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ISLAM IN KAZAKHSTAN: HISTORY OF REVIVAL UNDER CONDITIONS OF INDEPENDENCE

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ABSTRACT

The article discusses the process of formation and development of the relations between the state and religion in the late 20th-early 21st centuries. An attempt is made at rethinking the religious revival phenomenon and the attitude of the authorities towards this process. Political and legal factors in the development of state-confessional relations in multiconfessional Kazakhstan, methods and mechanisms of overcoming contradictions and ways to relieve tension between the state and religion are revealed.

The study of religion and society and the specific forms of their interaction during the transition period must be carried out with regard to their unity and connectedness. Hence, the article explores the influence of the socio-political and legal mechanism on the revival of religion, which has expanded significantly in the face of accelerated transformation of public life. This article aims to link the problem under consideration with a wider range of socio-political development issues under modern conditions.

Currently, significant socio-economic and political changes are underway in the independent Republic of Kazakhstan, and

the need for them is dictated by life itself. Along with the transformation, there is an ongoing process of reappraisal of spiritual values, and a modification of a number of conceptual provisions of various ideological theories and views, which is a natural phenomenon. This is entirely understandable, since any historical phenomenon that involves the formation of a new independent state is characterized by its uniqueness and inimitability. In this case, more than ever, the capacity for introspection, the accuracy of forecasts and the perception of historical experience becomes increasingly more significant.

Contemporary events that are taking place in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries clearly confirm the relevance of the revival of Islam and spiritual traditions, as well as the problems of strengthening the state's national and spiritual unity and its security. These problems are especially topical now, when Kazakhstan is actively seeking moral guidelines for religious teachings, methods of preventing the "politicization of religion" as one of the most dangerous social destabilization factors, and there is an ever-increasing interest in Islamic values on

the part of young people and other socially active segments of the population. All of the above makes us seek answers to a number of questions, including the following: What kind of state-confessional and inter-confessional relations are appropriate? What is the impact of the Islamic revival on the religious-

ity in the country? How can religious traditions be utilized without impeding socio-political transformations, and what should the state-confessional relations model be in order to be aligned with the domestic conditions and be recognized by all as necessary?

KEYWORDS: Kazakhstan, state, revival, Islam, politics, tradition, law.

Introduction

Characteristics and Main Directions of the Religious Revival Process

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, there was a rise in what was later called the “Islamic revival” in Central Asia (we believe it would be more appropriate to use the term “revitalization of religion,” that is, the return of religion to life). The Islamic faith and traditions associated with it, as important elements of national identity, began to be revived in the Northern Caucasus, Azerbaijan, the Volga region, Crimea, Tatarstan and other regions of the former U.S.S.R.¹ An entire set of theoretical concepts was formed.² Researchers pointed out that the general prerequisite for this surge of interest in religion was the powerful socio-political process that influenced many social aspects.³ The years of perestroika and the consequences of the collapse of the U.S.S.R. played an important role, as did the independence of the former Soviet republics, which allowed to align the spiritual and cultural values with their people in a short period of time, gradually forming an ethnic and religious identity under new conditions. Mosques and temples began to revive and the number of believers gradually began to grow. Their number increased particularly following the adoption of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations on 15 January, 1992, which guaranteed the right to freedom of religion (Art 1), equality of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, regardless of their attitude to religion (Art 3), a ban on establishing political organizations of a religious nature, etc.⁴ The new legislation established the equality of all religions before the law, the right of citizens to determine their attitude to religion. The principle of non-interference by the state in the affairs of religious associations was proclaimed.

Against this background, there was a notable tendency towards intensification in the activities of official Muslim religious associations (the World Assembly of Islamic Youth, and the international foundations Abu Dhabi al-Khayriyah, Ahmed Yassawi, the Wakf al-Islamiya Charity Founda-

¹ See: S.M. Akimbekov, *Afganskiy uzel i problemy bezopasnosti Tsentralnoy Azii*, Second enlarged and revised edition, KontinenT, Almaty, 2003, pp. 147-148.

² See: L.G. Yerekesheva, *Religiia i sotsiokulturnye sistemy v istorii Tsentralnoy Azii*: Ph.D. Thesis in History, R.B. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies, KN MON RK, Almaty, 2008, pp. 16-17.

³ See: I.Z. Marziyev, “Islamskiy faktor na Severnom Kavkaze: prizrak ‘islamizma’ dobralsia do Rossii?”, *Kazakhstan-Spektr*, No. 2, 2005, p. 8.

⁴ See: The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 15 January, 1992, “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations,” in: *Religiia i pravo. Informatsionnyy biulleten*, Committee for Religious Affairs, Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Astana, 2007, pp. 161-162.

tion, Bereket, and Kaganat, Ahmedin Charity Center, Harun Yahya Center), as well as religious societies (League of Muslim Women, Fatima Association, Rifah movement, Sufi Brotherhood, Ihlas Cultural Center for Russian Muslims).

Since the mid-1990s, the activity of closed religious societies, as well as non-traditional Islamic movements and schools, has intensified.⁵ Followers of the Sufi Pir Ismatullah, members of the Turkish religious groups Nurjular and Suleymaniyah, the Pakistani religious and educational movement Tablighi Jamaat, the Naqshbandi group Hazrat Ibrahim, the Sufi group Tariqatshylar, as well as missionary organizations and movements Islamic Salvation Organization, World Islamic Assistance began to intensify their activities, along with others.

An Islamic education network was created in Kazakhstan, comprising the Islamic University (later renamed the Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture, where 145 students received religious education between 2001 and 2007), the Islamic Institute for Advanced Studies of Religious Figures under the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK). Additionally, the Kazakh-Kuwait University (now the South Kazakhstan Humanitarian Academy), the international Kazakh-Arab University, and the international Kazakh-Turkish University were opened. These higher education institutions operate outside the SAMK system and were established with financial assistance from foreign countries. In 2003 the Center for Islamic Studies at the Ramazan Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies under the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan was inaugurated. In 2006, the Center for Islamic Economics and Law (CIE&L) was founded at the Kazakh University for Law and Humanities, and the Union of Muslims of Kazakhstan was established. Since 1997, the religious and educational journal *Islam әlemi* (World of Islam), the *Shapagat-Nur* journal (published since 1998), the *Islam* magazine (published since 2003), the religious-educational newspaper *Islam zhene örkeniyet* (Islam and civilization), the newspaper *Iman* (Faith), the independent newspaper *Rukhani omir* (Spiritual Life), and the independent republican information newspaper *Islam* have been published.

Kazakhstani authorities have realized the need not only to proclaim the Law, but also to take measures to enforce it. A number of mass campaigns were organized to familiarize the population with new laws. Almost all religious organizations received a legal status. They began to freely publish and buy religious literature, conduct explanatory work among believers, and engage in charity work.⁶ As Sébastien Peyrouse notes, there was no deep break with religion, which the Soviet authorities were hoping for: religion remained taken for granted even after seventy years of the atheistic regime.⁷

One cannot but agree with Sultan Akimbekov, who states that “with the lifting of official bans in the U.S.S.R., Islam in Central Asia was unexpectedly ‘revived’ and ‘the revival from nonexistence’ of Muslim structures in itself allows us to argue that inter-civilization interaction did not take place via the replacement of one civilization with another, but was, rather, a form of coexistence, partial closure without damage to the basic systemic links. Naturally, after the pressure from the center had disappeared, Central Asian Muslim communities quickly began to restore familiar ties and interactions.”⁸

Why did the process of religious revival in various regions of Kazakhstan start off with such apparent success? We do not believe that this phenomenon can be explained by the fact that people have a tendency towards religious fanaticism, or merely by the level of their economic and social

⁵ For more details, see: Z.G. Jalilov, *Dvizheniia i techeniia v islame: ot proshlogo k nastoiashchemu*, R.B. Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies, Almaty, 2016.

⁶ Today in the country, 3,715 religious associations representing 18 faiths are officially registered and carry out their activities under the law.

⁷ See: S. Peyrouse, “The Partnership between Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Central Asia,” *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 36, Issue 4, 2008, pp. 393-405.

⁸ S.M. Akimbekov, op. cit., p. 148.

development, whether low or high. There are many catalysts that have activated the mechanism of returning to the roots of Islam. The process of reverting to the religion of the forefathers brought positive trends, but also generated numerous socio-political problems, often becoming a source of conflict situations, especially considering the fact that knowledge of religion itself among Muslims of Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries was not particularly deep.⁹ Moreover, the Islamic religion began to be seen as a panacea for many problems, including socio-economic and socio-political ones. Incidentally, it was against this background that non-traditional religious movements and schools, such as Hizb ut-Tahrir, appeared and began to actively operate in the republic, which sowed discord within the Muslim population of the region.¹⁰

In his book *Hibatullah at-Tarazi and its Spiritual Heritage*, Sheikh Absattar Haji Derbisali notes that “neither nationalism, nor regionalism, nor patriotism, nor socialism, nor capitalism, and none of the other communities on earth have been able to unite Muslims as religion did.”¹¹

In general, since the first years of the country’s independence, Kazakhstani officials adopted a new tactic in relation to Islam. It entailed using all the values of Islamic civilization in their activities without denying its influence on the population, and at the same time prevent the radical forces from resorting to Islam for political purposes and violating interethnic and interreligious harmony, as was the case, for example, in some countries of the Middle East and North Africa.

The Religious Environment and Political and Legislative Regulation in the Formation of the Relations between Secular and Religious Spheres

As we have noted above, in the very first years of independence, having openly embarked on the path of building a secular and civil society, the official leadership of the Republic of Kazakhstan began to remove the obstacles placed before religion by Soviet ideology.

According to the first article of the Constitution, the Republic of Kazakhstan affirms itself as a democratic, secular, legal and social state. Art 19 states: “Everyone shall have the right to determine and indicate or not to indicate his ... religious affiliation.”¹² The Republic of Kazakhstan, recognizing and guaranteeing human rights and freedoms in accordance with the Constitution (Art 12.1), allows reasonable restrictions on the rights of citizens. They are possible “only by law and only to the extent necessary for the protection of the constitutional system, defense of public order, human rights and freedoms, and the health and morality of the population” (Art 39).¹³

Certain aspects of the relationship between religious associations and state bodies are regulated by a number of normative acts:

1. Rules for the Registration of the Charters (Provisions) of Religious Associations, approved by the Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 14 April, 1992 No. 327.

⁹ See: R.M. Mustafina, *Predstavleniia, kulty, obriady u kazakhov (v kontekste bytovogo islama v Yuzhnom Kazakhstane v XIX-XX vv.)*, Kazak Universiteti Publishing House, Almaty, 1992, p. 42.

¹⁰ See: K.M. Baypakov, *Srednevekovye goroda Kazakhstana na Velikom Shelkovom puti*, Fylym, Almaty, 1998, p. 80.

¹¹ Quoted from: R.S. Zharkynbayeva, “Kazakhstan i strany Tsentralnoy Azii: poiski identichnosti,” *Evrasiiskoye soobshchestvo*, No. 2, 2001, p. 15.

¹² Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Official Text with Amendments and Additions of 7 October, 1998.

¹³ Ibid., pp. 15-16.

2. Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 14 December, 1993 No. 247 "On the Approval of the Regulation on the Procedure for Transferring Religious Buildings, Structures and Other Property to Religious Organizations."
3. Regulation on the Accreditation Procedure for Foreign Citizens and Stateless Persons Engaged in Missionary Activities, approved by the Resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 21 September, 1997 No. 1362.

To a certain extent, such measures stimulated the revival of traditional religious heritage, an increase in the number of places of worship, religious associations, and various faiths and denominations, as mentioned in the previous section. For the first time, leaders have made an attempt to develop a state policy in regard to religious associations' activities. In early 1992, the Government adopted the Resolution on the Enactment of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations, which defined the principles of relations between the state and religious organizations: separation of religion from the state, equality of all religions, and a ban on the formation of religious parties.¹⁴

The late 1980s and early 1990s occupy a special place in the history of the post-Soviet Central Asian republics. There is no doubt that the emergence of numerous controversial phenomena in social life and the ethnocultural development of the regional states is far from accidental. Its internal and external collisions, the contradictory nature of social phenomena, the turbulence and instability of life, earned it the name of a period of acute and painful crisis and a transitional stage.

In 1993, at the initiative of the first President of the Republic of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev, a provision was introduced in the Constitution that banned the activities of public and religious organizations that proclaim or practice religious intolerance. This provision was further reflected in the 1995 Constitution (Art 53), but with a broader wording. At the same time, this Constitution was supplemented with an article against propaganda and proclamation of religious superiority.¹⁵ The development of the actual religious situation in the country required the introduction of a number of provisions in the Civil Code related to the activities of missionaries and foreign leaders of religious associations and religious educational institutions, which should be coordinated with state authorities (Art 109).

All these measures were associated with the extremely complex and largely ambiguous religious situation in the country. An alarming symptom of problems in the religious sphere was the widespread dissemination of unofficial theological educational institutions and radical fundamentalist communities in the country. There were more than 20 theological educational institutions in the Zhambyl and South Kazakhstan regions alone that did not have an appropriate educational license. Madrassas were closed in the villages of Merke and Lugovoe, Zhambyl region, Shymkent and Sary-Agash for their non-compliance with the law. Incidentally, out of the 2 million people in the SKR, 600,000 are young people 14 to 29 years of age.

In August 1998, the activities of the radical Islamic fundamentalist community of Pir Kurban Ali Akhmetov in Kyzylorda were revealed. In October 1998, the activity of the Wahhabi community in the Zhylyoi district of Atyrau region was suppressed. In September 1998, a group of Pakistani Wahhabi missionaries operating in the Zhambyl region were expelled from the country. In 1999, five criminal cases were opened against 14 clergy members for the crimes they had committed. The measures taken in 2000 to verify religious associations' compliance with the constitution and laws revealed the activities of 497 unregistered religious organizations. In August 2003, several members of

¹⁴ See: The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 15 January, 1992, "On Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations", Art 20.

¹⁵ See: Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan: Official Text with Amendments and Additions of 7 October, 1998.

Hizb ut-Tahrir¹⁶ were detained by law enforcement agencies of the South Kazakhstan Region for the production and distribution of leaflets containing calls to overthrow the existing system and establish an Islamic state. Their activities extended beyond the southern regions of Kazakhstan, and were also uncovered in Karaganda, Pavlodar, Petropavlovsk, and Kokshetau.

After the well-known events in Tashkent, on 16 February, 1999, the official authorities adopted a number of laws and decrees, as a result of which state control over Islamic activity was tightened. The Decree of the President of the Republic on Measures to Prevent and Suppress Manifestations of Terrorism and Extremism (10 February, 2000) had once again formulated the tasks of state authorities, stipulating their strict supervision over prevention of the radicalization of the population's religious consciousness.

In describing the socio-economic and political situation in the country during that period, it is important to recall that it was experiencing the consequences of the Asian financial crisis at the time. Kazakhstan had suffered losses from the falling global prices for oil, lead, zinc, and aluminum. At that point, many enterprises faced the threat of bankruptcy. The situation at the external borders was rather dangerous, and the territorial integrity of the Central Asian states has been challenged by the direct international terrorists' attacks from the south.

As the social crisis worsened, the financial situation of all population groups in the region has deteriorated. The situation that arose did not merely repeat that which occurred in other countries, but, rather, possessed certain specifics due to its geographical location and political situation and its complex ethnic composition. With the growth of general dissatisfaction and the rise of unemployment, the tendency towards a spiritual and organizational formalization inherent in any opposition had manifested itself increasingly more clearly in the republics. Meanwhile, the majority of the population urgently required a phenomenon that could provide them with a mainstay and moral support, as the local authorities abused their power and the spiritual vacuum intensified. The noted tendencies could not but lead to the emergence and active spread of religious and political parties and organizations, as well as radical fundamentalist ideology in the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia.

In fact, a similar situation had occurred in the 1970s in Iran, when the government of Shah Reza Pahlavi carried out accelerated modernization, structurally altering the traditional Iranian society. Sultan Akimbekov has written: "People who were involved in the modernization processes, yet did not obtain real advantages, formed the social foundation for the protest against the modernization policy by the government of Shah Reza Pahlavi. These were mainly recent immigrants from the Iranian villages, who, under the new conditions in the city, had lost their familiar value orientations and the familiar foundations of social organization."¹⁷

From the first years of independence, the leadership of Kazakhstan tried to prevent such a development of events. In January 1990, the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan was established, with Mufti Ratbek kazhi Nysanbayuly as its head, and since June 2000 Absattar kazhi Derbisali (now director of the Ramazan Suleimenov Institute of Oriental Studies) has assumed this post. Since 1996, the Council for Religious Affairs under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan has been operating in the country, dealing with the affairs of both the local Islamic and other religious communities, as well as those that adhere to different creeds. The state's position in relation to religions, as is evident from official statements, is the source of the society's democratization, as reflected in the tasks of humanizing the entire state's social system and modernizing it. Coordination of relations with religious are addressed by the Ministry of Information and Public Accord, and since 2017, by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society.

¹⁶ See: *Spetsifika proiavleniy terrorizma i ekstremizma v Tsentralnoy Azii: itogi 2004 goda*, Report of the Center for Antiterrorism Programs, available at [<http://studies.agentura.ru/centres/cap/report/2004/>].

¹⁷ S.M. Akimbekov, op. cit., p. 26.

In order to quickly and comprehensively analyze the religious situation in the country, as well as to study the activities of religious educational institutions, a special resolution (No. 683 dated 6 May, 2000) established the Secretariat of the Council for Relations with Religious Associations, and on 27 July, 2000, a resolution of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan approved the regulations and composition of the Council, which comprised representatives of all concerned ministries and departments.

A similar situation was in place in 2002-2003, when the state also took measures to amend and modify the Law on Freedom of Religion and Religious Associations. The name of the bill is "On Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Issues of Religious Freedom and the Activity of Religious Associations." The need for this bill was dictated by the aggravation of the religious situation not only in the country, but also in the region as a whole.

A number of religious denominations spoke out against this bill. These were mainly the representatives of non-traditional religions, in particular, the Protestant Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan (AROK), the Emmanuel Christian mission, Jehovah's Witnesses, the National Ahmadi Muslim Zhamagat, etc. However, this bill was passed by the Parliament and sent for signing to the president of our country. But in accordance with Art 72.1.2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the head of the state sent it to the Constitutional Council. Guided by Art 72.1.2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Art 17.2.1, Arts 31, 32, 33, 37, 38, and 39 of the Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the Constitutional Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which has the power of a constitutional law, the Constitutional Council found that the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Freedom of Religion and the Activities of Religious Associations contradicts the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

By the way, representatives of certain religious organizations also drew attention to the non-constitutionality of the following provisions: Para 3.3 of the Law regarding the possibility of restricting legislative rights to the free dissemination of religious beliefs; Para 3.13 on state registration of Islamic religious associations on the recommendation of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan; Para 3.17 of the Law, which provides for the construction and/or opening of Muslim religious buildings and structures with the permission of the SAMK. At the same time, they drew attention to the fact that certain articles of the legislative acts on freedom of conscience and religion contain violations of human rights and of certain articles (1-6) of the Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief.

However, the fight against religious extremism and terrorism became the most relevant topic in the early 2000s, particularly, in 2011-2012. Due to the challenging religious and criminal situation in a number of the country's regions, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 11 October, 2011 No.483-IV "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations" was adopted.¹⁸

Since 2017, all amendments related to religious affairs and religious associations have been developed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society. While presenting the bill "On Amendments and Additions to Some Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activities and Religious Associations" in the Majlis, the head of the ministry, Nurlan Yermekbayev (now the head of the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Kazakhstan), noted that it stipulated over 50 amendments and additions to 12 legislative acts. In September 2018, senators returned the bill to the Majlis for revision, and on 29 January, 2019, the developers withdrew it from the lower house of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

¹⁸ The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated 11 October, 2011 No.483-IV "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations" (with amendments and additions as of 11 December, 2016).

Development of Religiosity in the Country's Population: Special Characteristics and Tendencies¹⁹

A new turn in the republican authorities' religion-related policy began in the late 1990s and was continued into the next century. For instance, it has found its official expression in the Decree of the Head of State Nursultan Nazarbayev on Measures to Prevent and Suppress Manifestations of Terrorism and Extremism, as well as in his speech on 31 January, 2001, to akims of all levels. It gave a worldview and political assessment of religion in the republic at the time, identified the main directions of work for local authorities and religious organizations, and aimed to normalize religious activity in the country. In particular, it pointed out that active promotion of public, universal values, ensuring the rights of citizens to freedom of religion, which are protected by the Constitution, strengthening spiritual harmony in society and harmonizing interfaith relations, are a strategic area of work in the religious sphere. Particular attention was paid to preventing the radicalization of religious consciousness.²⁰

Changes in the attitude to Islam, recognition and affirmation of its positive role in society led to the fact that many representatives of the clergy, as already noted above, took an active position in promoting the programs developed by state authorities.

And yet, how do regular people relate to religion? To respond to this and other questions, we have conducted a sociological survey in different regions of Kazakhstan. Among the respondents there were no representatives of the clergy, religious institutions, or various units of the administration. Our respondents were ordinary people who live in today's challenging conditions, and whose opinion reflects the interests, needs and moods of the majority of the population, at least to a certain extent.

While discussing the potential options for Islam's development, the respondents were asked the following question: "Along which path should religion develop? Modernization (i.e., alignment with the modern world) or the traditional path?" The respondents were divided into four groups, each of which was characterized by certain social characteristics. The majority of respondents (30.5%) selected "modernization" out of the proposed set of answers. This group contained, primarily, men, young people, highly qualified professionals, as well as entrepreneurs. These people supported the alignment of Islam with modern reality.

From the interviews with the respondents and in the process of analyzing their responses, it has become apparent that the respondents in this category are, as a rule, people who rely on their own energy, knowledge and entrepreneurial skills. These people are advocating a new relationship, a renewal of our lives. The second largest group supported the development of religion "along the traditional path, but without extremism and fanaticism" (17.7%). Among them, there was a greater share of older people, retirees and small business owners; all of them had doubts about improving, and even maintaining their social status. Propaganda of religious values resonated with them most often. The third group would have preferred the Muslim religion to develop "along the traditional path, but with an emphasis on cultural and moral values" (17.3%). This direction often attracted creative workers and intellectuals over 40 years of age. They found the emphasis on the moral foundations of religion to be the most realistic version of the spiritual transformation and society's cultural revival. Representatives of the third group were close to the second group. The fourth group supported the "preser-

¹⁹ This section uses data from field studies in 2001 and 2003.

²⁰ See: *Spetsifika proiavleniy terrorizma i ekstremizma v Tsentralnoy Azii: itogi 2004 goda*.

vation of the traditional path of development of Islam” (11%). In this group, the proportion of women and workers in the agricultural sector of the economy was above average. In terms of content, it is mostly a position that links culture and religion, closer to the option that states that “Islam, traditions and customs are inseparable.” The remaining respondents (8.3%) found the question difficult to answer. The respondents’ attitude to religion was reflected in the answers to the following question: “In what life situations is religion most beneficial?” According to the respondents, it is most important in child-rearing (36%), nurturing spirituality and morality (23%) and uniting people (17%). Islam attracted a large number of supporters with its spiritual and moral potential.

It should be noted that over the years of independence, a generally positive attitude has formed towards religion in the public consciousness. Answering the question of “In your opinion what place in our society should religion occupy?” 50.3% believe that religion should become the basis of spiritual and moral education; 13.3% accept the development of religion only within a reasonable framework; 10.8%—only under state control. Religion is considered unacceptable and intolerable in our society by only 8% of the respondents, while 2% found it difficult to answer.²¹

In assessing the prospects of “modernizing” Islam, the respondents were divided into “optimists,” “doubters,” and “pessimists.” “Optimists” (39%) were attracted by this prospect, since it means that this will eliminate unhealthy religious feelings in life. The share of “optimists” among professionals and businessmen 30-50 years of age was approximately the same. The tendency towards the modernization of Islam provoked conflicting feelings among the “doubters” (36%). They were not convinced that this process would not cause discontent among believers, and adversely affect the preservation of national traditions and customs, although religion itself should not lag behind modern life. The third, and the smallest group of “pessimists,” comprising 25% of respondents, did not accept this prospect. Respondents believed that moving away from Islamic traditions would hit national and religious feelings. The pessimistic point of view was shared by older people of low and average educational qualifications, most often women. As you can see, the respondents did not constitute an integral community, and the social groups that compose it related to religion in a different way. They were determined by the social status of groups, their gender and age, professional and qualification characteristics.

As is well-known, one of the fundamental issues determining the place and role of religion in society is the relationship between religion and politics in the activities of the society in question. In this regard, we find it interesting to consider students’ answers to the question “Would you like to live in a secular or religious state?” 89% of respondents answered that they would like to live in a secular state, 1.4%—in a theocratic, 9.6% found it difficult to answer.

Of course, problems in the religious sphere are particularly important for the country and its security, but it is obvious that flexible methods and principles of studying religious processes with regard for regional specifics are required. For effective regulation of the religious environment it is absolutely necessary to take these features into account. The authors of sociological studies came to the conclusion that the true scale of religiosity of Kazakhstan’s population is not as wide as claimed by the official clergy and statistics. If there was a practical way to establish the fact of functional religiosity, the percentage of believers would apparently be significantly lower for all age groups.

In fact, there are not so many strong believers in Kazakhstan (those who know the Arabic language, and consistently follow the instructions of the Koran and Sunnah in their daily lives). Those who act in accordance with the established tradition (observing religious traditions, customs and rituals, but do not read the Qur’an and the Sunnah, do not propagate faith), i.e. believers by tradition, are more numerous. However, they can hardly be considered “true” believers. For them, there is no difference between religious and national. They understand religion as a means of supporting morality

²¹ Here the data from field studies in 2017 are used.

and culture in a society, that is, in a socially utilitarian sense. Meanwhile, observance of religious rituals cannot serve as a criterion for distinguishing believers from the rest of the population. According to famous theologians, such as Professor Muhammad Ali al-Hashimi, the role of religious rituals is to strengthen the faith.²²

The level of religiosity in Kazakhstan, although generally relatively high, is not sufficiently deep. Our analysis shows that the religiosity of Kazakhstani population is heterogeneous. For many Kazakhstanis, faith is primarily conformist in nature. Preliminary results of the sociological study suggest that the modern believer is a person who fulfills not only his religious, but also civil obligations. He does not seek self-isolation, seclusion, and is tolerant of other religions.

Conclusion

As noted above, the problems of Islamic revival in Kazakhstan have inspired serious interest in researchers. This is due to the fact that without identifying the place and role of this religion in the countries of Central Asia, it is difficult to determine the nature and degree of society's maturity at different times, or resolve legal, philosophical, socio-psychological, cultural and other issues. All these objective difficulties have aroused scientific interest in the development of Islam in Kazakhstan and other countries of the region and in elucidating the main trends of its development. In this context, the study of the past is important not so much from a purely scientific standpoint, but rather for the correct understanding of present and future processes. An attempt to consider the historical scale of events with the participation of Islam allows us to better understand the nature of the issues that require immediate resolution today.

The problems of the historical development of Islam have always been a difficult task for researchers, and its genesis, at the time of a socio-political transformation in Kazakhstan, is even more complex and contradictory. Not only did religion have to protect its position in the new environment, but the origins of evolution of Islam were also extremely diverse, and its alignment with the new realities had lingered for many years, and in some countries continues into the present time. During this period, Islam, which had often played a decisive role in the emergence of unique forms of Eastern society, itself went through several stages of development, and during each the socio-economic and socio-political conditions influenced religion differently, subjecting it to their influence and control. The intricacy of the analysis is related to the fact that to this day there is a wide variety of Islamic schools and movements in Central Asian countries. It should be noted that the problem of politicization of Islam is poorly studied, which is often explained by the extreme scarcity of sources and materials on this issue.

Even though there undoubtedly are general trends in the development of Islam typical of many Eastern countries, practically each one of them possesses special innate features. In Kazakhstan and other post-Soviet states, Islam began to take a firm position mainly after independence. Islam in Kazakhstan underwent a long and strong impact from the atheistic propaganda of the Soviet state, which exerted constant pressure on the Muslim clergy and destroyed religious buildings and Islamic monuments. Indonesia, Iran or Lebanon have not encountered anything similar. However, Islam in these countries was more strongly influenced by the classical or "theoretical" norms and dogmas. It should be noted that the uniqueness of socio-economic and socio-political conditions left its mark on the development of religion in Kazakhstan.

²² See: M.A. Al-Khashimi, *Lichnost musulmanina v tom vide, kotoryy stremitsia pridat ey islam s pomoshchiu Korana i Sunny*, Transl. from the Arabic by V.F. Nirsha, Ibrahim Bin Abdulaziz Al-Ibrahim Russian Charitable Foundation, Moscow, 1999, p. 17.