učonnye zapiski*, Vypusk 1 [Lomonosov Moscow State University, *Scientific Communications*, Vol. 1], Moscow, 2008, p. 19

27 CORE, *Gute Regierungsführung in säkular verfassten Staaten mit muslimischen Bevölkerungsmehrheiten in Zentralasien*, Bishkek [Good Governance in Secular States with Muslim Majorities in Central Asia, Bishkek 15–16 November 2008 (Project Report)].

understands – the survival and well-being of the family. [...] It is about taking into consideration that the memory of the ‘Soviet past’ with its ideology of ‘general equality of all jobs’, ‘equal and just division of the social product’, ‘of state property’ lives on in them. [...] It is only natural that the social demands change, sooner or later, into political ones. Thus, the current protests have an extremely important aspect: The political solutions which are now moving to the forefront<sup>28</sup> are supported on a sound basis – on social and economic demands. What must be understood is that, over time, it is exactly this social protest that can solidify into an ideological movement”.<sup>29</sup>

The politicization of the religious sphere is, thereby, first and foremost, a sociopolitical answer in religious form to the unresolved social questions. These represent the primary driving force which motivates and mobilizes the population. With his appraisal, Malikow draws attention to an important development: The search by the population for a way out of their critical social situation takes on religious forms of expression in an initial protest step which, in a second step, can solidify into advocacy for political goals. There is no question but that government policy can have a lasting influence on this process, which will be dealt with below. Of interest at this point, however, is the question of the parameters which influence the quality shift from deepening of piety to politicization.

Turning to religion as a reaction to poverty, misery and a lack of social prospects has, for centuries, been a well-known phenomenon. Thereby, it always depends on the relationship in which the religious element stands to the social driving forces and possible political forms of expression. For Central Asia, it should be noted that political Islam has, up until now, not so much instrumentalized the available social energy by, for instance, mobilizing believers to (find) solutions to the social questions. In this respect, what Freitag-Wirringhaus wrote in 2006 is (still) appropriate. “Generally there is no possibility that the Islamists in the region might come to power.”<sup>30</sup> Currently, the primary direction of the Islamization process lies rather in a deepening of piety. This means, that the social questions (apart from the struggle for religious freedom) in fact, play a great role in the turn to Islam, but have not yet become a driving force for the political mobilization of believers. Also the representatives of political Islam have, up until now, not started any offensive to transform the secular state into an Islamic state.

In practice, concrete parties, politicians and activists embody the term “political Islam”. It is a question now of the way in which these actors differ in their goals and intentions. The answer to this can be found in the orientation to a deepening or “purifying” of their piety, on the one hand, or in their political instrumentalisation on the other hand. Both can be connected with one another, but smart politics can keep them separate, as will be shown in the example of the former Chairman of the

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28 Referring to the mass protests in Bishkek in April 2010, which led to the fall of President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and the clashes in South Kyrgyzstan in June 2010.

29 Kadyr Malikov, *Vozmožnye očertanija idejno-političeskogo i religioznogo processa v Kyrgyzstane* [Possible Contours of the ideological-political Processes in Kyrgyzstan], 23 March 2010, at: <http://www.analitika.org/article.php?story=20100323070158800>.

30 Freitag-Wirringhaus, loc. cit. (Note 11), p. 306.

PIWT, Said Abdullo Nuri. A clear example for this ambivalence between devoutness and potential political mobilization are the angry young Tajiks, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, who, as labor migrants, must sell their labor for miserable remuneration in Russia to be able to feed their families at home.<sup>31</sup> They pray together in the mosques in Moscow. The anger about their situation could act as a catalyzer, which connects the social question and Islam in an explosive mix, whose representatives these young men could potentially become one day.

The Russian Islamic scholar, Malašenko expresses the ambivalence of the instrumentalization of Islam in this way: “In Islam two directions emerge: moderate Islamic pragmatists who take their place in the arrangement of national or local political groupings and work politically in a practical way. On the other hand, there is a radical, extremist direction, whose adherents consciously fight for unrealistic goals, such as the creation of a caliphate, and are prepared to attack tirelessly using the most brutal means up to and including terrorism.”<sup>32</sup> It is in this dichotomy that the reason for the deepening piety lies and will, for an indefinite period, (continue to) be the primary area of competition among the Islamic powers, who struggle for hegemony over the direction of belief and its instrumentalization. A further factor in the battle over hegemony is the lack of understanding by the secular elite. For them, the area of deepening piety is an intellectual and emotional *Terra incognita*.

### 1.5. The Reaction of the Secular Powers

The secular governments affect the processes described above to a great degree. Thereby, it is only with difficulty that they grasp the connections between social driving forces, deepening religious awareness and potential mobilization. Influential segments of the secular intelligentsia have not distanced themselves from anti-religious and anti-Islamic views. They understand religion – unchanged – as the “opium of the people.”<sup>33</sup> The governments do certainly send their secret services into the religious sphere – mostly with repressive missions. But the governments concentrate their attention – shortsightedly – on the segment of politicization of the

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31 In the boom years of 2004–2008 ca. 500,000–800,000 Kyrgyz, 600,000 Tajiks (here the details vary up to 1.5 million, cf. Note 20) and more than two million Uzbeks left their homelands in search of work. Of these, about 60 percent of the Uzbeks, 80 percent of the Kyrgyz and 90 percent of the Tajiks work in Russia. In 2008, the estimated volume of wire transfers to Tajikistan represented 49 percent of the gross national product (GNP). In Kyrgyzstan it was 27 percent and in Uzbekistan 13 percent. The enormous significance of this becomes clear when one notes that these have a much greater volume than official development aid payments and foreign direct investments. According to a survey (2007) among labor migrants in various Russian cities, 17–29 percent of their families at home were fully dependent on the money transfers, 35–50 percent received half their income this way and 11–26 percent a quarter. Cf. Brigitte Heuer, *Harte Zeiten für Arbeitsmigranten. Auswirkungen der globalen Rezession auf die Arbeitsmigration*, in: *Zentral-Asien Analysen* 29/2010, p. 2–6, here: p. 2, 4.

32 Malašenko, loc. cit., (Note 1), p. 201.

33 That represents the distorted Marxist formulation of the term “religion” in the Soviet functionary training. In the original, Marx said of religion that it was “the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, as well as the soul of soulless conditions. It is the opium of the people.” Karl Marx, *Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie*, in: *Karl Marx/Friedrich Engels, Ausgewählte Werke*, Berlin 1972, Vol. I, p. 10.

religious sphere and try, on the pretext of the fight against terrorism, to subjugate the religious area, to control it and to prosecute Islamic activists.<sup>34</sup> The result is predictable: It will be further Islamic radicalization.

This approach is shortsighted because the power apparatuses, with their repression, also force pragmatists, who have made their peace with the secular state character and are democratically oriented both in their political behavior and out their own experiences, into a corner. The most relevant example for this is the abovementioned PIWT. It recognizes the secular character of Tajikistan and professes democracy and parliamentarianism. Nevertheless, the secular state power, by “allotting” it only two Parliament seats, denies it representation commensurate with the unofficial estimate of a 30 to 35 percent share of the vote in the Parliamentary elections of 2010 (with which it would be the second strongest parliamentary power after the presidential party).

## **2. Consequences for Governing in the Central Asian States**

### **2.1. Changed political parameters**

In Tajikistan the PIWT is recognized as the most influential opposition party. In Kyrgyzstan, the fact that Muslim circles, for the first time, articulated the demand to found a party or a movement can be counted among the most important results of the April revolt in 2010. In Kazakhstan as well, Muslim activists have announced that they want to create – in the foreseeable future – a pro-Islamic party of the type of the Turkish Islamic Justice and Development Party. On the relevance of Uzbekistan for the Islamization process in Central Asia, one can agree with Naumkin when he writes: “Uzbekistan is of central importance for the prospects of Islam in Central Asia.”<sup>35</sup> Here political Islam is subjected to the harshest persecution. Its adherents wait in the underground for a “moment of weakness” in the hated regime. Such a moment could already occur if the question of a successor to the president were raised. What impulses for the mobilization of political Islam in Central Asia would arise from such a moment, no one can predict. A prognosis would be even more difficult if that “moment of weakness” in the Uzbek regime were to coincide with the inability of the Western alliance to launch a political stabilization process in Afghanistan, which also included relevant Taliban circles. Altogether, a high level of political uncertainty is derived alone from the fact that NATO cannot win the first great military test in its history – and that, of all things, against an anti-Western resistance movement from the Islamic world, which takes careful note of this fact.

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34 A detailed description of the government’s method of dealing with the „Islamic challenge“ can be found in: Vitaly Naumkin, *The Years that Changed Central Asia*, Moscow 2009 (Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Science), p. 241–295.

35 Vitaly V. Naumkin, *Radical Islam in Central Asia: Between Pen and Rifle*, Lanham 2005, p. 264.

The Russian Central Asian expert, Irina Swjagelskaja, concludes: "The states of Central Asia are facing a prospect in which the influence of political Islam will spread and new forms of its interaction with the secular power will appear. [...] Because Islam will remain the most important factor of national and political life, one cannot count on its weakening."<sup>36</sup> This new quality of Islamic factors will play a role in shaping the parameters of the political space of Central Asia and should be borne in mind, both by the regional rulers as well as in European politics.

## 2.2. Effects on the political powers in Central Asia

As a result of the transformation and state-building processes to date, it can be said that the exercise of political power in Central Asia in the future will be inextricably connected with the Islam factor. The relationship to Islam is becoming the Achilles' heel of the secular state power because Islam can offer a much broader basis for national identity creation than the separate state and religion understanding of secularism. At the CORE Symposium in Almaty in December 2007 it was unanimously agreed by Islamic and secular participants that "the secularism concept practiced by the ruling elites would not be suited either to the Muslim character of the majority population nor to the tempo at which the revitalization of Islam, under the pressure of internal contradictions and external influence factors, is progressing. None of the elite in power had been capable, up until then, of developing a consolidating national identity concept in keeping with the degree of fragmentation of the Central Asian societies and states."<sup>37</sup>

Thereby, the old surviving Soviet understanding of secularism finds itself in a crisis of legitimacy. Consequently, for the secular state power, adaptation to the Islam factor and its representatives will be a condition for its political survival.

In this new position the usual control instruments are also exhausted and the governmental resource of repression has proved to be ineffective. On the other hand, there are no means available to the government, particularly in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, for a perceptible improvement of the socioeconomic situation – not even marginally. Also in the offing is the possibility that the secular ruling powers could lose the "competition over youth" to radical-fundamentalist forces with external patrons. But it is precisely here that the key question for further power relationships will be decided, namely which side succeeds in winning the nationally oriented Muslims.

Among the difficult questions are those on a socially acceptable understanding of secularism as well as the use of the positive potential of religion and its representatives for societal equalization, national solidarity and a normative

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36 Irina Zviagelskaja, *Stanovlenie gosudarstv Centralnoj Azii, političeskie prozessy* [The Emergence of the States of Central Asia: Political Processes], Moscow 2009, p. 90.

37 CORE, Bericht zur Durchführung des „Diskurs- und Publikationsprojektes zur Entspannung des säkular-islamischen Verhältnisses in Zentralasien“, [“Report on the Discourse and Publication Project on the Relaxation of Secular-Islamic Relationships in Central Asia”], Almaty, December 2007 (Project Report).

consolidation in the interest of further state-building. Of central importance is finding a common language with the Islamic elites, above all with their nationally and democratically oriented segments. With them, the government must make an effort to create a political *modus vivendi* within the framework of a secular-Islamic negotiation process. This is the key question for the consolidation of the state. For this, there needs to be a joint elaboration of a democratic mechanism, which makes possible the nonviolent cooperation of both sides. It is about a balance of interests, common ground, and contradictions, above all in questions on which the stability of the development of a common state depends. Tajik experts developed a productive way of thinking by considering drafting a modern model that synchronizes secularism and Islam with each other. Such a process is unthinkable without an effective democratization of the regimes of Central Asia. By contrast to the ideas of the ruling elites, it is precisely democracy that becomes the central resource of a state-building strategy that includes political Islam. Conversely, the current “Arabellion” shows how quickly authoritarian regimes on whose stability one – also in the West – all too long believed – can fall when the dam has once been broken.

### 2.3. Effects on the Islamic Side

Political Islam is still far from bringing its growing societal influence to bear politically and conceptually. Rather, there is a struggle between national Islamic powers and their pan-Islamic-oriented competition. At heart, thereby, it is about the theological direction of Islamic teaching and practice in the new Central Asian states – in an externally-imposed, radical-fundamentalist direction or in its own traditional Hanafi direction. There are discussions taking place in Islamic communities which entail the risk of a rift. Politically relevant differentiation processes are advanced by two central factors: on the one hand, by the widening social division into poor and rich, which is also fragmenting Islamic communities. Thereby, the expanding poverty plays into the hands of the extremist Islamic movements<sup>38</sup> and limits the potential for influence by moderate Islamic powers. And second, the present inability of the Islamic elites to draw up their own Islamically anchored concept for shaping national statehood should be mentioned. In no Central Asian country, up to now, has the Islamic elite set itself this task. But neither has it occurred to the secular elite to enlist the Islamic side for joint deliberations. The radical pan-Islamic wing thrusts itself into this conceptual vacuum on the Islamic side with its call for a struggle by Central Asian Muslims for a caliphate. It would, therefore, be in the national interest,

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38 According to the assessment of the-then Chairman of the State Agency for Religious Matters in Kyrgyzstan, Kanybek Osmanaliev, and his deputy, Kanatbek Mursachalilov, Hizb ut-Tahrir has the most adherents “in the socially deprived segments of the population, particularly in the districts of Karassuujski, Korgonski, Susakski, Arawanski, Usgenski, Nookatski and cities such as Osh, Jalalabad, in the Kysyl-Ky, Tschujsk, in the territory of Issykkul as well as in Bishkek.” Kanybek Osmanaliev/Kanatbek Murzachalilov, *Vzaimootnošenija mešdu gosudarstvennymi ispolnitelnymi organami i religioznymi organizacijami* [The Relationships between the Executive State Organs and Religious Organs], in: Centre for OSCE Research (CORE), Hamburg/Institute of Strategic Studies and Prognosis, Bishkek, *Nadležaščee upravlenie v svetskich gosudarstvach s musul'manskim bolšinstvom naselenija* [Good Governance in Secular States with a Muslim Majority], Material from an International Round Table, Bishkek, 15–16 November 2008, p. 86.

if the secular elite were to decide on cooperation in the conceptual aspects of statebuilding, perhaps through the modernization of religious education. With a joint state-Islamic program for its reform, the way could be opened for a return to the Hanafi roots of Islamic teaching in Central Asia, quite apart from the confidence-building effect. Only when the Islamic side can also contribute from a religious point of view to national self-discovery, will it be an equal dialogue partner for the secular state.

#### **2.4. Significance for Europe**

The most obvious reason for Europe to promote confidence-building with political Islam in Central Asia is the foreseeable end of the military presence of the West in Afghanistan. Admittedly, in the Central Asian states, but also in Russia and China, one asks oneself the scary question of whether the Taliban could mobilize the Islamic underground in Central Asia; by contrast, the follow-up question which is every bit as important, whether one could not at least “immunize” the Central Asian section of political Islam against external manipulation, has not (yet) been asked. Initiatives from Europe on the introduction of a process of confidence-building could play an important role here.

Such initiatives must aim at working out a joint approach for the realization of the formula “cooperation and non-violent co-existence of civilizations, religions and cultures” in Central Asia. In this connection, it would also be appropriate at a certain point to speak about legal modalities and their implementation. One should, however, be clear that the demand for so-called “guarantees” on which the one side or the other could insist, should not be a precondition for entering into a process of confidence-building. “Final guarantees” can only be the product of a certain stage of confidence-building through practical cooperation and non-violent co-existence.

#### **2.5. On the possible role of the OSCE**

The OSCE could play a significant role in the shaping of such a process of confidence-building. However, it cannot be denied that grave obstacles that are hard to overcome stand in the way. Three arguments for an active role of the OSCE in secular-Islamic confidence-building in Central Asia can be put forth: *first*, the OSCE in the Eurasian space is, in every respect, the most comprehensive security organization which works with a cooperative, inclusive approach. *Second*, it is engaged in the goal of conflict prevention, to which the project of secular-Islamic confidence-building in Central Asia could significantly contribute. And *third*, the organization has at its disposal decisive normative resources (democracy, rule of law, human rights) without which a further peaceful state-building process in Central Asia would be very difficult. This is particularly the case for the guaranteeing of freedom of religion as well as for the harmonization of secular-Islamic relationships as a fundamental condition for a conflict-preventative support of further state-building processes. All of this indicates that the OSCE should, in this respect as well, take on a more important role in Central Asia.

However, a range of important impediments stands in the way of this. *First*, the organization would have to overcome the limitations of its current, overwhelmingly security-relevant anti-terror strategy and recognize that such approaches (border management, container security, etc) remain, to a great extent, ineffective if a political framework strategy is lacking. *Second*, the OSCE would have to go beyond its present orientation to the implementation of religious freedom – as important as that is and remains – by opening itself up to the question of how the relationships to states, – yes even to entire regions in which the majority of the population is Muslim – might look. And *third*, they would need to do this in consensus with all participating countries, i.e., including the ruling elites in the Central Asian states, and on top of that, taking into account representatives of political Islam. However the ruling elites as well as the representatives of Islam are mostly not (yet) ready for a serious secular-Islamic dialogue because, for one thing, they don't recognize the need for it and, for another, the long-term consequences – democratization and, thereby, necessary sharing or even giving up of power, appear to be too painful.

In Europe (and the USA) the vital importance of democratic dealings with the Islam factor in Central Asia is insufficiently recognized and here, too, this mental block has to do with shying away from painful insights. That the military deployment in Afghanistan is leading to a defeat – though a qualified one – and not to a victory, is something that they mostly don't yet want to admit. But that would be a condition for not repeating in Central Asia the same mistake that was made with Afghanistan. Rather, the experience which western states have also had in the Arab space, such as in Iraq and recently in Libya, should not be ignored: without the cooperation of Islamic organizations, movements and parties, no stabilization will be successful. Thus, Europe and the West should not fall into the trap of participating in the repression of the increasingly important Islamic factor in Central Asia. Instead, the Western states should emphasize the importance of democracy and rule of law, also quite concretely with respect to the Islamic side, and thereby point out that this is not only about an abstract normative profession but rather about a strategic tool for long-term stabilization.

Although Central Asia is gradually finding its feet again in the overall Islamic space, it would be false to equate Central Asian political Islam with that which we generally understand as "political Islam." The window of opportunity is still open to find, together with its adherents, a cooperative way to an appealing model of new relationships. For the secular way of life and the secular governments in Central Asia still enjoy the sympathy of significant parts of the population. The Islamic elites also feel connected to their national states and are interested in good relationships with Europe. Islamic politicization is still at an early stage, which temporarily keeps the possibilities for its misuse for extremist goals within bounds. Also the majority of the advocates of political Islam still differ from those in other regions of the world. In the Soviet period, they enjoyed a secular education and became acquainted with European philosophy and culture, rationalism and dialectic. These favorable conditions for a constructive relationship will no longer be there in a generation. Europe should contrive to make use of these distinctive characteristics.

### 3. Experiences from Tajikistan

There are initial experiences from Tajikistan in the matter of secular-Islamic confidence-building. In a closing document<sup>39</sup> of a three year dialogue between prominent Islamic and secular politicians, which CORE moderated with Swiss experts, the goal of confidence-building measures is defined as follows: “The goal of confidence-building measures consists in the creation of optimal variants of cooperation and mutually advantageous relationships between the state power and the representatives of religion.”<sup>40</sup> On the European dimension of confidence-building it was stressed: “The creation of a European stability space also presupposes stability in the Asian region of the OSCE. This goal requires designing a new relationship model, based on the political, non-violent settlement of differences. This goal involves overcoming the ‘dilemma of mistrust’ between the secular and the Islamic representatives or, as a necessary minimum, the creation of such conditions, which reduce the dimensions of mistrust and open up to both sides the possibility of peacefully co-existing.”<sup>41</sup>

This first document of its kind attracted a great deal of attention in scientific and political circles in Central Asia and Russia and, at the same time, raised the extremely contentious question of whether political Islam – also in its radical but not jihadist form – could have a place within the framework of confidence-building. The initial answer raises a counter question about the risks which an *exclusion* of such powers from confidence building would involve. If the prominent Orientalist, Vitaly Naumkin, correctly judges that “Islamic radicalism will remain, for an indeterminate time, the inspiration for larger segments of the population”<sup>42</sup> then it cannot be productive to exclude radical Islamic politicians from conflict preventive rapprochement processes.

#### 3.1. Equal Perspectives in a Common State

It became clear to all the participants over the course of the confidence-building dialogue in Tajikistan, how important it is to moderate radical positions. And the necessity of changing the political and intellectual culture in a positive way proved to be no less fundamental. In the dialogue, this was shown by the example of the understanding of relations of state and religion. Here, at the beginning, completely contrary views collided with each other. Some Islamic colleagues characterized the essence of the secular state founded in Tajikistan as anti-Islamic. They demanded that the government repeal the principle of separation of state and religion. Secular

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39 Centre for OSCE Research (CORE)/Program for the Study of International Organization(s) (PSIO), Vertrauensbildende Maßnahmen, verabschiedet von den Teilnehmern eines informellen säkular-islamischen Dialogs in Tadschikistan [Confidence-building measures agreed upon by the participants of an informal secular-dialogue in Tajikistan], Hamburg 2004 (CORE Working Paper 12).

40 Ibid., p. 42.

41 Ibid., p. 41.

42 Naumkin, loc. cit. (Note 35), p. 268.

participants reacted with the accusation that this demand was unconstitutional and they would not be prepared to continue the discussions on such a basis.

In order to be able to continue the joint work at all, it proved to be necessary to bring the sides together on the central question of the character of the state. The key question was: "Are you prepared to mutually guarantee each other an equal perspective in a common state?" A practical useable answer required that, in an initial step, they agree on a political *modus vivendi*, in order to deliberate on this basis, the conditions for a longer term, non-violent co-existence. Agreeing to this, our Islamic colleagues demanded that the formula of "separation of state and religion" be reformulated as "separation of church and state", whereby they explicitly referred to the European secular understanding. This would also open up the way for a reformation of the relationships of the state to religious institutions in accordance with democratic principles and in harmony with constitutional and human rights, above all that of religious freedom. Logically, the relationship between the executive state organs and the religious organizations must also be guided by these principles.

Article 8 of the Tajik constitution, in accordance with which religious *organizations* but not religion as such, are separate from the state, offered a way out of the differences of opinion about how one could arrive at a "harmonization of the relationships between the state power and religion". Thus the document on confidence-building measures was able to determine that Article 8 of the constitution "opens up space for the assurance of harmonious relationships because it speaks exclusively of religious organizations."<sup>43</sup>

It can be illustrated with this example that, under certain conditions, radical Islamists and secularists are capable of coming to an understanding even in initially contentious fundamental questions. The far more important example for this is the entire Tajik peace process, including the successful work of a commission for national reconciliation and a coalition government. In addition to secular politicians, 39 members of the United Tajik Opposition<sup>44</sup> (VTO, among them so-called „radicals“), the two deputy Prime Ministers, five ministers, nine deputy ministers as well as ten chairmen of state committees, belonged to it. It should be emphasized that the-then-Chairman of the PIWT, Said Abdullo Nuri, gave up the strategy of creating an Islamic state during the phase of government participation. He saw the problem with such an orientation in that it placed emphasis on the power question and motivated the society to achieve its connection with Islam through a change of the political order. Because this concept presupposes a power struggle, it inevitably leads to conflict

Nuri repudiated this approach by changing from a strategy of the "Islamic state" to that of an "Islamic society." He saw in the latter the only possibility of retaining the Islamic character of his party and its legitimacy under the conditions of a secular state. Thereby, he approached a changed Islamic society concept, according to which a stronger secular constitutional state makes it possible for its citizens to turn to religion, through the guarantee of religious human rights. Nuri understood the

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43 CORE, loc. cit. (Note 39), p. 19.

44 The VTO was the alliance of opposition parties in Afghanistan exile in 1993.

“Muslim community” as a behavioral framework of people, in both their personal spheres as well as vis-à-vis other elements of the society, in harmonization with the rules of Islam. Guaranteeing this, according to Nuri, requires neither a change of the constitutional order nor taking up illegal political action. From this fundamental position Nuri also supported the secular state character.

The significance of this conceptual shift lies in taking the power question away from the first point of the Islamic political “agenda” whereby the tension in the secular-Islamic relationship can be reduced. What remains is a meeting of different values in the socio-cultural sphere as well as in the political space, which lies within the normal parameters of a democratically composed society.<sup>45</sup>

The government did not pick up on the positive changes within political Islam in Tajikistan. On the contrary, the model of rule on a broad national basis was once again abandoned once the government saw its positions sufficiently consolidated after a transitional period following the Civil War. Thereby it proved useful that the VTO in the interest of a peaceful agreement had agreed to its own disarmament. In the years that followed, the participation of the VTO in the government was reduced step by step; today the government consists exclusively of partisans of the president and the overwhelming majority of VTO adherents or their parties have once again been pushed back into the opposition. Thereby, the Tajik presidential regime fundamentally undermined the compromise with the former opposition, even though the PIWT continues to maintain the acceptance of a secular state introduced by Nuri.

#### **4. Conclusions and Priorities for Action**

The example of Tajikistan has specific elements, in particular the Civil War and its political processing, which can certainly not be generalized to all of Central Asia. On the other hand, the Islamic-secular dialogue process in Tajikistan was especially advanced simply because of the Civil War and even now still is, in a certain way, despite all the setbacks. The fact that only in Tajikistan, with the PIWT is there a legal Islamic opposition party, is witness thereof. Further confirming this, are the fundamental considerations of the “confidence-building measures” of 2003 that were continued in the Tajik non-governmental organization “Academy Dialogue”, which, in 2010 went public with a new document under the title “Confidence-Building Measures – 2”. In the following some initial generalizations will be offered.

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45 Cf. Abdullo Rachnamo, Transformacija političeskoj kulture „političeskogo islama“ v Tadžikistana [The Transformation of the Political Culture of “political Islam” in Tajikistan], Moscow 2009, p. 191–193.

#### 4.1. No Alternative to an inclusive Approach

The Tajik example shows that there is no alternative to an inclusive approach which treats all partners as fundamentally equal. It was only through an inclusive approach that the Civil War could be ended. Turning away from it again jeopardizes this result in the long term. Thereby, it also becomes clear that dealing tactically with the principle of inclusion is counterproductive. Whoever thinks that he can push political competitors to the wall because they have renounced the use of weapons in a particular situation has reintroduced the principle of violence and is provoking a military race. Such behavior destroys every prospect for confidence-building.

Thereby, the principle of inclusion is not one that relates specifically to the relationship between secularism and Islam, but (rather) a general democratic principle that aims at the integration of societal groups including their partisan interests. As with any principle at this level of abstraction, the question also arises here of where one's boundaries are or where its use begins to be counterproductive. On this, Naumkin wrote

*“Among the urgent questions demanding a solution, one may mention the definition of the Islamic forces with whom it is possible and necessary to carry on a dialogue. Should the course toward dialogue and tolerance be inclusive, and if not, what restrictions on the scope of this dialogue should be made? One has to delimit the borders of that segment of the Islamists with whom it is inappropriate for Central Asian regimes to negotiate (just as it would be futile to speak of a dialogue between Washington and Usama bin Ladin). What should be done to incorporate non-violent, although committed, elements of the HTI [Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami] into the negotiating process? The exclusion of this (so far peaceful segment) will not help do away with radicalism. The same applies to Salafis as a current in Islam, which unites not only jihadists.”<sup>46</sup>*

That means that the most important criterion for an answer to the question of integrative or exclusionary strategies towards Islamic political organizations is their relationship to the use of force. For all those who do not resort to violence, the attempt should be made to incorporate them into inclusive strategies, even if we don't like their program. In this sense, (the late) Charles William Maynes, the President of the Eurasia Foundation, commented eight years ago:

*“The core issue in Central Asia today is how the political order can accommodate the rise of Islam. At this point, neither the authorities nor outside powers have an answer or know what this new order will look like. [...] Work must be done to reconcile Islam and democracy, and Western countries must make this goal a priority if they hope to co-exist with the political forces likely to dominate the region. [...] The West should urge the region's leaders to open local governments to electoral challenge and to allow all parties seeking peaceful change to take part. Perhaps it will turn out that more radical Islamists enjoy little support. Even if they do garner electoral support however, Islamic forces may gradually develop a stake in the system, so that when they do finally enter national government, it will constitute an act of inclusion, not revolution. In all these efforts, Washington must show patience”<sup>47</sup>*

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46 Naumkin, loc. cit. (Note 35), p. 267–268.

47 Charles William Maynes, America Discovers Central Asia, in: Foreign Affairs 2/2003, p. 120–132, here: p. 124, 131, 132. The American journal, Foreign Affairs, broaches the issue of the necessity of a

## 4.2. The Dilemma of Mistrust

The enormous mutual mistrust that exists between the secular state power and Islamic political forces is due to the fact that both sides see no guarantees that the one side will not try to shut the undesired partner out of the political process as soon as it has come to power. The secular leaders fear that Islamic parties, if they once come to power through democratic means, would establish a theocratic state in which there would no longer be a place for secular powers. The Islamic leaders not only have the concern that, under secular rule, their organizations would be placed on the list of terrorist associations and would be forbidden, but also that not even democratic legitimation through elections guarantees their survival in a political order in which the question of the relationships to political Islam are not resolved.<sup>48</sup>

This “mistrust dilemma” also has a European dimension. It is questionable whether the European OSCE states would recognize Islamic parties which have come to power through democratic means, because they could fear that these parties would introduce radical constitutional changes. On the other hand, still not resolved is the question of whether moderate Islamic parties, if they come to power, can guarantee the stability of the constitutional order or whether they could be inveigled by more radical Islamic powers to act in an undemocratic way

Up until now, neither of the two sides has offered guarantees for their “behavior vis-à-vis the opponent”, which would be acceptable for the other side. The Islamic elites want to be able to trust that they have a political and religious perspective on the basis of equal rights, both in their own country and also in the greater Eurasian space. The secular side – also Europe’s – on the other hand wants to be certain that the recognition of the OSCE principles and obligations by moderate Islamic leaders is more than just a tactical maneuver.

Since overcoming this mistrust can only be a long-term process, in the short-term, positive signals with a ripple effect in the Islamic world and the Eurasian political space are needed. Such signals could be sent by the European side through the introduction of consultative dialogues with Central Asian Islamic organizations and secular powers. Both groups and the nature of their interaction, significantly influence the stability of the entire OSCE space.

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constructive strategy change in US foreign policy as one of the lessons from the current upheavals in the Arab region: “For decades, U.S. policy toward the Middle East has been paralyzed by ‘the Islamist dilemma’ – how can the United States promote democracy in the region without risking bringing Islamists to power? Now, it seems, the United States no longer has a choice. Popular revolutions have swept U.S.-backed authoritarian regimes from power in Tunisia and Egypt and put Libya’s on notice. If truly democratic governments form in their wake, they are likely to include significant representation of mainstream Islamist groups. Like it or not, the United States will have to learn to live with political Islam.” Shadi Hamid, *The Rise of the Islamists*, in: *Foreign Affairs*, 3/2011, p. 40.

48 For a deeper analysis on this see: Arne Seifert, *The Reconciliation between Europe and Islam in Eurasia*, in: *Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH* (eds.), *OSCE Yearbook 2004, Baden-Baden 2004*, p. 317–333.

### **4.3. Mechanisms and Means**

Such dialogues should begin with democratic and nationally-oriented representatives of political Islam who already have experience in cooperation with the state side, as is the case in Tajikistan and also in Kyrgyzstan. Thereby, what should be established, first and foremost, is which topics are felt to be urgent and with the help of which mechanisms non-violent cooperation can be guaranteed. This broad task can be broken down into a series of concrete steps:

The goals of confidence-building measures are to introduce a process of rapprochement to avert the danger of escalation, to find a common basis as well as to overcome, as far as possible, division and misunderstandings. In the short term, a possible radicalization of the representatives of political Islam should, thereby, be prevented and the integrative, peace-promoting potential of Islam developed. Long-term, the attempt should be undertaken to permanently reduce tensions and to create a self-sustaining stability.

The secular state should be encouraged to constructively reflect on its attitudes towards Islamic institutions such as, for instance, mosques, madrases, universities, political parties and movements, and to reform the law and executive structures accordingly.

The prevailing concept of “separation of religion and state” must be adapted to the special sociopolitical and religious conditions of a Muslim majority. It has been shown that the Tajik Islamists of the PIWT can more likely accept the European secularism concept of “separation of church and state”, understood as a separation of religious institutions and state, than the “separation of religion and state” concept stemming from Soviet times. It should be established whether there is also such an acceptance among Islamic powers in other Central Asian states.

A further priority working area is religious education. All in all, it is of primary importance that the dialogues bring about productive results in the short and middle term and can be expanded on the basis of their joint implementation.

### **4.4. A Signal from Europe**

Europe should contribute, to the best of its ability, to overcoming the “dilemma of mistrust” between Central Asian political Islam and the secular rulers in the region. For this, it would be important to signal the readiness of Europe to recognize Central Asian political Islam as an integral part of the political process in Central Asia. Europe – in this context, this could be individual European states, international organizations such as the EU or the OSCE, but also European non-governmental organizations.

Obviously, one must be aware of the great discrepancies that prevail between secular and Islamic concepts of state- and nation-building, democracy, the rule of law, human rights, the equal status of women, of education and in many other areas. Nevertheless, in the interests of stability and peace in the Eurasian region there is no alternative to such a dialogue.

## **About CORE**

The Centre for OSCE Research (CORE), founded in 2000, is the only institute specifically dedicated to research on the OSCE. Located in Hamburg, Germany, within the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH), CORE operates as a politically independent think tank, combining basic research on the evolution of the OSCE with demand-driven capacity-building projects and teaching. Addressing political actors, the academic community and the interested general public in Germany and abroad, CORE strives to contribute to the OSCE's development with analysis and critique that provide insight into the problems faced by and opportunities open to the Organization. For more information about CORE or this paper, please contact:

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