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THE EVOLUTION OF MULTIPARTY POLITICS IN UZBEKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This article examines the development of the multiparty system in Uzbekistan, highlighting the key stages and milestones since independence. It outlines the role of political parties in fostering democratic governance and representing the interests of diverse social groups in society. The paper explores the historical formation of political parties in Uzbekistan, from the cessation of the one-party system to the establishment of legal frameworks that empower political parties in shaping state power. The emergence of the Ecological Party of Uzbekistan is discussed as a significant event in the country's evolving political landscape. Furthermore, the article addresses the current challenges faced by political parties, including the lack of political ideology, limited public awareness of political rights, and the need for improved competition among parties. The author argues that enhancing the legal foundation of parties and increasing their involvement in governance is essential for deepening democratic reforms. The article concludes with recommendations to strengthen political party participation, foster public trust, and promote active competition in Uzbekistan's political system.

KEYWORDS: Multiparty system, political parties, democratic governance, political reforms, Uzbekistan, Ecological Party of Uzbekistan.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past 7-8 years, fundamental democratic reforms have been implemented across all spheres of societal life with the aim of establishing a democratic legal state and a civil society. It is no exaggeration to say that we have achieved significant success in defining the role and importance of the media, public organizations, entrepreneurship, family, and free labor, which are considered structural institutions of civil society, in society's life based on the demands of the times. In

particular, a vivid confirmation of this is the increasingly solid position that political parties are occupying in the life of the state and society.

In this regard, on August 22, 2019, at a meeting with the leaders of the political parties operating in our country, the President of our state, Shavkat Mirziyoyev, stated the following: "Today, five political parties are active in our country – the Democratic Party 'National Revival,' the People's Democratic Party, the Movement of Entrepreneurs

and Business People – the Liberal Democratic Party of Uzbekistan, the Social Democratic Party ‘Adolat,’ and the Ecological Party. They have all the legal grounds to implement their ideas and programs, actively participate in elections based on the principles of equality, openness, and impartiality, form their own factions and party groups in parliament, as well as in local representative bodies, and actively participate in the political and public life of our country. The recently adopted Election Code of the Republic of Uzbekistan is significant in that it creates more opportunities in this regard.”

At present, the growing democratization of our society and the deepening of political and legal reforms are posing new tasks for political parties. Studying the experience of foreign countries in organizing the participation of political parties in governance, especially in local representative bodies, and examining the political and legal ideas that have emerged in world social sciences in this regard, as well as applying them to the process of improving the activities of our country's representative bodies, are some of the pressing issues today.

It is important to note that one of the key institutions of civil society is political parties. Political parties ensure the continuous interaction between civil society and the political system. It is well-known that state power is dependent on society, and in most cases, society's control over it is exercised through political parties.

According to M. Kyrgyzbaev, the primary goal of political parties is to express the powers of social strata within the political system, which must satisfy this interest. Parties perform a bridging and intermediary function between the state and society, expressing the interests of various social groups and strata within the political system of society. At the same time, they ensure the integrity and unity of society. Without interest groups, public organizations, and parties, the state system cannot effectively manage diverse, and at times conflicting, interests.

Political parties do not merely express particular interests; they also actively participate in shaping those interests. Parties align civil society with the

state, ensuring the mitigation or elimination of intolerance and contributing to the stability of legislative and executive power. Strong parties do not weaken the state but rather strengthen it by closely linking the state with local societal bodies and helping to control political processes. On the contrary, weak parties can lead to a weakening of the state.

According to M.A. Lipchanskaya and M.S. Volkova, the interaction and cooperation between the state and political parties on issues of ensuring citizens' participation in the governance of state and public affairs are contingent on several conditions. These include, first and foremost, the legal regime of the state, the type and level of development of the party-political system, the parties' attitude towards the government's policies, and the degree of public support for the parties. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the principles of mutual cooperation between the state and parties in addressing common tasks at the legal level. These scholars also shared their views on the mechanisms that ensure political parties' participation in decision-making by local government bodies. In their opinion, this mechanism should include the following: a) broad involvement of political party representatives in working groups developing draft regulatory documents, contracts, and programs; b) concluding various agreements on mutual cooperation with government bodies; and c) initiating the adoption of specific legal documents.

The political parties express the political will of their members and participate in the creation of state governance bodies, as well as in the activities of these bodies through their representatives elected to the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic and to the Councils of People's Deputies. They produce programmatic documents, and these documents are made available to the public through the press. Every citizen of the Republic of Uzbekistan can express their political will by joining a political party of their choice, and through that party. This freedom, in turn, leads to a rise in the political consciousness of the people, as well as an increase in the number of individuals with diverse worldviews who dedicate all their

efforts to the independent and comprehensive development of their homeland. Political parties in Uzbekistan strive in various ways to ensure the participation of their members and other citizens in state affairs.

For Uzbekistan, which aspires to secure a prominent place among the world's advanced developed countries, it is essential to reform the political and legal system of society based on the demands of the times, ensure the protection of human rights and freedoms, strengthen the role and importance of political parties in decision-making by the people's power, improve the judicial and legal sphere, and enhance the social life of the population. This is critical in raising political and legal awareness and culture.

The first forms of political parties currently active in the world were formed during the modern era. In the 19th century, political parties in Western Europe and North America began to take shape as political representative institutions. One of the important reasons for the formation of parties was the increasing demand for justice in forming state power, as well as the need to democratize society.

According to foreign scholars Viktor and Vladimir Meitusov, the institution of political parties acquired its modern form at the beginning of the 20th century and continues to evolve to this day. Currently, this institution is an essential element of the democratic system, alongside entities like the parliament, president, and local government bodies. However, unlike these structures, political parties are voluntary institutions of society, united on a democratic basis, organized by individuals to address common objectives initiated by themselves.

Political parties participate in the governance of state and societal affairs either by securing votes for certain parties or by directly participating in elections to the respective state bodies. Therefore, in many developed countries, the activities of local representative bodies are directly tied to the national electoral process. In particular, the nature of the relationship between local and central authorities in Israel is examined in connection with election results.

Since the modern era, political parties have represented the political interests of various social groups and classes, gradually evolving into independent institutions representing the interests of civil society. Specifically, with the increased role of electoral institutions as a mechanism for holding political power accountable, political parties have improved as well.

Overall, the experiences and lessons from the first political parties formed in the United States, Europe, and Japan became an important phase in shaping modern parties. If we analyze the number of political parties operating today in foreign countries, Austria has 7, Azerbaijan 11, Belgium 13, Brazil 34, Bulgaria 16, Canada 6, the Czech Republic 11, Estonia 7, France 15, Germany 7, India 17, Israel 11, Japan 13, Kazakhstan 7, the Republic of Korea 9, Kyrgyzstan 6, Moldova 26, Russia – although 64 parties are registered, only 6 are active, Switzerland 7, Tajikistan 7, Turkey – 83 parties are registered, but 13 are active, the United States 4, and Belarus 15.

Political parties began to emerge in our country after independence. According to I. Bekov, a legal scholar specializing in the formation of political parties in Uzbekistan and their participation in legislative activities, "as a result of the declaration of national independence, the formation of independent unions occurred, and the complete dismantling of former party organizations created conditions for the formation of civil society institutions. With the establishment of legal frameworks for the free expression of people's interests and political will, as well as the creation of a free political environment, political parties began to form."

At present, as the scholar rightly acknowledges, the Law "On the Election of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan," adopted in November 1991, legally recognized multi-party elections. This law states that political parties have the right to nominate candidates for the presidency of the country.

It should be noted that to create the necessary organizational and legal conditions for political parties' participation in the formation of

representative state authorities and, most importantly, to increase the activity of political parties within civil society, the Law "On the Renewal and Further Democratization of State Governance and Modernization of the Country" was adopted in April 2007. The Constitutional Law "On Strengthening the Role of Parties" marked the beginning of significant transformations in the life of the state and society, as well as in state-building.

Thus, the adoption of this Constitutional Law laid the foundation for implementing consistent constitutional and legal reforms within the system of local state governance in the Republic of Uzbekistan. Accordingly, a new procedure for appointing and confirming regional khokims and the khokim of Tashkent city was established. Candidates for the positions of regional khokim and the khokim of Tashkent will be presented to the regional and Tashkent City Councils of People's Deputies for approval by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan after consultations with each party group in the respective Councils. A candidate for the position of regional or Tashkent khokim is considered approved if they receive the majority of votes from the total number of deputies of the respective Council of People's Deputies.

A multiparty system, based on democratic principles, was formed in Uzbekistan in a short period as a result of political parties acting as subjects of the political system and their ability to influence it. It is worth noting that in domestic literature, the development of a multiparty system in our country is analyzed by dividing it into specific stages. In particular, according to the authors of the book "Fundamentals of Civil Society" (A. Jalilov, U. Mukhammadiev, K. Joraev, and others), the process of forming a multiparty system in our republic can be divided into the following five stages, each marked by significant events:

- 1) ****1991-1994****: The creation of necessary conditions for the cessation of the one-party system and the formation of a multiparty system.
- 2) ****1995-1999****: The establishment of a legal framework for the multiparty system and the formation of new parties. Laws such as "On Political Parties" (November 26, 1996) and "On Non-Governmental Non-Profit Organizations"

(April 14, 1999) were adopted.

- 3) ****2000-2004****: Gaining political experience, ensuring financial independence, and defining a stable electorate. Laws such as "On Public Discussion of Draft Laws" (December 14, 2000), "On the Referendum of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (August 30, 2001), "On the Results of the Referendum and the Basic Principles of Organizing State Power" (April 4, 2002), and the new version of the Law "On Elections to the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (August 29, 2003) were passed.

- 4) ****2005-2006****: Strengthening parliamentary oversight over political parties and forming a constructive opposition.

- 5) ****2007 to the present****: The activity of political parties has accelerated based on the Constitutional Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan "On the Renewal and Further Democratization of State Governance and Strengthening the Role of Political Parties in the Modernization of the Country" (April 11, 2007), along with the participation of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, as well as deputies in regional, district, and city council elections. This period also saw the strengthening of inter-party competition.

The development of a multiparty system in the Republic of Uzbekistan necessitated the establishment of specific legal regulations for this process. As noted by legal scholar A. Yangibaev, who studied the participation of political parties in the formation of representative state bodies and their activities, political parties gained a legal foundation following the adoption of the Law "On Political Parties" and other legal documents. This led to significant changes in the legal status of political parties.

Indeed, at the beginning of the new century, the role of political parties in society and state-building increased due to the development of legislative foundations for the formation of a bicameral parliament. A new era for political parties began with the parliamentary and local representative body elections in December 2004, as political parties were granted the right to nominate

candidates for the lower house of parliament, the Legislative Chamber.

With the granting of new powers to political parties, their responsibility to society increased automatically. Overall, the expansion of political parties' powers marked the beginning of a new stage in the process of liberalizing the political sphere in society. The true essence of the political conceptual program "From a Strong State to a Strong Civil Society" was primarily focused on this goal.

One of the main reasons for the emergence of political parties in developed countries and the increasing role they play in ensuring relations between the state and society is their role in forming state power. In the history of humankind, no mechanism has been invented for the fair formation of a non-partisan political elite. Civil society and the practice of building a legal state have shown that a political elite formed exclusively through political parties can act in the interests of both the state and society.

One of the most important functions of parties is not only to represent the interests of their members and the social strata they are based on but also to help these groups realize their own interests. Political interests do not form within an individual on their own. A person needs dialogue and relationships with party organizations, participation in public organizations, and the creation of social and political spaces for their activity. In order for each person to participate in the activities of party organizations, a sense of confidence must be formed that their interests will be represented and realized within these organizations.

Nations that have not lived in a democratic society and have long been under the oppression of a totalitarian regime may have national, economic, and political interests. However, without organized processes of political socialization, it is difficult for them to develop their political interests. The main reason for this is that political consciousness and views can only be formed through active participation in group organizations. Therefore, a person whose political consciousness is not sufficiently developed does not feel the need to

participate in any party. It is evident that if primary organizations or party representatives in the country do not operate in citizens' places of residence and work, and if they cannot influence voters' worldviews, the parties will be unable to realize their potential.

It is hard to disagree with B. Jamiev, who studied the role of political parties in society, regarding his view that parties are among the most important interest groups. As he rightly acknowledges, parties formalize the relevant interests of these groups for the authorities and communicate the interests and needs of their supporters and members to state institutions. The masses can only convey their interests and demands to the authorities through political parties.

The Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan was founded on August 2, 2008. Over the years, it has fully accomplished its goals and objectives. However, during this time, many changes have occurred in nature and society. The serious reforms implemented in our country in recent years have placed new challenges before all societal institutions. To address these challenges, a new approach and fresh forces are required.

In fact, as part of the new stage of wide-reaching reforms in state and societal construction in our country, there arose the need to establish a new political party based on the experience gained from the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan. As a result, on January 8, 2019, an important event took place in the political and public life of our country. On this day, for the first time in the history of independent Uzbekistan, a new political force was founded—the Ecological Party of Uzbekistan, tasked with ensuring ecological stability.

This party can secure a certain number of seats by competing with other parties in representative bodies through direct elections by voters, rather than by electing deputies through conference members, as was done previously. Therefore, as the legal scholar I. Bekov pointed out, "the primary criterion that determines the status of political parties in society is the results they achieve in elections to representative state bodies."

If we analyze the distribution of parliamentary

mandates in local councils following the 2014 elections, we observe the following picture: 2,250 deputies in district, city, regional, and Tashkent city councils of people's deputies, as well as in the Jokorgi Council of the Republic of Karakalpakstan, belong to UzLiDeP; 2,300 to UzKDP; 1,077 to the DP "National Revival"; and 431 to Adolat SDP.

As a result of the elections to the district councils of people's deputies in Tashkent city held on December 24, 2017, a total of 278 (84.2%) deputies from political parties and 52 (15.8%) candidates from citizens' self-government bodies secured seats.

At present, as the head of our state Sh.M. Mirziyoyev rightly noted, "political parties have the right to fight for power. However, despite this, competition, diversity of opinions, and positions between them are hardly noticeable."

Political scientist Sh. Mamadaliev identified the following primary reasons for the lack of popularity and insufficient authority of parties among voters: 1) the underdeveloped political ideology of the parties; 2) the uncertainty of the parties' political image in the media, the insufficient interpretation of national and global events from Uzbekistan's perspective, and the lack of attention paid by the parties to the formation of citizens' political culture; 3) insufficient public awareness of their political rights and a lack of political activism; 4) the lagging of science, which should assist in realizing the political rights of parties and citizens, behind the demands and needs of the time.

In our opinion, only when the above-mentioned shortcomings are addressed will the people trust their parties, and the parties will transform into a selfless force of the people.

In our view, to enhance the role and significance of multiparty politics in the functioning of state power, special attention should be paid to the following aspects:

First, since 2017, Uzbekistan has entered a new stage of development—a national revival. The Action Strategy for the Development of Uzbekistan is being implemented, which is based on our Constitution and corresponds to the core interests

of our people. On the other hand, it is necessary to recognize the need to elevate political parties to a new level in line with the democratic reforms taking place in the country, which are rooted in the idea of "From National Revival to National Uplift."

Second, it is essential to improve the legal framework necessary to increase the effectiveness of political parties, which are among the key institutions of civil society, and to turn them into a decisive political force in our lives, in line with the needs of the times.

Third, the growing political maturity and social activism of our citizens, in response to the demands of today, require the continuation of political reforms at a new stage, the further acceleration of work in this direction, and the strengthening of public control by political parties as a crucial condition of civil society.

Fourth, today, only political parties nominate candidates to representative bodies, and party factions and groups are formed within these bodies. Currently, the need to further refine the legal framework to clearly define the legal status of these structures is on the agenda.

Fifth, the current practice established in the rapidly developing sphere of political construction requires the creation of an effective system to maintain mutual proportionality and balance between representative and executive branches of power at the local level, among other measures.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the analysis of competition among the five political parties operating in our country and their participation in managing state and societal affairs demonstrates that, today, it is necessary to keep pace with the rapidly changing social reality and foresee strategic perspectives when necessary. On this basis, political parties still have much work to do in defining their programmatic goals.

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