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Dear Readers!

The revival of religious life in the Caucasus at the end of the 20th century has paved the way for transformation of the region’s social-spiritual values and ethno-confessional structure. The significant changes that have occurred in the past two decades in the confessional life of all the nationalities of the post-Soviet Caucasus have been very instrumental in aggravating ethno-political conflicts. During this time both local ethno-confessional forces as well as the leading world political and religious actors have been stepping up their activity aimed at realizing their geopolitical and economic interests.

So the Institute of Strategic Studies of the Caucasus would like to draw your attention to this special issue called Religion and the Caucasian Civilization devoted to an analysis of various aspects of religious life in the Caucasian-Caspian region.

Keeping in mind that only the Central and Northern Caucasus were involved in the transformation processes occurring in the ethno-confessional space, whereas the ethnic groups of the Southwest Caucasus (Turkey) and the Southeast Caucasus (Iran) have been steadily developing their traditional religions, this work mainly takes a look at the religious processes in the post-Soviet Caucasus.

The main feature distinguishing the ethno-confessional processes in the post-Soviet Caucasus is that for an entire century all the diversity of religious and spiritual life was forcibly replaced by a single ideological (communist) value system. In 1922, when the U.S.S.R. came into being, the state’s anti-religious policy was aimed at alienating all the ethnic groups from God and the Church by imposing values aimed at lauding the personality cult and party. The multifarious ethno-confessional groups were forced to become a single ethno-ideological community known as the Soviet people. When the Soviet Union collapsed and absolute domination of the communist ideology was rejected, the Caucasian nationalities were able to return once more to free confession of their faith and revive their traditional spiritual values in all the ethno-territorial formations of the region.

An analysis of the methods used to alienate the various ethno-confessional groups from religion, their truly historical return to the bosom of their faith, as well as the influence of these processes on the political, economic, and social-spiritual life of the Caucasus will help to settle the existing conflicts, promote sustainable regional integration, and encourage the region’s subsequent involvement in the global civilizational processes.

Chairman of
the Editorial Council

Eldar M. Ismailov
THE CAUCASIAN STATES:
ETHNIC AND CONFESSIONAL FACTOR OF
NATIONAL SECURITY

Abstract

The author investigates the phenomenon of ethnic and confessional affiliation that plays a special (positive or negative) role in the highly conflict-prone contexts of the post-Soviet transition states' national security. He analyzes the phenomenon's genesis and dual nature as well as its ability to breed social-political conflicts of a special type and their destabilizing and stabilizing impact on the contemporary security systems.

Introduction

At all times academics and politicians have found it hard to agree on the nature of interrelations between religion and politics and among their products: traditional and political cultures, values, and institutions. In the past, debates developed into armed clashes: witness the Wars of Religion in France (16th-century); the Reformation in Germany, the Reconquista in Spain (15th-century); the Ottoman-Safavid wars (16th-17th centuries), etc.
Later, the religious factor retained its social and political weight in the countries’ socioeconomic development and domestic policies, when it came to “conveniently” dividing the country into administrative-territorial units or to securing geopolitical aims.

At the turn of the 21st century, when the archaic forms of imperial confrontations had finally become the thing of the past, there came the epoch of globalization with its own advantages, paradoxes, and challenges. The upsurge of ethnic activity throughout the world, mushrooming nation-states based on this matrix, and the imperative nature of the values of ethnopolitical development are among such challenges. In other words, globalization created ethnopolitics as its antinomy.

Despite the wealth of political-religious, academic, and publicist writings devoted to the problem of the coexistence of religion and ethnopolitics under the new conditions, this field still abounds in lacunae and brims with unanswered questions.

Here I have addressed three of the most topical of them:

- Is it right to speak about the interrelation between “ethnic group” and “religion” (confession) as a qualitatively new category—ethnoconfessionalism?
- Is it scientifically correct to identify the so-called ethnoconfessional conflicts as a special type or do they belong to the category of ethnopolitical conflicts?
- What place in the “ethnopolitics-security” formula belongs to the confessional factor; are the recently relatively identified types of security (“religious” and “ethnoconfessional”) rooted in the scholarly and meaningful context or are they none other than mythologemes?

These questions are especially pertinent for the transition states, that is, for all the Soviet-successor states, the Caucasian states included. The still unfolding ethnosocial and nation-state processes and the difficulties inevitably encountered during democratic development create tension when combined with the political, ethnic, and confessional problems. This, in turn, creates an entanglement of threats with higher than normal conflict-prone potential when it comes to these states’ ethnopolitical and, on the whole, national security. I shall seek answers to the above questions in this context.

**Ethnoconfessionality: Is it an Ethnic or Religious Phenomenon?**

I shall first concretize the basic concepts to be used in the article. Academics and publicist writers alike have accepted that “religion” and “confession” (“religious” and “confessional”) are two interchangeable categories. On my part I believe that these two equivalent concepts differ when it comes to their psycho-linguistic and ethnopolitical contents.

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2 This trend was especially evident in Western Europe in the early 20th century where many of the political parties were based on the religious affiliation of its members.

3 This was typical of all empires, especially of the British and Russian.

4 For example, Russia actively used the “need to defend Christians” in the Balkans as a geopolitical pretext, which was also present in the so-called Eastern Question in the 19th-early 20th centuries.

5 The “Globalization and ethnicization are two sides of one coin” dilemma is discussed in my article “Globalization and Ethnic Policy in the Caucasus: Between the Beetle and the Block” that appeared in *The Caucasus & Globalization* journal, No. 1 (2), 2007.
To confirm the above let us look at what contemporary dictionaries say.

“Religion (Lat. religio—piety, object of worship, cultic object) is a philosophy and perception of the world as well as corresponding conduct and specific (cultic) actions based on faith in God (or gods) and the supernatural.”6 “Confession (Lat. confessio) is denomination (faith). With the emergence of various Protestant trends the term was applied to religious communities (churches) related by common doctrines as well as the ‘symbolic books’ that registered these doctrines (for example, the Augsburg Confession, and others).”7

While religion is a specific form of generalized philosophical mastering and assessment of reality and the basis on which public conscience and social conduct are built, confession helps people make a more or less conscious choice of religious model (one of the world confessions and their trends) and corresponding religious technologies (cults, rites, and prescriptions).

This problem has a subjective side to it: each student of religion deals with basically extrascientific matter and has to bring together in his mind the truths of reason and the truths of the faith. Elmir Kuliev from Azerbaijan has pointed out: “As for the studies of those who remain ‘outside religious world outlook,’ they cannot be unbiased and objective. When we deal with any religion, Islam or Christianity, the position of an outside observer is impossible: religious convictions demand that everyone either accept or reject them.”8

There is another aspect of the same problem related to the essential description of ethnicity and confessionality, their shared or different features and their inner interconnection. The wide variety of interpretations of these two phenomena notwithstanding, their fundamental criteria reveal aspects suggestive of their inner nature.

The immanent properties of ethnicity and confessionality are best seen in tabulated form.

The table below supplies enough material for the following: ethnicity and confessionality do not negate one another but rather are mutually complementary: the negative and positive processes as well as integration and disintegration are, on the whole, mutually balancing. At the same time, since it is next to impossible to identify the exact mechanisms of interaction between the immanent features of both ethnicity and confessionality (this should be treated separately), we should concentrate on identifying the contact zones of this interaction as a much more promising exercise. A new social-anthropogenic reality, a blend of ethnicity and confessionality—ethnoconfessionality—appears where interaction takes place.

The following mechanisms can be identified as its key structural-functional elements:

- Structuralization of ethnic groups through consolidation of those living in adjacent territories into a larger ethnic entity of a higher typological order on the basis of local variants of shared moral principles;
- Ethnonational implementation of religion. Russian authors T. Mastiugina and L. Perepelkin have the following to say in this respect: “The world religions … are of a supra-national, international nature, yet each of the world confessions, Christianity in the first place, contains a multitude of denominations to play the role of national (or, rather, quasi-national) religion (Anglicanism in Great Britain, Baptism in the United States, and Shi’i Islam in Iran);”9
- Method of translation of confessional content into ethnic forms, for example, religious-moral prescriptions into prescriptions of social stereotypes and symbolic environment;
- A mechanism of integration used to construct new systemic components of the ethnic group’s social life:

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6 [http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc1p/40598].
7 [http://dic.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enc1p/23942].
— a single system of social (ethnic) and civilizational (confessional) solidarity and identity;
— a single system of collective (ethnic) and civilizational (confessional) ideas about one’s own social group and its place in contemporary realities;
— a single system of social-state coercion and religious-moral sanctions, authority.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion Description</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Confessionality</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Key descriptions</td>
<td>Inborn qualities (primordialism); symbolic milieu; system of stereotypes</td>
<td>Historically determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Genesis</td>
<td>In the majority of cases is vague and debatable</td>
<td>As a rule, historically anchored to the relatively exact time of emergence and development stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Substantial basis for national statehood</td>
<td>Substantial basis for confessional civilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective</td>
<td>Justification of domination of any specific confession on a given territory</td>
<td>The reason why scattered ethnic groups should be united into an ethnosocial community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of culture</td>
<td>Traditionally instrumentalist</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of interconnection</td>
<td>Historical form of realization of confessionality</td>
<td>Historical method of preserving ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acmatic phase</td>
<td>Increases the social distance between it and other ethnic groups</td>
<td>Shortens the social distance between it and other ethnic groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeostatic phase</td>
<td>At the large group level, decline of ethnicity turns into a process of ethnic transformations when the changes of individual ethnic components (language, culture, conscience, etc.) bring about a change in ethnic self-awareness and self-identity</td>
<td>At the large group level, decline of confessionality is evolutionary because the changes do not affect confessional self-identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic values</td>
<td>Ethnocultural, political</td>
<td>Civilizational, common to mankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aim</td>
<td>Nation-state</td>
<td>World confession</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change of the self-identification type</td>
<td>Practical constancy of self-identification</td>
<td>Potential possibility of change in confessions on the basis of their sociocultural relevance</td>
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There is another aspect of the problem, which is theoretical-methodological in nature: the concept “ethnoconfessional” is used in various contexts: an ethnoconfessional system,\textsuperscript{10} ethnoconfessional democracy,\textsuperscript{11} etc. So far, scholarly definitions of the very phenomenon of ethnoconfessionality have been poorly elaborated.

Here is my contribution to these efforts: ethnoconfessionality is a special type of social identity caused by confessionality and ethnicity developing together in historical contexts and expressed in various forms of socio-psychological perception of their identity.

This definition reflects the specific features of confessional-ethnic reality in the Soviet-successor states at the transition stage when public conscience has become firmly convinced that individual ethnicity is identified through its confessional affiliation and vice versa.

It is much more important to identify the place of ethnoconfessionality in the ethnopolitical processes going on in the Caucasian states. The paradigm espoused above suggests the following important aspects.

1. Most of the ethnic groups living in the Caucasus (both titular and smaller ones) have not yet completed the process of their ethnonational development. Ethnoconfessionality brings the completion of this process closer—its very nature overcomes ethnotribalism and subethnic clans, that is, stimulates ethnic consolidation.

2. The Caucasus’ polyethnic nature (with the exception of Armenia, which deliberately became monoethnic) has made the task of transforming the “coexistence” of the previously relatively independent small ethnic groups into a new form of their ethnosocial cohesion into a single nation within each of the states while preserving their ethnocultural diversity. This complex ethnoblending process (ethnic fusion, to borrow the ethnologists’ favorite term) largely depends on the degree to which ethnoconfessional forms are developed.

3. In most of the polyethnic transition states (in the Caucasus, as well as elsewhere) ethnoconfessionality became a pragmatic ideal and political basis for all sorts of constructs of the national idea, national ideology, and national ideal (the idea of Russia-ism or the ideology of Azerbaijan-ism). It is very important to find an answer to the question: To what extent is this social ideal “national” and to what extent is the national ideal “social” if the development of ethnic groups (nations) is reduced to movement toward an ideal (aim or ideological program)? I believe that ethnoconfessionality, a universal accumulator of the nation’s historically developing ethnic, social, and spiritual experience can be taken as a measuring rod.

It should be said here that the level of a society’s ethnoconfessionality is not a constant—it is determined by the state of its ethnopolitical and religious spheres. An analysis of the dramatic events of the late 1980s-early 1990s that took place in the Caucasus demonstrated that ethnoconfessionality develops through two stages.

- At the first stage, which I call “ethnopolitical confessionality,” the ethnopolitical component of ethnoconfessionality was the most required element in the context of the mounting centrifugal trends when the population should have been politically mobilized. This means that ethnic elites, ethnic political parties based on “national-liberation” and “religious” rhetoric, and armed monoethnic units designed to fight against people of other confessions, etc. were formed at a fast pace.


The second stage, which began in the late 20th-early 21st century when the sovereign Caucasian states had already achieved partial stabilization, moved the task of internal consolidation and modernization to the frontline with the confessional element of ethnoconfessionality coming to the fore (“confessional ethnopolitics”). Religious hierarchs become actively involved in the efforts to bring national peace and harmony to the region; the declared and actual growth of confessional tolerance, the desire to integrate into the world community on the basis of common civilizational values, etc.

This suggests the following conclusion: the ethnicity-confessionality dilemma used in the title of this section cannot be resolved in favor of one of the parts. The realities of the transition states, in the Caucasus and elsewhere, demonstrate that ethnoconfessionality is one of the indicators of the level of diffusion of the politically most important public spheres: ethnic and confessional. When this integral form of social life goes beyond certain threshold indicators the researcher can point out that new types of conflicts—ethnoconfessional—have come into being. In actual fact, however, the gap between the possibility of ethnoconfessional conflicts and their emergence in sociopolitical realities is wide enough.

Ethnoconfessional Conflicts: Myth or Reality?

Samuel Huntington’s well-known forecast that in the future conflicts would take the form of a “clash of civilizations” spurred on by religious differences stirred up no mean enthusiasm in the academic community. Many of its members rushed to prove that such clashes were a reality rather than possibility. Political scientists and publicist writers have pepped their works with “ethnopolitical and ethnoconfessional conflicts” without going to their real roots. For example, the authors of the fundamental work Konflikty na Vostoke. Etnicheskie i konfessional’nye (Ethnic and Confessional Conflicts in the East) did not bother to study in depth the phenomenon of ethnoconfessional conflicts as an object of special scrutiny even in the opening chapter, which is of a theoretical-methodological nature, entitled “Etnokonfessional’nye konflikty sovremennosti i podkhody k ikh uregulirovaniu” (Ethnoconfessional Conflicts of Our Days and Possible Approaches to their Settlement). The authors, in fact, limited themselves to analyzing the religious (confessional) factor, thus treating the ethnoconfessional conflicts as a type of ethnopolitical conflict. The same can be said about other monographs, textbooks, methodological programs, and teaching aids.  

The Hindu-Muslim (Indian-Pakistani) conflict and the conflict between the Protestants and Catholics of Northern Ireland are frequently used as an example of ethnoconfessional conflicts of recent history; the Greek-Turkish conflict on Cyprus (1974) and the Balkan conflict of the 1990s-early 21st century are mentioned much less frequently. Driven by political motivations some authors tend to describe the post-Soviet conflicts as religious. This is done in relation to the conflict between Armenians and Azeris over Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflict in Chechnia in the Russian Federation, etc. More than that: the political elites of post-Soviet states are watching, with mounting anx-

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iety, the potential seats of what they describe as ethnoconfessional conflicts in their territories. For example, Western and Russian analysts widely discussed what Vladimir Putin said in his interview to a correspondent of The Guardian: “When the Soviet Union fell apart numerous ethnic and confessional conflicts flared up in its former territory. We have up to 2 thousand potential conflicts of this sort. If we remain passive they will ignite.”

It seems that here different concepts are being wrongly classified as belonging to the same category. The conflicts between the Hindus and the Muslims of British India that reached its peak in 1947 can be described as a confessional conflict because two different confessional communities were involved in it: ethnogenesis had not yet been completed there by that time. Their common religious-confessional identity was the catalyst for integrating the multitudinous nationalities of India and Pakistan. On the other hand, the conflict in Northern Ireland cannot be described as a confessional one in the true sense of the word since members of the same Western Christian confession who merely belonged to its different (Catholic and Protestant) interpretations were involved. This and the fact that the local population was not clearly divided in the ethnic sense mean that this conflict should be described as innerconfessional rather than ethnoconfessional (between the English and the Irish and the Catholics and the Protestants) as is sometimes done.

The role of the religious factor in conflicts across the post-Soviet expanse was minimal: ethnosocial communities were the subjects of conflict relations. According to R. Silantiev of Russia, “the four major conflicts that emerged in the Caucasus in the last twenty years have several things in common. None of them started as a religious conflict, however the religious factor gradually gained weight.”

It should be said that even when the author concentrates on certain specific features of ethnoconfessional conflicts (the “explosive” beginning and development, unlimited use of force and means, total mobilization of resources, ethnic cleansing, hostage-taking, mutual mistrust, their protracted nature when the sides draw their diasporas into it, as well as the destructive results), they, in fact, turn out to be present in any more or less major ethnopolitical conflict.

This means that at historical turning points when clashes of interests in post-Soviet ethnic communities developed into conflicts, the people’s “defensive functions” took the form of nationalism and its institutions rather than religion.

Both the confessional and ethnopolitical conflicts share one common feature—they are motivated by status-related interests. The contradictions that rest on ethnoconfessionality, on the other hand, are cognitive by nature. This means that they are realized in a clash of ideas and do not change the status of the sides involved. This is primarily explained by the absence of the main criteria (the subjective and purposefulness) in any social conflict.

This makes it hard, if not impossible, to hypothesize purely ethnoconfessional conflicts in the absence of relevant facts. The fact that certain small ethnic groups (the Druses of Lebanon) are relatively independent in the ethnoconfessional sense does not mean that they are involved in an ethnoconfessional conflict. Most experts on foreign policy agree that the conflict in Lebanon, which has been smoldering for many years now, is part of a vaster geopolitical conflict in the Middle East.

This means that the thesis about the mounting ethnoconfessional conflicts in the 21st century is totally unfounded. The ethnic entities involved in any conflict in pursuit of political aims make the
conflict ethnopolitical (ethnic); the confessional entities involved in a conflict allow it to be described as confessional. There is no convincing evidence that there is such category as an ethnoconfessional community that could have been involved in a conflict.

Upon closer scrutiny all so-called ethnoconfessional conflicts are, in the final analysis, reduced to one of two large real types of conflict: ethnopolitical and confessional.

Ethnoconfessionality and Security in the 21st Century

The above is directly related to the question of the place of ethnoconfessional factors in the national security system. Academically it is counterproductive to break down the security concept into new, and fairly unjustified, types, including so-called religious and ethnoconfessional security. A. Alekseevskiy, for example, failed to define this concept in his work on the religious security problem. Those authors who define religious security reduce it either to open protectionism of the dominant confession or to repulsing geopolitical threats.

The absence of a solid theoretical base is caused by the objective fact that a confessional community, as well as an ethnic community, realizes its nature (confessionality, ethnicity) through the key sphere of public life—the economy, politics, culture, etc. It is impossible to speak strongly in favor of the existence of religious security or ethnic security because they are not a unilinear phenomenon: there are confessional or ethnic communities, but there are no forms of aggregation or articulation of their interests.

Ethnoconfessional security is even more debatable. I have already written that the idea of ethnoconfessional community and correspondingly of ethnoconfessional conflicts is nothing but a myth. The key parameters of ethnic and confessional communities are tabulated below.

These ethnic and confessional communities have different basic parameters, but it cannot be denied that they are closely interconnected. Throughout history the confessional factor has remained an ethnic-forming factor (the Arabs, Eastern, and Southern Slavs) or an instrument used to prevent assimilation and protect ethnic identity (the Jews).

In the security context it is much more important to identify the blending of qualitative impulses where these two identities cross their borders. In real life this is reflected in the complicated ethnoconfessional conditions in which people divided by such borders have to live:

—innerconfessional: Kurds (Sunnis, Shi’a, Yezidi); Arabs of Yemen (Sunnis, Zaydi Shi’a); Germans of the FRG, Dutch, Swiss (Catholics and Protestants), and others;
—interconfessional: the Bengalis (Hindu in the east and Muslims in the west); the Arabs of Lebanon (various trends of Christianity and Islam).

Similar phenomena in the post-Soviet transition states are strongly affected by the state and territorial division of nationalities. This, in turn, stimulates an ethnoconfessional impact on the national

21 This is directly indicated by the RF Conception of National Security: “Threats to the national security and interests of the Russian Federation in the border sphere are caused by the following: economic, demographic and cultural-religious expansion by neighboring states into the Russian Federation,” available at [http://www.russastra2000.html].
and regional security system. The specific vector of ethnoconfessional impact is the sum-total of the interactions among social-ethnic and religious-confessional institutions coupled with the institutional system’s purposeful efforts to regulate ethnonational and state-confessional relations. Below the factors are ranged according to their conflict potential (from weaker to stronger):

1. *Ethnoconfessional tolerance*—the state of society stemming from the low level of its ethnicization and confessionality, which does not rule out, however, normal ethnic and confessional identities.

2. *Ethnocentrism*—high level of ethnicity combined with a relatively low level of confessionality. Discrimination in the form of demonstration of the superiority of the titular nation and passive intolerance pushes different ethnic and confessional communities to the social margins.

3. *Religious fanaticism*—high level of confessionality combined with a relatively low level of society’s ethnicity. It is rooted in its incompatibility with the dominating confessions of any other religion (in the transition states this may take the form of conflicts under the slogan of the purity of faith, etc.).

4. *Ethnoconfessional intolerance*—high level of ethnicization and radical confessionality which leads to aggressive incompatibility with other ethnic and confessional identities. When concentrated on one and the same object religious fanaticism and active ethnocentrism create the image of an enemy-nation and lead to national phobias. As a result, “aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism create ethnic, political and...
social tensions within and between States. They also undermine international stability and worldwide efforts to place universal human rights on a firm foundation.”

This suggests two questions: What is the mechanism for translating the ethnoconfessional impact to the national security system? And what are the specifics of this process in the transition states of the Caucasus?

In relation to the former it should be said that the above four types of ethnoconfessional factors do not directly influence the national security system according to the following pattern: ethnoconfessionality-economic security, ethnoconfessionality-political security, etc. It is much more logical to surmise the existence of a segment in the national security system that would absorb, in a natural way, the main ethnoconfessional impulse.

Ethnopolitical security could play this role: within its framework the balance between the specific vector of ethnoconfessional impact (intolerance) and the set of national interests suggested by the context of ethnonational existence is achieved. This explains why the choice of interests (real and false, strategic and short-term, important and of secondary importance) as national directly depends on an ethnopolitical filter of sorts.

The waves of migration that reached Western Europe in the latter half of the 20th and early 21st centuries created new, hitherto unknown problems: greater ethnoconfessional distances and self-isolation of the newcomers. D. Dragunskiy of Russia has rightly written: “Immigration from the Third World countries creates new classes or ethnoclasses, to be more exact. It creates new proletarians not only in the context of the economy, but also because of their ethnic affiliation. The ethnoclasses are charged with new revolutionary vigor in which social demands are blended with ethnocultural and confessional.” In the final analysis, new Europe with its altered anthropogenic, ethnic, and cultural makeup might generate greater social and political tension in the region.

The ethnoconfessional factor in the form of a “new national question” is affecting, to an ever increasing degree, the European countries’ national security: they must largely revise their priorities and abandon the traditional ethnic policy based on the French model of assimilation and citizenship for multiculturalism.

Great Britain supplied an example of readjusted priorities when in the summer of 2002 the Cabinet invited the parliament to discuss a draft law on immigration and citizenship that suggested that the children of immigrants should be educated in special schools within immigrant centers rather than in ordinary British schools. Racial unrest forced the Cabinet to retreat, but the problem remained and would develop into an even worse headache.

As distinct from the European countries, ethnoconfessional factors are having a different impact on ethnopolitical security in the transition Caucasian states.

First, there is a much greater, compared with the developed democratic countries, role of the external factor in determining any specific ethnoconfessional vector in ethnopolitical security:

— In the case of Azerbaijan—political (20 percent of its territory is occupied, a fact that has produced about 1 million refugees and forced migrants) and geostrategic factors (participation in setting up international “communication corridors” and political alliances of the GUAM type);

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— In the case of Armenia—retrospective (reviving the memory of the nation’s past as part of
the Ottoman Empire) and geopolitical factors (implementation of plans to set up a so-called
Greater Armenia by means of neighboring territories);
— In the case of Georgia—political (Russia as the main stumbling block on the road toward
the country’s territorial integrity) and geostrategic factors (strategic partnership in setting
up international “communication corridors” and political alliances together with a policy
aimed at integrating into the Euro-Atlantic structures).

■ Second, a wide variety of ethnoconfessional models: in Armenia ethnoconfessional intol-
erance is coming to the fore as the dominant trend; Georgia is moving toward ethnocen-
trism; Azerbaijan is displaying, to an ever increasing degree, signs of its ethnoconfessional
tolerance.

Neither of the models is static. Azerbaijan is moving away from the ethnocentrism of
the early 1990s to the ethnoconfessional tolerance of the early 21st century confirmed by
Pope Benedict XVI who expressed his satisfaction with the level of national tolerance when
visiting Azerbaijan in 2008.24

The highly controversial dynamics of ethnoconfessionality can be observed in the
neighboring countries as well. According to Armenian experts on religious studies, in
2005 Armenia was still moving toward religious diversity,25 while in 2006 the Armenian
Church became an exclusive institution.26 In 2007 Armenians were concerned with the fact
that Amnesty International put the republic on the list of countries where discrimination
for religious reasons was obvious.27 According to Zaza Piralishvili of Georgia “in 2005,
the main events unfolded around freedom of conscience and the churches’ geocultural ac-
commodation, two major issues that echoed in 2006. In 2007, the Orthodox Church forti-
fied its position amid political aggravations; this pushed all the other developments in the
religious sphere to the side.”28

■ Third, the competing ethnic elites are actively using ethnoconfessional factor as an instru-
ment of struggle and mobilization or, at least, as a unifying symbol.

■ Fourth, ethnoconfessionality removed the distinctions between confessional and ethnopoliti-
cal conflicts at an ever accelerating pace and brought to light the trends toward internation-
alization of regional and even local conflicts.

This means that the ethnoconfessional factor, which contributed to ethnopolitical security of the
transition states, is evident on at least two planes:
— As “symbolic religious-political images” of the world, country, region, historical enemies,
and allies, which the entities of the security network use to their advantage;
— As a method used to create a certain type of conflict.

26 The new version of the republic’s Constitution says that the Republic of Armenia “recognizes the exclusive his-
torical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church in the spiritual life … of the people of Arme-
p. 128.
The latter deserves special attention. In full accordance with the widely accepted typologization of conflicts as vertical and horizontal we can talk about:

- Confessional (within confessions or between them) conflicts of a predominantly horizontal nature (confession against confession), even though the state might support one of the sides;
- Ethnic (ethnopolitical) conflicts, which in the context of the predominantly polyethnic states, are mostly of a vertical nature (ethnic group-state opposition); ethnic confrontations within a federative state are not infrequent (horizontal conflicts).

As distinct from the above patterns the aggressive forms of ethnoconfessionality serve as fertile soil for the escalation of horizontal and vertical sociopolitical conflicts alike. Separatism, as the highest form of an integral conflict, could blow up the entire edifice of the contemporary world order.

Separatism as a highly varied phenomenon—it can be ethnic, religious, territorial, political, etc.—has always caused wars and conflicts that ended in changing the political map of the world. Separatism rooted in ethnoconfessionality leads to the most prolonged, bloodiest, and cruellest conflicts which the sides practically never agree to end for the simple reason that neither the “voice of blood” nor religion allow the sides to leave them in the past. The memory of them is bequeathed to new generations involved in the endless rotation of victories and defeats.

Separatism that springs into being on the basis of ethnoconfessional intolerance threatens national security, and ethnopolitical security as its part, to a much greater extent than the other types of separatism. Why? The post-Soviet history of the Caucasus has demonstrated that if ethnoconfessional intolerance dominates in a country, region, or area it will sooner or later create a distorting mirror of ethnopolitical realities in which the neighboring nations are seen as a deadly enemy without any right to continued existence, while their territories are declared to be an area of vital interests or even a “historical homeland.” The other side responds in kind, which leads to a clash of ethnoconfessional identities that over time develops into historical antagonisms.

It should be said that a positive ethnoconfessional impact on the security sphere is also possible, particularly in the form of tolerance. Its importance for the contemporary world and its role in ensuring security and stability have been registered in many international documents. This phenomenon, which is put in a nutshell in the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance the UNESCO General Conference adopted in 1995, is described as respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures; forms of self-expression and human individuality.

Much has been written about the problem of tolerance, however, until recently, authors have concentrated on its religious or religious-political aspects. In fact, people did not become aware of the ethnoconfessional dimension of tolerance until the last quarter of the 20th century when several Mid-Eastern conflicts (on Cyprus, in Lebanon, the Kurdish problem, etc.) became too hot to be ignored. It was then that politicians, public and religious figures, and academics became aware of the need to promote the philosophy of tolerance and to create an efficient sys-

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31 See: J. Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions, Transl. into English by H. Taylor, Iqnatius Press, San Francisco, 2004 is one of the latest works on the subject that attracted a lot of attention.
tem needed to prevent or neutralize threats to security. In this context, “ethnoconfessional toler-
ance (as a factor of peace and security) becomes a phenomenon that reflects the nature of the
interrelations and sociopolitical activity of political entities (including social, ethnic, and con-
fessional groups, as well as individuals) expressed in their tolerance, mutual understanding and
agreement that create the feeling that the individual, society, state, and region are protected
against external and internal threats.”

This means that in order to make ethnoconfessional tolerance part of the political and social
life of the transition states it is not enough to merely investigate the factors that promote (or sup-
press) it and monitor ethnosocial intolerance and confessional tension. It is advisable to identify
the priority trends leading to deactivation of the huge amounts of energy of social destruction trapped
in nationalism, xenophobia, and religious radicalism and to put tolerance on an adequate legal and
normative base.

**Conclusion**

The above suggests the following answers to the questions formulated in the Introduction.

- First, as distinct from the ethnic and confessional sphere, ethnoconfessionality is not an inde-
pendent element of the nation’s existence. As a result of blending, in the course of history, of
the ethnic and confessional spheres into a qualitatively new social-anthropogenic identity
that created a socio-psychological background, ethnoconfessionality structuralizes the eth-
nic group through ethnonational implementation of its religion, transformation of the confes-
sional content into ethnic forms, and creation of new systemic components of the ethnic
group’s social life.

- Second, due to its transborder nature ethnoconfessionality cannot be regarded as a direct
cause of specific conflicts; it merely imparts its specifics to and creates development vectors
of ethnopolitical conflicts.

- Third, in the context of security (international, regional, and national) ethnoconfessionality
may play either a positive or a negative role (the latter happens more much often). Within the
favorable development trends ethnoconfessionality may contribute to the ethnopolitical se-
curity of the post-Soviet transition states by shaping, at all security levels and in all security
entities, sociopsychological attitudes of tolerance. In a negative context defective
ethnoconfessionality tends to create images of the “chosen” and “inferior” nation, thus pushing
the ethnic elites and a large part of the ethnic groups toward aggressive actions. History has
taught us that the never ending struggle against “enemy nations” waged under slogans of
“freedom and security” of one’s own nation leads an intolerant society in the final analysis to
the brink of the precipice of political tyranny, which deprives both freedom and security of
any meaning.

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32 M.M. Gajimirzaev, Etnokonfessional’naia tolerantnost kak factor obespechenia mira n bezopasnosti ta Severnom
CENTRAL EUROPE,
THE CENTRAL CAUCASUS,
AND CENTRAL ASIA:
CONFESSIONAL STRUCTURE AS A FACTOR
IN REGIONAL SECURITY RELATIONS

A b s t r a c t

To what extent is it important to take the specifics of confessional structures into account when assessing the vectors and dynamics of interstate relations in regional security systems? The author has analyzed the regional systems of Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia to answer this and related questions.

I n t r o d u c t i o n

In the 21st century religion and security cannot be discussed separately, which prompts the question: To what extent should confessional structures be taken into account when discussing the functioning of regional security complexes (RSC) as a whole and their members’ securitization, political behavior, and relations in the security sphere in particular. I have taken three post-Soviet RSCs as an example—Central Europe (CE), the Central Caucasus (CC), and Central Asia (CA).

Seen as either homo- or heterogeneous their confessional structures are very different: while the degree of their ethnic heterogeneity can be compared, their confessional content makes them very different indeed. In any case, religion is still one of the factors to be taken into account when assessing the dynamics of regional conflicts. The very obvious differences in the confessional structures of the three RSCs discussed here suggest the logical conclusion that this factor has a different effect on the

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2 Here I use the concept of Central Eurasia and Central Europe formulated by Eldar Ismailov, according to which Central Eurasia includes three post-Soviet regions: Central Europe (Belarus, Moldova, and Ukraine); the Central Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia), and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) (for more detail, see: E. Ismailov, “Central Eurasia: Its Geopolitical Function in the 21st Century,” Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 2 (50), 2008, pp. 7-29).
process of securitization in the member states. It remains to be seen to what extent it can affect their political behavior and the security relations between them and outside actors.

The classical theory of security complexes suggests that, in defining the shape and structure of the RSC, cultural (religious and racial included) patterns may be an important contributing factor, though they come second to political patterns.

The initial structuralism of the RSC theory (RSCT) is obvious: political relations and distribution of power among the RSC states stimulate the corresponding amity/enmity vectors. By introducing the category of securitization and the thesis that the process is an autonomous one, B. Buzan and O. Weaver have moved away from the initial excessive structuralism of this theory. The latest RSCT modernizations suggest that confessional factors are not mere catalysts but at times act as independent determinants of securitization in the RSC states and the corresponding security relations among them.

The thesis of the autonomy and the relative nature of securitization casts doubts on the priority of the structural-political factors in RSC; more than that: this can be proven empirically. The question is: Is this related to the RSC of Central Europe, the Central Caucasus, and Central Asia? It is extremely important to assess the degree to which religious closeness/differences affect interstate and inner conflict potential in the RSC states in the post-Soviet period and the way they perceive the amity/enmity existing among them and between them and external actors as factors of their foreign policy orientations.

Confessional Structure and Relations within the RSC

The realities of the post-Soviet Caucasus are obviously dominated by the regional states’ political agenda (in their conflicts, in particular).

Out of the four large-scale post-Soviet armed conflicts—the Armenian-Azeri, Georgian-South Ossetian, Georgian-Abkhazian, and Russian-Chechen—only the latter exhibited an obvious religious component. It cannot, however, be described as the conflict’s determining factor in the context of the Chechen rebels’ political aim: independence from the RF for the sake of state independence. Of the remaining three conflicts the Armenian-Azeri conflict alone can be described, at a stretch, as confessional merely because the conflicting sides belong to two different confessions—Christianity and Islam—and because the sides claim the same stretch of territory of Muslim Azerbaijan with a predominantly Christian Armenian population (see Table 1 on p. 22-25). In this case, too, it is not easy to fit the Armenians’ political demands (independence from Azerbaijan and forming an independent state) into the Procrustean bed of religious differences.

Two other regional conflicts—the South Ossetian and Abkhazian—on Georgian territory cannot be described as products of confessional disagreements since, on the whole, there are Orthodox Christians on both sides; the prevailing demands of the Georgian autonomies are purely political.

Judging by the specifics of the confessional structures (see Table 2 on p. 26) of the RSCs discussed here, the CC makes the most promising subject for those resolved to identify confessional security determinants and the religious roots of the local states’ conflict-prone behavior. It is a region in which there is not only relatively balanced shares of the prevailing confessions—Islam and Chris-

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3 See: B. Buzan, op. cit., p. 197.
4 See: Ibid., p. 190.
### Table 1

Confessional Structure of Central Eurasia: Dominant and Non-Dominant Confessions in the CE, CC, and CA States

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Dominant Confession</th>
<th>Non-Dominant Confessions (main)</th>
<th>Description of Trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Share of the total population strength (%)</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Afghanistan</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>99.0</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Armenia</td>
<td>Christianity (Gregorian)</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox), Yezidi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Azerbaijan</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>93.4</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox, Gregorian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>Western Christianity,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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6 The Table is based on the figures quoted by the CIA World Factbook 2008 and the author’s personal calculations.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Dominant Confession</th>
<th>Non-Dominant Confessions (main)</th>
<th>Description of Trends</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Share of the total population strength (%)</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox) 83.9</td>
<td>Islam, Christianity (Gregorian) 14.6</td>
<td>Russians, and Ukrainians); others are Roman Catholics and Protestants (mainly Poles). Sunni Islam is popular among the local Tartars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Kazakhstan</td>
<td>Islam 47.0</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox), Western Christianity 46.0</td>
<td>The Kazakh population, as well as certain ethnic minorities (Uzbeks, Tartars, and Uighurs), are Sunni Muslims; the local Christians are mainly Orthodox Russians (44%); there are Protestants (Germans, 2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>Kyrgyzstan</td>
<td>Islam 75.0</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox) 20.0</td>
<td>Most of the population are Sunni Muslims (Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, Dungans, and Uighurs). Christianity is represented by Russian Orthodoxy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Dominant Confession</td>
<td>Non-Dominant Confessions (main)</td>
<td>Description of Trends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>---------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Share of the total population strength (%)</td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>Judaism, Western Christianity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Tajikistan</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>97.0</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Turkmenistan</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>89.0</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No.</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Dominant Confession</td>
<td>Share of the total population strength (%)</td>
<td>Non-Dominant Confessions (main)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Ukraine</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
<td>83.7</td>
<td>Western Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Christianity (Gregorian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Uzbekistan</td>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>88.0</td>
<td>Christianity (Orthodox)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
tianity—but also a variety of trends within them. It should be said that it is not easy to look at religion as something more important than one of the multitude of factors involved in the security relations among the regional actors. No matter how varied these factors are it seems that the classical RSC theory is quite right when it describes the political factor as the dominant one—this is fully confirmed by the functioning of the Central Caucasian RSC.

Table 2

Confessional Balance in the CE, CC, and CA RSCs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>RSC</th>
<th>Christian Orthodoxy (%)</th>
<th>Gregorian Christianity (%)</th>
<th>Western Christianity (Catholicism, Protestantism) (%)</th>
<th>Sunni Islam (%)</th>
<th>Shi’a Islam (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Central European</td>
<td>88.8</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Central Asian</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>80.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Central Asian (plus Afghanistan)</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Central Caucasian</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Central Caucasian (plus the Northern and Southern Caucasus)</td>
<td>34.3</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>38.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Central European and Central Asian RSCs differ greatly from the Central Caucasian RSC where its confessional structure is concerned. Table 2 shows that one confession dominates both of them while the others are reduced to insignificant shares. Orthodox Christianity dominates CE while Sunni Islam prevails in CA. This “unbalanced” confessional structure does not allow religion to develop into a dividing factor in the competitive political context. In other words, under these conditions religious mobilization at the national level, spearheaded against a “religiously alien” state that might affect the security sphere, is next to impossible. This happens for the simple reason that all RSC states belong to the same confession and the same trend within it.

This circumstance keeps CC apart from the other two RSCs. In the Central Caucasian security complex (even if the Northern and Southern Caucasus are excluded from the discussion) the confessional specifics of Orthodox Georgia, Gregorian Armenia, and Muslim Azerbaijan are conducive to their isolation from each other and the neighboring states. Despite their shared Christianity the titular

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7 Even if we do not deal with the Caucasus as a whole but concentrate on the Central Caucasus, the differences in the shares of the main religions are much smaller than in the CE and CA regions (irrespective of whether Afghanistan is discussed or excluded) (see Table 2).
nations of Georgia and Armenia belong to trends that are different enough to totally exclude mutual religious mobilization against one another, to say nothing of Muslim Azerbaijan.

In the CE and CA states a confessional split could happen at the sub-national level. It is hardly possible that Belarus will experience social mobilization against Ukraine for religious reasons or that the same might happen in Uzbekistan in relation to Tajikistan or Tajiks. At the same time, mobilization for ethnic reasons is much more possible.

Confessional Structure and the Relations between the RSC States and Foreign Actors

The confessional factor betrays itself in the relations of the RSC states with foreign actors for the reasons described above. In fact, this sphere is even more open to the impact of structural-political factors.

Let’s have a look at the amity/enmity perceptions in relation to foreign powers that have developed in the states of the Central Caucasian RSC. Indeed, does the religious kinship/foreignness factor come into play when the regional states identify their friends and foes beyond their borders? Had the religious factor played the main role Russia would have become Georgia’s closest friend because of their predominantly Christian Orthodox population. Reality is different—Georgia regards Russia as its main enemy and a source of security threats. Russia’s ideas about Georgia are very similar. The tension between the two states has never subsided since late 2003.8

The relations between Azerbaijan and Iran, states in which Shi’a Islam predominates, confirm the above. However, instead of an alliance there are far from unambiguous ideas about one another and far from unambiguous political behavior on both sides, which could better be described as enmity than friendship. Azerbaijan finds it hard to share Iran’s ideas about regional politics. A student convinced that the confessional factor dominates politics will find it strange to discover that Christian Gregorian Armenia, in a state of war with Islamic Azerbaijan, is the closest regional ally of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Despite its shared religion with Azerbaijan, which is at war with Armenia, Iran cooperates, on a wide scale, with Armenia in the transport, trade, energy, and military spheres.9

The relations between Georgia and Russia and between Azerbaijan and Iran are the most graphic proof that political rather than religious factors form the amity/enmity vectors within the Central Caucasian RSC. Less graphic examples are numerous; it is much more difficult to find confirmation of the predominance of confessional rather than political structures. The Armenia-Turkey duad is the most pertinent example while all other examples known to us merely refute the connection between religious kinship/foreignness, on the one hand, and amity/enmity and corresponding behavior, on the other, thus confirming the primacy of political factors in the functioning of RSC.

I have already written above that religious differentiation in the Central Asian states is more likely to take place at the sub-national level between the titular ethnos and the local Russian population. In view of the latter’s share in the total population (Table 1), its compact settlement, and geo-

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8 Early in August 2008 the sides were drawn into armed hostilities. Georgia tried to restore its sovereignty over South Ossetia, to which the RF responded with military actions in Georgian territory with the use of its land forces, Black Sea fleet, and aviation.

Graphical pattern, active domestic conflict dynamics can be expected only in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. At the same time, religious mobilization in the two countries at the national level is more probable in relation to their two neighbors—Russia and China. In this case, too, its impact on the behavior of these two Central Asian states in the security sphere will probably be corrected by the power elites for political reasons: they need positive relations with stronger actors and stability at home. In principle, however, we can expect religious mobilization and its influence in the security sphere in bilateral relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, Kazakhstan and China, Kyrgyzstan and Russia, and Kyrgyzstan and China. This may happen if the inner confessional conflict potential in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan begins rapidly unfolding all of a sudden. This will undermine their system of political institutions since uncontrolled conflicts among domestic ethnoconfessional groups will spread to neighboring ethnically and religiously kindred states.

The same can be said of the Turkmenistan-Iran duad: religious differentiation will follow the Sunni-Shi’a line. These developments are much less likely than the conflicts in the Kazakhstan-Russia, Kazakhstan-China, Kyrgyzstan-Russia, and Kyrgyzstan-China duads for the simple reason that Turkmenistan and Iran are both Muslim states. Nevertheless, we should not completely rule out the possibility of social mobilization at the national level because the two Islamic trends are different. History knows of many examples of interstate conflicts in which a great, or even the main, role belonged to the differences between trends of the same religion. This happened for example in the 16th and 17th centuries when the Ottoman (Sunni) Empire fought the Safavid (Shi’a) Empire. In the event of radicalization of one of them, say the Islamic trend, when it becomes a rigid state ideology (Iran is a relevant example), this prospect turns from a probability into a possibility.

The confessional structure of Central Europe, which on the surface looks very much like that of Central Asia, has a specific feature that, at least theoretically, should have created more moderate dynamics within its RSC. I have in mind the specific confessional kinship with the powers outside it. I have already written that in CA religious differentiation with political repercussions is more possible at the sub-national level, between the Muslim population (in the large majority in all CA countries) and the local Orthodox Christians. At the national level, on the other hand, the secularization of the religious factors and its outward manifestation could be limited to the relations between the regional states and external powers (Russia and China). This is predetermined by the degree of confessional kinship/foreignness of the system and its environment, which is different than in CE.

In the case of CA, the system with a dominant Muslim population has a protracted land border with the two largest Eurasian powers—China and Russia10—countries with dominating confessions—in which Sunni Islam has no important role to play. The CA RSC has its confessional specifics in the south where it borders on Iran.11 As distinct from the CA countries, the Iranian state ideology is based on Shi’a Islam.

The confessional differences between the CE RSC and the external political actors are less obvious because, first, its land border separates it from societies in which Christianity is the dominant religion. Turkey is the only geographically close Islamic country (in terms of its social nature), separated from RSC by the Black Sea. Second, the longest stretch of the land border of Christian Orthodox Central Europe separates it from countries with the same confessional specifics: about 64 percent of the land border of the CE RSC separates it from the predominantly Christian Orthodox countries—Russia and Rumania.

This means that if we exclude the external powers from the RSC structure but analyze their involvement through penetration mechanisms as the TRSC suggests, the relations between the CE and

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10 The border with Russia and China comprises about 76 percent of the total stretch of CA land border.
11 The total stretch of the land border between Turkmenistan and Iran is 992 km; together with the border between Afghanistan and Iran, the land border between CA and Iran is twice as long—1,928 km.
CA countries and external centers of power will develop under obviously different confessional conditions. If we accept religion as a factor that can affect the securitization processes and the relations within the RSC, we should surmise that the confessionally kindred external powers will find it easier to penetrate CE than CA (which is especially true in the case of Orthodox Russia). The real picture is different: the RF and China find it much easier to penetrate CA with its Sunni Islamic majority than Orthodox Russia—Orthodox CE. This confirms the already stated thesis that the confessional factors play a secondary role in the functioning of RSCs, at least in the discussed regions.

In the Central European RSC confessional closeness does not often bring about political closeness; the same can be said about the relations between the CE countries and their environment. The amity/enmity vectors are determined by factors far removed from religious kinship/foreignness. The region supplies the best example of the primacy of policy over all other spheres. The United State of Russia and Belarus is one of the few examples of political consolidation of religiously identical states even though the relations between the two countries are far from easy. The Transnistria and the Crimea are two examples that confirm the opposite; in both cases Orthodox actors are involved in the conflicts. In the case of Transnistria there are Christian Orthodox subjects on both sides: Moldova and the separatist Transnistrian Republic, which is supported by Orthodox Russia. In the case of the Crimea Orthodox Ukraine and Orthodox Russia (which does not conceal its designs in relation to the peninsula) are on the opposite sides.

Anybody insisting on the primacy of confessional structures will find it hard to explain the relatively high variety of foreign policy preferences and rejections in the CE RSC. In this respect the Central European RSC is closer to the Central Caucasian than to the Central Asian RSC despite the fact that the confessional structures of CE and CA are very close indeed. In the Christian Orthodox RSC the pro-Russian political bias of Belarus, which is involved in several post-Soviet structures (the United State, CSTO, EurAsEC, and others) looks very different from the pro-Western orientations of Ukraine and Moldova. A similar, albeit more balanced, contrast can be seen in the CC with its pro-Russian Armenia and pro-Western Georgia and Azerbaijan. In the totally Muslim CA all post-Soviet states (with the exception of neutral Turkmenistan) tend toward a pro-Russian political orientation.

What Minimizes the Stimulating Function of the RSCs Confessional Specifics?

The fact that the states of the three Central Eurasian RSCs remain secular explains why the political agenda dominates in all of them. More than that: this principle was accepted as the guid-

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12 The treaty was signed in December 1999. The united state was set up to lead to the creation of a single economic expanse that was expected to ease the free movement of goods, services, capital, and labor, and establish equal conditions for the economic entities in both countries, etc. This structure, however, has not yet gone any further than economic cooperation; their political integration is limited to setting up formal structures and formal activities within their frameworks. There is the Supreme State Council, the Council of Ministers and the Permanent Committee of the United State, the Border and Customs Committees, and the TV Corporation of the United State. These are either joint structures of ministers and other republican structures of state administration of Belarus and Russia (see: Foreign Ministry of the Republic of Belarus, available at [http://www.mfa.gov.by/ru/foreign-policy/bilateral/css/a234583eeb210b12.html]). The regular meetings of representatives of the two countries within the structures enumerated above have not yet shown any tangible progress toward political integration. The future status of the two subjects within the single state is the greatest obstacle: Russia wants Belarus to join the RF as one of its subjects or an autonomous republic while Belarus wants an equal status within the single state (see, for example: A.Iu. Plotnikov, “Soiuznoe gosudarstvo Belorussii i Rossii: sovremennoe sostoyanie i perspektivy razvitiya,” in: Belorussko-rossiiskie otnoshenia v kontekste evropeyskoy integratsii. Tetsiy yystuplenniy belorusskikh i rossiiskikh ekspertov—uchastnikov VII “kruglogo stola” po voprosam sozdania Soiuznogo gosudarstva. 13-14 Aprilia 2004 goda, available at [http://soyz-2004.narod.ru/plotnikov/]).
ing one from the very beginning; it became a sort of political tradition that survived and was
developed during their quasi-state existence within the Soviet Union. Their long existence as
part of the excessively secularized Soviet state (which sometimes went as far as suppressing the
flare-up of religious identities of the local people) left its imprint on the societies of the Soviet
successor states.

The possibility cannot be excluded that in the 1990s the Soviet republics reached the threshold
of their independence on the crest of the wave of national self-awareness with religious undertones.
More than that: religion was used to mobilize society during conflicts. It should be said, however,
that, first, any changes in traditions that took decades to form (or, rather, in the culture of secularism)
needed time, at least the span of one generation. These changes might take place if religious factors
are consistently encouraged inside and outside the country and if these societies remain isolated from
the social and political standards of the West, which won the Cold War. In this context no rapid devel-
opment of religious feelings in the post-Soviet countries could be expected within the still very short
period of time. In fact secular culture and the impact of the state’s “Western standards” proved to be
much stronger than the religious renaissance.

Second, it was secular political leaders who exploited the mobilizing functions of religion for
purely political purposes. We should bear in mind that in most of the post-Soviet states the Soviet
political elite remained in power at the first stages of independence. This is especially true of the pres-
idents; in some countries (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, and Tajikistan) Soviet leaders returned to
power after a short interval. In most of the newly independent states, however, the regime was stabi-
лизирован when the former Soviet leaders (the elite educated under conditions of harsh Soviet secularism)
regained their place at the helm. This was merely one of the factors that prevented the use of religion
as a political instrument inside and outside the country. The “old new” leaders defeated the political
elite that had come to power at the height of the national upsurge under the slogans of independence
and national revival sometimes blended with religious feelings. This meant that the use of religion for
political purposes was fraught with many dangers. In most cases the religious sphere was placed un-
der strict control while secularist traditions were encouraged.

In the political context, therefore, the confessional factors were kept on the back burner, which
found its reflection in the relations between the political and religious structures. The political elites
of all of them (Afghanistan being the only exception) have declared and are insisting on their inten-
tion to create secular states. This is true of Armenia and Georgia, two Christian states, and of the Is-
lamic states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, etc.): these statements were obviously not mere
declarations. In fact, the political elites wanted to prevent, as efficiently as they could, the possibility
of religious mobilization. Strange as it may seem, that was particularly true of the countries with pre-
dominantly Muslim populations. On the other hand, the logic is obvious if we look at the domestic
political developments in the newly independent states. To remain in the mainstream of my subject I
shall limit myself to several comments.

The transition from a single system to a multitude of different state systems (as far as religious
legacy is concerned, among other things) obviously and naturally caused political turmoil. The stakes
placed on religious identity could have served as a unifying factor for the newly independent states,
which suddenly found themselves in an ideological vacuum, but it was obvious that this process could
have gone in the wrong direction to cause social and political cataclysms. (This happened in Iran in
1979 and in Afghanistan when the Taliban came to power.) This, and similar developments in
Tajikistan at the early stages of its independence, showed the political elites of the other newly inde-
pendent Muslim states with what excessive reliance on religion as an instrument of social consolida-
tion was fraught. Today, with the stage of extreme social and political instability safely behind them,
the regional elites, aware of the risks, remain cautious when dealing with religion as a consolidation
instrument; they are especially careful when it comes to security issues of key importance. The post-
Soviet development of these states demonstrated that sometimes the elites abandoned restraint and
moved to the actual or declarative use of force against domestic religious movements potentially able
(in the near or distant future) to stimulate religious mobilization at the national level. I have already mentioned Tajikistan; post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan supplied more examples of the same—the Batken events of 1999 and the Andijan events of 2005.  

The stakes placed on limiting the influence of religious factors on social consolidation in the region’s Islamic countries is part and parcel of the logic of the domestic political struggle. The authors of the Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia (2001) have written: “Regional political elites are likely to remain resistant to political Islam, at least in the near future. … In periods of disorder, Islam may attract opposition leaders, particularly those without strong regional or tribal power bases, or others, … as it did Muhammed Solikh in Uzbekistan and Nadir Khachilayev in Daghestan.”

This inevitably affected the process of securitization in the newly independent states, which still fails to concentrate on the targets, goals, and stimulants of the confessional threats.

Can the Confessional Factor Play a Stronger Role?

The traditions of secularism, influence of the West, and what the political elites are doing in the CA states, which goes as far as open use of force, restrained, to a certain extent, social consolidation within the religious context. Does this mean that these temporary results will survive?

The answer is: it would be wrong to ignore the confessional factor even though today it is kept under a lid—in the future, confessional structures could move to the fore to affect the regional actors’ political behavior. This conclusion is based not only on the well-known civilizational conception of Samuel Huntington. Most of the regionally active factors, both endogenous (social and material inequality; the administrative crisis that hit the traditional religious trends; the imperfect regulatory mechanisms of the relations between the state and religion, etc.) and exogenous (the steadily expanding seats of armed conflicts between the United States and the Eurasian Islamic states—Afghanistan, Iraq, and probably Iran), as well as the fact that Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan are actively exploiting the religious factor to gain political influence in CC and CA, make it possible to say that Islam is developing into a political instrument in the countries of these regions, while the process of securitization is acquiring religious aspects.

This might be caused by those methods used by the political elites to bridle religious processes in the post-Soviet period. For example, the excessive cruelty with which the nontraditional religious trends were suppressed (mainly in CA) could produce counter-productive results some time in the future: “Regimes throughout the region have been careful to distinguish between mainstream (traditional.—J.E.) Islam, which they support, and radical Islamic currents. But careless actions against the latter could affect mainstream attitudes and discredit the officially accepted hierarchy of the faith.”

The developments of the 1980s-1990s in Afghanistan might prove instructive: excessive military interference and the use of force to bring about secularization (or, rather, to set up a system of

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13 It is not quite correct to seek the roots of what happened only in the religious sphere, however the government exploited the slogan of struggle against the radical political Islamic groups to add legitimacy to what was being done at home and abroad.
relations between the state and religion patterned on the Soviet one) caused severe social opposition that finally developed into the radical Islamic regime of the Taliban. The experience of the civil war in Tajikistan and the events in Batken and Andijan suggest that similar developments might be expected in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and, probably, in Kyrgyzstan.

The confessional specifics of the former two (where Islam is much more socially prominent than elsewhere and where the Muslim population is much larger than the non-Muslim) create the risk of their becoming Islamic states. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is less acute, but it could develop into a seat of religious conflict that will undermine the republic’s weak political system.\(^\text{17}\)

Significantly, if this variant is realized in CA—if any of the regional states where traditional Islam predominates becomes a state close to Afghanistan under the Taliban (where non-traditional Islam predominates), the confessional factor may acquire a greater role in the securitization process. I have already written, in particular, that confessional homogeneity in CA (in all countries Sunni Islam is the main religion) objectively prevents national mobilization on the basis of confessional differences. If, however, in one of the countries the regime changes and brings to the fore a nontraditional Islamic trend (which has already happened in Afghanistan),\(^\text{18}\) the current homogeneity will be undermined to a certain extent. In this situation states with different dominating paradigms of Islam will have to coexist; from this it follows that social mobilization against a religiously alien regime (state) cannot be excluded.

The already existing “alien” Islamic regimes are seeking radical political changes in the neighboring states irrespective of whether they are Islamic, Christian, or belong to other confessions. Iran in the wake of the 1979 revolution and Afghanistan under the Taliban are relevant examples: both states insisted on spreading their political ideology (Shi’a Islam in the former case and radical Sunni Islam in the latter) as an important component of their security policy. As a result, some of their closest neighbors look at Iran and Afghanistan as threats to their security (Iraq, Turkey, and Afghanistan in the case of Iran and Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Iran in the case of Afghanistan under the Taliban).

**Conclusion**

Today (and in the near future) it is still premature to seriously discuss the possibility of greater impact of the confessional factors on securitization in the states of CE, CC, and CA, as well as on the dynamics of their mutual security relations. There are strong objective regional limitations, as well as those created by the local political elites. Today we can describe them at best as catalysts rather than determining factors.

\(^\text{17}\) The religious situation in Kyrgyzstan is remarkable not only because Orthodox Christianity is fairly strong there (Kazakhstan is another republic where Orthodox Christianity is just as strong) but also because the position of Islam is also very specific. The republic’s southern and northern parts traditionally differ from one another where the role of Islam is concerned. The south has been and remains Islamic; this is especially true of the areas adjacent to Uzbekistan with a great share of ethnic Uzbeks in the local population: in 15 years the number of mosques in Kyrgyzstan grew 43-fold, most of them (545) are found in the Osh Region (see: A. Sukhov, “Post-Soviet Radicalization of Islam in Kyrgyzstan: Hizb ut-Tahrir,” Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 6 (42), 2006, pp. 102-110; N. Borisov, “Revolutionary and Post-Revolutionary Processes across the Post-Soviet Expanse: Can They Be Compared? (Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan),” Central Asia and the Caucasus, No. 5 (41), 2006, pp. 71-80).

Today confessional factors have not yet developed into stimulators of securitization at the national level in their own right. Their specific features (kinship/foreignness) will determine the degree to which the more important securitization stimulators turn out to be stronger and more sustainable. It goes without saying that religious specifics may also become an object of manipulation on the part of the political elites of states for, say, social consolidation needed to create a strategy of attaining political interests.

Hypothetically, an objective confessional structure of the CC might add vigor to the confessional factor, which means that this specific feature should, together with others, be used to explain why the dynamics of security relations in the post-Soviet period was rooted in a conflict context to a much greater extent than in the other two RSCs. No matter how stable, these dynamics may change under the pressure of the current domestic sociopolitical, socioideological, and external geopolitical processes and the greater role of the confessional factors in securitization in the CA states. We have already seen how regional political regimes were partially transformed into those based on non-traditional Islamic trends. The Taliban’s advent to power in Afghanistan suggests that this alternative is more than a mere hypothesis.

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GLOBALIZATION AND THE GEORGIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH

Abstract

The author discusses the place of the Georgian Orthodox Church and its role in the public and political developments in independent Georgia; he traces the changes in the Georgians’ religious feelings during the transition period and assesses the responses of the religious communities to the challenges of globalization. Prof. Piralishvili concludes that today, for most of the Georgian Orthodox population, traditional religious values remain the best tool for preserving the nation’s identity while political instability adds weight and influence to the religious institutions.

Introduction

Viewed over the last two or three decades religious life in Georgia can be described as a process during which its religious organizations have been adjusting to the changing historical and social
contexts. They gradually shed the old Soviet ideas and moved toward so-called market principles. The Georgian Orthodox Church, as the largest and most influential organization, tried to stem the omnipresent market trends and insist on its own ideas. Each of the religious organizations has come face to face with globalization and the far from simple geopolitical context in which the country has to live and develop.

The prevailing descriptions of this process suggested two key strategies that determine (fully or partially) the country’s religious life. On the one hand, the religious minorities are obviously working toward a liberal religious market in order to acquire freedom of action. On the other, the Georgian Orthodox Church is out to prevent this in order to preserve its traditional role and dominance. Obvious manifestations and concealed meanings typical of both strategies led to an open confrontation.

The Soviet Context

We have no reliable information about the geography of religious organizations in the Soviet Union and their size—the special services that gathered relevant information preferred to keep their findings secret. Officially, religion was announced to be a withering remnant of the past that deserved no closer scrutiny.

On the strength of Stark and Bainbridge’s classification, the religious organizations functioning under the strong pressure of the state were client cults. They had organizational structures of their own while relations with their followers were limited to the consultant-client pattern and rarely, if ever, went beyond them. Under Soviet power, believers were deprived of the right to set up socially articulate religious movements; any activities attracted the attention of the KGB which immediately informed the organizations or educational establishments of the far from correct religious interests of their employees or students. The Soviet regime spared no effort to stem new religious movements and to keep the traditional ones within the pinching limits of loyalty.

Contacts among confessions were a lifebelt for those that had to live under pressure. Today, the latent solidarity that bound all sorts of Christian, Muslim, and other organizations together may seem baffling. It was the Georgian Orthodox Church that initiated contacts among the Christian Churches. Here are the facts: in 1962 the Georgian Orthodox Church joined the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches; in 1979-1981 the Patriarchate of Georgia supervised theological discussions between the Georgian Baptists and the Orthodox Christians. In 1983 the Patriarch gave community to two Roman Catholic priest-monks from Austria in the Sioni Cathedral; in 1989 he repeated the procedure for a group of young Georgian Roman Catholics. When on a trip to one of the Georgian regions with a predominantly Catholic population he said that it was Rome and Constantinople that had parted ways while the Georgian Church had never severed its ties with Rome.

Here is another, no less interesting fact: in the 1950s the Soviet government destroyed the Shi’a Blue Mosque in Tbilisi. The local Sunnis invited the Shi’a to their mosque where the two groups had prayed at one and the same time divided by a curtain until the curtain was removed ten years ago. Since that time the two groups share the same mosque, an inspiring example against the background of the Sunni- Shi’a confrontation elsewhere which has developed into a civil war in Iraq.

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The Post-Soviet Context

It is hard to determine the size of the religious communities in Georgia. My efforts to compare figures from different sources produced the following results: 80.0 percent are Orthodox Christians; 11.0 percent are Muslims; 5 percent follow the Armenian Apostolic Church; 0.5 percent are Jewish; 2.5 percent belong to other religions; and 1.0 percent have no religious convictions at all. The Orthodox, Catholic, and Armenian churches, together with the Jewish and Muslim communities, are considered to be the traditional religious groups.

I have already written that all later developments were generated by the newly formed religious market that appeared in the early 1990s and which spread to Georgia. Religious organizations with big money coming from abroad, well-adjusted to the free philosophical environment, and armed with adequate missionary techniques came to Georgia. The Georgian Orthodox Church (and, to a certain extent, most of the traditional religions in Georgia) had never regarded “faith” and “salvation” as marketable products. This relies on a logic of its own and is rooted in serious religious motivations that should be taken into account. However, according to Mark Juergensmeyer, this may result in religious nationalism and religious conflicts. Indeed, at some point some of the Orthodox priests accepted latent or open religious violence as possible.

The other traditional religious organizations displayed more reserve with respect to the religious market. On the one hand, they were naturally concerned about the aggressive missionaries of the new religious movements; on the other, the liberalized market protected them against the mounting aggressive religious nationalism.

The relations between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Muslim and Jewish communities still determined by many years of contact deserve special discussion. Today, as in the past, they live side by side, always prepared to close ranks at times of crises.

While in the first half of the 1990s ethnocultural nationalism comprised, to different extents, religious nationalism, in the latter half of the same decade religious nationalism became an independent ideology mainly because society, struggling to adjust to the new realities, was badly wounded.

There are two main circumstances caused by the adaptation crisis that finally created the current religious context.

First, Georgian society, like the larger part of the formerly Soviet population, lived for 70 years in a constrictive historical space with limited ideas about the global processes and unable to contribute to them. In the years of independence it has found itself in an absolutely alien world, the philosophical and cultural paradigms of which turned out to be different from what most of Georgian society expected. The liberal and democratic ideas in great demand in Soviet times among the intelligentsia looked alien in the new historical conditions; in some cases they appeared to be directly opposed to the country’s cultural identity. Many of the products of globalization, especially those that demanded revision of the traditional cultural and religious values were rejected as unacceptable. The church community was moving toward an ideology that rejected globalization and liberalism as unacceptable.

In the latter half of the 1990s this trend became even more obvious: while in 1990, according to a public opinion poll carried out by a group of students, the absolute majority of the respondents (about 58.4 percent; 16.1 percent refused to answer, while 25.5 percent were undecided) was in favor of the country’s liberal and democratic development, two year later, in 1992, 14 percent of the polled looked at liberal democracy and national interests as two independent options, the latter being preferable. According to the public opinion monitoring conducted by the Philosophical Society of Georgia

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in 1998, 17 percent regarded globalization and liberalism as a more or less acceptable alternative to cultural identity. The figures are not too obvious but the trend is there.

To a certain extent, this is the result of blunders of the ideologists of liberalism who hoisted it as an alternative to traditional national values, which, more often than not, was misused, thus adding a cutting edge to the cultural identity problem. These ideologists failed to predict that confrontation between liberalism and the traditional forms of national identity (Christian Orthodoxy being one of them) would undermine the position of their ideological preference. The conception of the identity of Georgian society was a logical continuation of this process. It acquired its final shape at the very beginning of the new century, after the Rose Revolution to be more exact, and caused ever sharper responses to globalization.

The extremely hard social conditions in which most people found themselves drove the nation away from the liberal option. Indeed, in the absence of adequate social skills and an efficient system of social protection the free market economy looked like the synonym of an economic disaster. Extreme poverty is still the nation’s everyday problem. Those regions central power ignored were hit more than the others.

Let’s have a closer look at this problem. The 1998 public opinion poll conducted by the Philosophical Society of Georgia revealed a very interesting fact: a large part (about 29 percent) of the active Orthodox believers were jobless because they failed to find employment in keeping with their field of specialization and educational level or assessed their incomes as low or very low. There is no information about the extent to which this factor contributed to the growing number of new religious organizations, especially the Jehovah’s Witnesses, but their numbers did skyrocket at the turn of the 21st century; it can be surmised that the loss of social status also contributed to the process.

It should be admitted that the latter came to the fore after the Rose Revolution when most of the population of 40-45 years and over lost the hope and chance of being employed by state structures.

In any case, the rapid growth of active believers over the last few years can be considered an important fact and sign of stronger religious feelings. This fact cannot be explained by social and cultural reasons alone; the process is unfolding because of personal and religious considerations, although the above factors should not be ignored. The social and cultural factors served as fertile soil for existential factors behind the more vigorous religious activities.

At first the Orthodox Church confronted the challenges of globalization with rising fundamentalism: starting in the mid-1990s religious and secular publications presented, in apocalyptical terms, democratization and liberalization as a conspiracy against Christian Orthodoxy as the true faith. The theories of alternative historical roads for the nation and the church gained currency under the spell of certain Russian Orthodox ideologists.

Since that time the conservative right wing of the Georgian Orthodox Church with its frequently archaic social vocabulary has been standing opposed to the missionary activities of the new religious groups perfectly adapted to the latest historical realities and, in their extreme manifestations, striving for the country’s “new Evangelization.” On the other hand, violence against the newcomers attracted the attention of highly respected human rights organizations.

On 20 May, 1997, under pressure from its fundamentalist wing the Georgian Orthodox Church left the World Council of Churches and the Conference of European Churches. On 8-9 November, 1999, during the visit of Pope Paul John II to Georgia, the Patriarchate issued a statement which prohibited its followers from attending the Papal service.

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The mid-1990s can be described as a time when religious nationalism struck root in Georgia. It was a time when liberal-minded religious figures moved to the fore within the Georgian Orthodox Church; their active efforts and frequent criticism of the Church policies failed to dent the religious process and convince the public. Most church figures and believers remained convinced that the liberals were resolved to undermine the nation’s cultural and religious identity rather than to remedy the situation.
The liberal wing, however, managed to introduce liberal and democratic terms into the statements coming from the top church officials. In May 2005, the Patriarchate set up the Coordinating Center of Inter-Religious Relations in Support of Statehood which brought together nearly all the confessions functioning in Georgia: the fundamentalist ideology was finally abandoned for the sake of adjusting to the new conditions.

The Georgian Orthodox Church Today

The fact that the number of believers in Georgia has considerably increased speaks volumes about the country’s religious (and not only religious) life. Despite the fact that the absolute majority regards itself as Orthodox Christians, due to cultural and historical traditions the number of those who follow Orthodoxy for purely religious reasons is growing rapidly.

According to the public opinion poll conducted in 2006 by the Business Consulting Group (by E. Jgerenaia), 56.1 percent of the polled who described themselves as Orthodox believed that religion was a very important factor in their private lives; 32 percent described it as an important factor, while 8.5 percent said it was not very important; 17.5 percent practice religion regularly, while the majority limits its involvement to large religious holydays. According to the 1998 poll conducted by the Philosophical Society of Georgia, only 5.67 percent described themselves as true believers. This means that religious motivation has become stronger. Well-organized groups of believers living in their autonomous or even closed communication shells form another important social factor.

It should be added that according to all the opinion polls the Orthodox Church enjoys the greatest trust of the nation: in 2003, in the wake of the Rose Revolution, it outstripped the president by several points. This means that the number of followers is not the only indicator of the role of religion in Georgia. Since the 21st century the Orthodox Church has obviously been leaving behind its former image as an ethnographic and cultural curiosity to become a social factor in its own right. Today it strongly affects the country’s movement toward the global context.

Problems of the Religious Organizations’ Legal Status

The above is directly related to the legal basis of religion and religious organizations in Georgia. The special role of the Orthodox Church in the history of Georgia is envisaged in Art 9 of the Constitution, which says: “The state shall declare complete freedom of belief and religion, as well as recognize the special role of the Apostle Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Georgia in the history of Georgia and its independence from the state.” The idea about an agreement between the state and the Georgian Orthodox Church was first formulated in the latter half of the 1990s; the final document acquired the form of a constitutional agreement; in March 2001 the parliament amended the Constitution accordingly.

The Constitutional Agreement was signed on 14 October, 2002, and approved by the Synod of the Orthodox Church three days later, on 17 October; the parliament of Georgia passed it on 22 October. Under this document the Church acquired the historically determined status of a subject of public law.

This legal status placed the Georgian Orthodox Church above all other religious organizations, the legal status of which was limited to that of a subject of private law. Georgia’s legislation has no
special legal status for religious communities, which makes the situation unacceptable: many of them reject the status of subjects of private law.

No legal changes are possible for two reasons: on the one hand, most of the hierarchs of the Orthodox Church refuse to limit themselves to recognizing the Church’s past services. They regard the republic as the Church’s canonical territory in which no other confession may enjoy the right of evangelization.

On many occasions this radical approach is confronted by the equally radical opinion that the Constitutional Agreement created unequal conditions for religious organizations and that all other structures should be invited to sign similar documents. In a country with scores of religious organizations (some of them with no more than ten members) the Constitutional Agreement can hardly be accepted as precedence.

This probably explains why Georgia has not followed in the footsteps of many European countries (Austria, the U.K., the Baltic countries, etc.) which classify religious organizations on the strength of the country’s cultural traditions, the length of their presence in the country, etc. to create adequate legislation. Many of the religious newcomers or small groups would object, but this is the only road leading to a legally organized religious context.

The degree to which any religious organization blends into the specific conditions in any country is very important: on many occasions a religious movement, which is perfectly adequate in one cultural milieu, fails to blend into a different environment. New religious movements have already created unpleasant surprises in Japan, Belgium, the U.S., and other countries, which means that this problem should be managed with caution.

International Contacts of the Georgian Orthodox Church

The most intensive yet far from unambiguous ties connect the Georgian Orthodox Church and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC). On the one hand, the Georgian Church is doing its best to contain the ROC’s expansion to the regions (Abkhazia and Samachablo) outside the control of the central authorities. Some of the members of the Moscow Patriarchate went as far as approving the “cold war” of 2006 between Russia and Georgia in the course of which Georgian and other labor migrants were deported from Russia. This caused numerous violations of human rights and a lot of suffering. The patriarchs of All Russia and Georgia declared that the two churches remained true to the many centuries of their fraternal relations, but it became obvious that Russian neo-imperialism had become Russian Orthodox messianism. This breeds mistrust of the Russian Orthodox Church.

We are aware of two approaches to the contemporary Orthodox realities: the first, a relatively liberal one, is practiced by the Constantinople Patriarchate which is actively trying to adjust to the new historical conditions and has accepted human values as its highest value. This was clearly demonstrated during the Papal visit of Benedict XVI to Turkey in November 2006 when he and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I declared their readiness to bring the two churches closer together. This meeting and the reference to Bartholomew I as the Ecumenical Patriarch rocked the ROC. The Russian Orthodox ideologues argued that the Pope denied the ROC the role of heir to the Byzantine Church.

The process began even before the Pope reached Turkey: Metropolitan of Smolensk and Kaliningrad Kirill Gundiaev, head of the department of foreign contacts of the ROC, expressed his concern
about the Archbishop of Constantinople and Ecumenical Patriarch claiming a role in the Orthodox world similar to the one the Pope plays in the Catholic world.

Those Orthodox Churches (the Georgian Church being one of them) that did not abandon the Julian calendar for the Gregorian have a special role to play in the globalist project of the ROC. It claims leadership of the group of churches that is still living in “alternative history.” Russian publications are brimming with statements that primacy should belong to the Jerusalem Church as the Mother-Church rather than to the Constantinople Patriarch and that it is for the Russian Church and the state to address the global tasks of Orthodoxy.

There are no influential supporters of the Russian Orthodox globalist project among the Georgian Orthodox clergy; however, the wing that thinks in the terms of alternative history and alternative (not liberal) eschatology is very strong: this makes them unintentional allies of the Russian strategy. Many of them agree with the thesis supplied by the Russian Orthodox circles that so-called mondialism is an evil spearheaded against Orthodoxy.

The very ambiguous position of the ROC in relation to the churches of the breakaway regions finally tipped the balance: after the war of 1991-1993 the Tskhum-Abkhaz Eparchy of the Georgian Orthodox Church was detached from the rest of its canonical territory. Today, a temporary eparchial council made up of local clergy is looking after the interests of the Abkhazian Orthodox Church. It rejects the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church which, in turn, refuses to accept its canonical rights. Despite the efforts of Council Head Vissarion Aplia, the Abkhazian churches and their congregations could not join the Moscow Patriarchate, however the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad (ROCA) considers that the Abkhazian Church belongs to its jurisdiction even though this has not received canonical confirmation. The Act on Canonical Communion signed in May 2007, under which the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad became part of the ROC, created the impression that the Abkhazian Church is patronized by the ROCA. In Georgia this is interpreted as an attempt by the ROC to invade the canonical territory of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Expansion is going on in the case of the Ossetian Orthodox Church as well.

This produced a diplomatic result in the form of a visit by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, an indefatigable object of criticism on the part of the Russian Orthodox ideologists, to Georgia as a guest of honor at the 30th anniversary of the enthronement of Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia Ilia II. The official information supplied by the Georgian Church did not mention a ROC delegation. It should be said that President George W. Bush congratulated the Catholicos-Patriarch. The head of the Georgian Church responded with a letter in which he pointed out that the United States had a great role to play in developing Georgian statehood. It is interesting to note that for many years the Georgian Orthodox Church preferred to stay away from foreign policy issues thus breeding strong suspicions among its opponents of its pro-Russian bias. In this context the letter was a telltale point: the Georgian Orthodox Church had left its shell and is viewing itself as part of the globalizing process.

The Latest Developments

The latest developments have transformed the Georgian Orthodox Church into an institution that enjoys the trust of the nation. During the November 2007 political crisis the Orthodox Patriarchate turned out to be the only force with enough authority to interfere in the crisis and bring measure and rationality to the political passions. During the previous crises of 1989, 1991, and 2003 the Church tried to do the same and failed: the political opponents either ignored the calls to peace and a dialog or even declined them. In November 2007 the Church did not merely initiate a dialog between the two opposing groups but also suggested that constitutional monarchy might prove to be the best
form of Georgian state organization. Several influential political parties sided with the Church. This means that if and when the project is realized the Church will gain even more authority.

Those who insist that this will cripple the country’s democratic development are wrong; today, the man-in-the-street is looking for familiar cultural landmarks—without them democratic development will remain a mere formality.

Conclusion

The developments in Georgia’s religious life designed to match the global processes and meet the challenges facing human values have not always been straightforward. So far they cannot be described either as democratic or as consistently religious and nationalist. This is what can be expected of a small nation living in an uncomfortable historical environment and working hard to save its identity by preserving its traditional forms of life. The two trends manifested in the Georgian Church—the attempt to preserve its religious and cultural identity, on the one hand, and the need to take the global processes into account, on the other—faithfully reflect the major trends obvious in Georgian society.

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RUSSIA IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS (LATE 18TH–EARLY 20TH CENTURIES):
STATE AND LEGAL ASPECTS OF ITS RELIGIOUS POLICIES

Abstract

The author investigates the so-called peaceful ways to fortify Russia’s position in the Northern Caucasus, which include, among other things, special relations with the local Muslims, as well as Orthodox missionary activities wherever possible. She relies on archive materials, written sources, and regulatory acts relating to the later 18th–early 20th centuries to conclude that, on the one hand, the Russian state in the Northern Caucasus created favorable conditions for the nationalities who became part of the
Introduction

Throughout the 19th century the sociopolitical and cultural development of the Northern Caucasus was largely determined by Russia’s consistent and purposeful efforts to inculcate an imperial identity and self-awareness in the mountain dwellers (mainly the local military and Muslim spiritual elite). Out of the varied and numerous tools, the authorities preferred to rely on peaceful ways to cement Russia’s presence in the region. The Russian Empire was inclined to act in all spheres of life: military, administrative, judicial, land and estate relations, educational, religious, and cultural.

The Russian authorities concentrated on the mountain-dwelling elite and also turned their gaze both to the Muslim clergy among the mountain dwellers and to those North Caucasians who could potentially be converted to Christian Orthodoxy. Below follows a discussion of the legal aspects of Russia’s regional religious policies based on archive materials relating to the Northwestern and Central Caucasus.

A New Status for Islam and the Islamic Clergy in the Northern Caucasus (the 18th-First Half of the 19th Century)

Since the mid-16th century Islam remained an object of Russia’s legal activities, yet it was later, between the 18th and the first half of the 19th centuries, that they started yielding the first fruit in the form of organizational achievements.

By the time they became part of the Russian Empire a large number of the North Caucasian mountain dwellers were Muslims with a period of Christian Orthodoxy behind them (numerous traces of Orthodoxy are found in Kabarda). The Ossets were the only exception: some of them left Islam for Christian Orthodoxy due to the missionary activities of, first, the Georgian state and, later, the Russian Empire.

It should be said that before the Russian authorities came to the Northern Caucasus the so-called Muslim clergy enjoyed a certain legal status formulated within the norms of customary law—the mountain adat. Let us look at the materials in the collection of the mountain adats compiled by Lieutenant Colonel Kucherov in 1845: a complete collection of the Kabardinian ancient adats (1844) and the adats of the Malkars, Uruspietsvs, and Karachais was the product of his cooperation with highly educated local people Shore bek Murzin, Davlet Girey, and others.

The Russian authorities decided to collect the norms of the mountain adats in 1841; the correspondence between civilian officials and the military clarifies the reasons: “Your Excellency knows that all disputes among the mountain peoples, with the exception of criminal cases, are judged by the adat, the court of justice that proceeds from the customs, or the Shari’a based on the Al Quran. The rules of the adat and the Shari’a might not be sufficient in many cases, they might be biased or even

contradictory. Without clear and positive information about them it is impossible to say which of them (the adat or the Shari’a) should be preferred. We can prefer the former only because there is certain information about it based on hearsay. As for the Shari’a, it still remains terra incognita. It is unwillingly accepted only because when introduced among the mountain Muslims it was, and remains, an instrument of the mullahs and the Muslim clerics in general who interpret the Shari’a as they see fit. Fully convinced that the weakening of the Shari’a and introduction of another body of law would deprive them of their political power, they are doing their best to stick to it.”

“There is no doubt that if there is the possibility of introducing, sometime in the near future, the Russian laws among the mountain people, there would have been no need to look for ways to familiarize ourselves with one of the codes of law mentioned above and accepted by the mountain peoples. Since the government is rightly convinced that this measure was untimely, we have to let the mountain dwellers sort things out for themselves according to adat and the Shari’a…”

In 1842, in his memorandum, Bibikov pointed out that “today it is too early or even hazardous to change the now accepted legal procedure because this would have set one of the social groups—the princes and the nobility or the clergy—against us…”

This suggests that the Russians saw the legal status of the Muslim clergy in the Northern Caucasus as firmly attached, first, to the planned changes in the judicial system and, second, to the purely political and military aims formulated by the military and civilian authorities in the Northern Caucasus. They acted hand in glove, which produced, in the early half of the 19th century, enough formal and hypocritical statements, instructions, proclamations, and secret instructions while there was an obvious shortage of legal documents needed to regulate the life of the North Caucasian Muslims.

The collection of mountain adats contains a section “On Different Social Estates, the Different Rights They Appropriated, and Different Priorities; On Obligations and Mutual Relations among the Social Estates,” which said in part: “All these tribes are Muslims and in fact accept no authority over themselves. Yet, living in communities, they are following the rules of aristocratic and democratic governance. This explains why none of the estates have firmly formulated rules, advantages, and obligations, yet these rules have somehow been accepted through folk legends—they have been accepted as guiding principles in their social life, therefore all the members of any of the estates enjoy the rights their estate appropriated, with the following limitations…”

Points 26-37 of the third section “About the Clergy,” which identify the status of the Muslim leaders among their own people, are of key importance. Point 29 says: “Despite their origins, the effendis and mullahs are respected and trusted not only by the common freemen and peasants, but also by the nobles and princes. They have the right to share a meal with princes, which the nobles cannot do unless specifically invited by the prince.”

Section Six looks at the rules of the customary law of the mountain people: Section Seven, “On Inheritance and Last Wills and Testament”, describes the rights and responsibilities of the clergy (Points 72-85), according to the Ada [adat in Arabic] Code of the Adats of the North Caucasian Mountain Dwellers” (1847).

The regulatory acts that in the 18th century regulated the legal status of Islam in the Russian Empire as a whole are represented by the decrees of the Russian emperors, the Senate and, most important, the Orthodox Synod. These legal documents envisaged the rights of the Muslims of the Russian Empire in general and of the Northern Caucasus in particular.

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3 Ibid., p. 88.

4 Ibid., p. 91.


In 1767, Art 494 of a regulatory act dealt, for the first time, with religious tolerance and the right of the peoples of the Russian Empire to religious freedom: “In a great State that extends its power over a great number of different peoples, a ban on or prohibition of their various beliefs would have damaged citizens’ peace of mind and security.” This gave the Russian Muslims the right to protect and defend their faith. In 1783 the manifesto “On Accepting the Crimean Peninsula, the Isle of Taman, and the Entire Kuban Area into the Russian State” declared the freedom of religion for the Muslims of the Russian Empire. The document said: “…we promise, in holiness and steadfastness, Ourselves and in the name of the Descendants on Our Throne, to keep them in the same conditions as Our native subjects, to protect and defend them, their temples, and their native faith; the right to freely follow it and perform all lawful rites will be protected forever.”

On the whole, the 17th century produced no regulatory acts that envisaged the right of the North Caucasian mountain peoples to freedom of religion. It was late in the 18th century that Russia took a more active position in relation to the North Caucasian Muslims. In 1786 the Decree of Catherine the Great to the Senate set up the Caucasian Vicegerency. In 1792 the Enactment of Catherine the Great for the Kabardins said in part: “…anarchy and chaos, impudence and plunder are the real reasons why these people, who are our subjects, have so far remained useless to the Empire. We are convinced that its cruel habits can be improved according to the rules of our humanity and concern for the well-being of each and everyone.”

“We should not rely only on the force of arms when dealing with the people living high up in the mountains and being safe there. We should try to draw them to our side by justice and fairness, by improving their habits with meekness, winning their hearts, and teaching them to communicate with the Russians. We should:

“(1) demonstrate kindness and attract the best of their members… give them high posts, money, and other distinctions according to our choice; our royal kindness will be showered most abundantly on those who have adopted the Christian faith. This munificence will encourage others to act accordingly.

“(2) determinedly see to it that neither our troops nor the Cossacks living on the Line infringe on the rights of the mountain dwellers and offend those of them who come to our fortresses. We resolutely confirm that our military commanders, both in the field and in garrisons, do not allow their subordinates to deal dishonorably with the Kabardins and other mountain peoples by stealing horses and other property, or in any other way. They should be brought to court and cruelly punished as criminals, as well as everyone else who might act in this way.”

The document further said: “To better promote this and to reassure the local people, we believe that you should invite Major-General Gorich or someone else from among their own people; you should also rely on their faith to convince them of the same. To achieve this you should invite several mullahs from among our Kazan Tartars to help him (Gorich.—Ed.), who will open mosques in Greater and Lesser Kabarda. We allow them to do this. To produce a better impression and to encourage more friendly feelings toward us among the mountain people, do you think it will be useful to send you, for some time, the Orenburg mufti, who was used to promote order in that area and better organize the life of uncivilized Kyrgyz peoples.”

This is one of the first administrative documents of Catherine the Great that deals with the status of Islam among the Kabardins. On the one hand, the Russian authorities recognized the right of the

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7 Islam v Rossiiskoy imperii (zakonodatel’nye akty, opisania, statistika), Compiled, introduced and commented by D.Iu. Arapov who also authored the appendices, Moscow, 2001, p. 44.
8 Ibid., p. 47.
10 Ibid., p. 294.
Kabardins, one of the numerically largest mountain peoples of the Northern Caucasus, to freedom of worship, to religious life, and to Islam. On the other hand, they regarded the Kabardins as people with “savage habits,” thus denying them an ethnic culture and morals of their own.

The quoted document testifies that as early as in the late 18th century the Russian state armed itself with religious freedom and Islam to socialize the local mountain dwellers: from that time on the regulatory acts that envisaged religious freedom for the mountain dwellers (later complemented with the right to ethnic culture) served as instruments of Russia’s policies in various spheres.

From the very beginning of shaping the legal status of Islam in the Northern Caucasus Russia was concerned not only with the local people’s rights, but also with their obligations; religious freedom for the local people was enforced by circumstances rather than chosen freely as a deliberate policy. At the same time, Russia was engaged in Orthodox missionary activities not only in Ossetia, but also in other regions of the Northern Caucasus. According to archive materials, in the 1760-1770s numerous Christian Kabardins and other North Caucasian mountain dwellers lived in Kizliar.11

Late in the 18th and the first half of the 19th century the Russian authorities issued regulatory acts relating to the position of the Muslims within the Russia Empire. There were two kinds: general, dealing with all the Muslims living in the empire, and local, enforcing the status of Muslims within certain areas. The Northern Caucasus was seen as a very special territory, obviously because of the hostilities that took place during the first half of the 19th century. At that time, and earlier, in the late 18th century, it was for the military authorities to enforce the “local” statuses of Muslims in each of the areas. The Imperial Decree of 1805, for example, On Rules for the Muslim Clergy of the Elisavetpol Okrug,12 was based on the report supplied by Prince Pavel Tsitsianov, Commander-in-Chief in Georgia and the Astrakhan Military Governorship.

The “Prayer for the Czar for the Muslims of the Caucasus” of Russian General Alexey Ermolov to be read on Fridays in mosques is an important source of knowledge about the Islamic practices among the North Caucasian dwellers in the first half of the 19th century.13 In the 1820s General Ermolov submitted his draft of 7 points relating to the Muslim clergy:

1. control of the government over “those people whose religious convictions often lead to enmity in relation to it;”
2. opposition to stronger corporate bonds among the clergy;
3. prevention of penetration of clerics from Persia and Turkey;
4. limitations, “to the extent possible, on the influence of the clergy among Muslims without encroaching on their religious convictions;”
5. dependence of a large part of the clergy on the government by making material incentives contingent on their service to the government;
6. control, as strict as possible, over religious schools;
7. finding out what part of religious property is used to support clergy abroad.14

At the same time, the Proclamation General Ermolov gave to the Kabardins on 26 June, 1822 said the following: “I shall preserve religious freedom and the old customs and shall accept the owners and the uzdens who came down from the mountains with their old titles and regalia. I shall form a court of justice from the owners and uzdens according to Russian laws and shall indicate when the

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14 State Archives of Military History of Russia (SAMHR), Record group 821, Inventory 78, File 610,sheets 4-5.
clergy should be invited… I shall not alienate those who want to become Christians, but I shall not permit people to be lured into Christianity.”

The instructions of the Minister of War to Head of the Caucasian Region Lieutenant-General A. Vel’iaminov, Commander of the Troops on the Caucasian Line and in the Black Sea Area, that appeared in 1837, ordered him to inform the people under the command of the Sunza, Kabarda, and Kuban lines that “they can count on preserving their right to the land, faith, and customs of their ancestors.” In the Rules for the Administration of the Loyal Mountain Dwellers of the Caucasus, A. Vel’iaminov wrote: “All loyal mountain dwellers are allowed to profess their Muslim or any other faith. Nobody should urge them to change their faith or oppress them for religious reasons.” The Russian military authorities were expected to monitor fulfillment of the rules. Russia officially recognized the right of the local people to remain Muslims, however, while trying to win the Muslim clerics over to their side, the Russians never abandoned their Christian missionary activities.

To cope with the former, the Russian authorities created a social group of Muslim clerics patterned on the Orthodox hierarchy. They formulated the “Muslim clergy” concept with a legitimate status in all corners of the empire in general and in the Northern Caucasus in particular.

In the first half of the 19th century, the Muslims of the Caucasian Area were granted more rights and obligations.

- From that time on, under the imperial decree of 1834, the honorary Muslims of the Caucasian Area could send their children to military schools.
- Under the imperial decree of 1842 On Fixed Salaries of the Mullah of the Fortress of Anapa, the mullah acquired the right to draw a state salary. He served in the newly built mosque in Anapa to meet the needs of the Muslim mountain amanats who studied in the Russian school there. This was done to ensure that they remain loyal to their faith and to Russia.
- According to the 1829 Rules for Teaching Mountain Dwellers trained for the service in the Regiment of the Nobility, Muslim students had the right to use the services of the mullah.
- Under the imperial decree of 1850 the Russian military extended the right of the Muslim military of the Daghestanian Irregular Cavalry to use the services of a mullah and a Muslim medic hand-picked by the Chief Commander from among the members of the Avar tribe “who distinguished themselves by their loyalty and devotion to the government.”

In the early half of the 19th century the Russian administration set up the main controlling and supervisory bodies designed to monitor the activities of the Muslims of Russia. In 1810 the Main Administration of the Spiritual Affairs of All Faiths was set up to be transformed in 1817 into the Ministry of Spiritual Affairs and People’s Education; A. Golitsyn was appointed the first minister. In 1824 the Ministry of Education left the structure, which was later (in 1832) transformed into the Department of Spiritual Affairs of All Foreign Faiths (as part of the Ministry of the Interior) that survived until 1917. The department had a group of experts who specialized in Islam and Is-

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16 SAMHR, Record group 13454, Inventory 2, File 281, sheets 1-1rev.
18 See: Islam v Rossiiskoy imperii..., p. 111.
19 See: Ibid., p. 132.
20 See: Ibid., p. 262.
21 See: Ibid., pp. 150-151.
Islamic law (at one point they were Kazem bek, an ethnic Azeri, a prominent Russian Orientalist who headed the Department of Oriental Languages at St. Petersburg University, and Russian ethnographer S. Rybakov).\textsuperscript{23}

In 1857, under Emperor Alexander II the Charter of Spiritual Affairs of Foreign Faiths related, among other things, to the lifestyle of the Russian Muslims and established control over them. This task was entrusted to the newly set up regional spiritual administrations (the Orenburg Spiritual Administration and the Taurida Muslim Spiritual Administration that united the Muslims of the Crimea); the Shi’i and Sunni Administrations of the Transcaucasian Muslim Clergy were also created.\textsuperscript{24} The best results were achieved in the Volga area where the Russian authorities actively promoted their ideas among the local Muslims through the Orenburg Spiritual Muftiat.

In the Northern Caucasus the Russian authorities were seeking control over the form and content of the sermons preached on Fridays at all the village mosques. Those imams who permitted themselves direct or indirect criticism of the Russian policies in the Northern Caucasus were deprived of administrative support.

Not all local people could aspire to become an imam or a mullah; to become a candidate for mullah the aspirant had to present “confirmation of his moral qualities and reliability” supplied by the local police, as well as a document from the qadi who vouched for the claimant’s adequate knowledge. Those private mosques that refused to obey were banned. Mullahs could preach only in main mosques in the presence of elders whose task was to supervise the content of what was said. At the end of the 1840s, anyone in Kabarda wishing to become an effendi or a mullah should pass an exam before a commission of three members: the chief qadi (the judge of the Kabarda Interim Court) and two permanent effendis selected, according to an archive document, “from among knowledgeable people who know Muslim law.” The claimant had to demonstrate his knowledge of Islam and vow allegiance to the Russian state. Those who passed received a document that allowed them to become a village effendi or a mullah.\textsuperscript{25}

The military were involved in settling cases relating to the Muslims of the Caucasus. In 1859, for example, the emperor issued a decree based on the materials submitted by the Viceroy of the Caucasus Alexander Bariatinskiy (1856-1862) On the Procedure for Selling the Possessions of Orphaned Muslims Supervised by the Muslim Shariats of the Transcaucasus.\textsuperscript{26}

**Religious Policies of the Russian Empire in the Latter Half of the 19th–Early 20th Centuries**

On the whole, the regulatory acts adopted in the latter half of the 19th-early 20th centuries continued the policy started in the early half of the 19th century: first, they fixed certain rights and obligations of the Russian Muslims and, second, they granted the Russian Muslims new rights and formulated their new obligations.

It should be said that, very much as before, many of the regulatory acts were based on discussions of and rulings relating to individual cases, that is, on precedents that made them applicable either to a large group of Muslims or to all Muslims of Russia.


\textsuperscript{24} See: *Islam v Rossiiskoy imperii...*, pp. 210-246.

\textsuperscript{25} Central State Archives of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic (CSA KBR), Record group 23, Inventory 1, File 48, pp. 125, 151.

\textsuperscript{26} See: *Islam v Rossiiskoy imperii...*, pp. 161-162.
Besides the special regulatory acts proper regulating the Muslims’ legal status—the Codes of Institutions and Rules of the Administration of Spiritual Affairs of Alien Faiths of both Christian and Alien Believers (1896), the Law on Religious Tolerance (17 April, 1905), and the Statute of Alien Faiths (1912)—there were legal acts that treated the situation in Russian Islam and the position of the Muslims in an indirect way: the Code of Gubernia Institutions, the Code of Compulsory Military Service or the Construction Rules (1900). The regulatory acts issued in the latter half of the 19th-early 20th century were supplemented with all sorts of instructions issued by ministries (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Education, etc.).

These regulatory acts confirmed some of the rights and social privileges of the Russian Muslims while maintaining control over their lives. S. Rybakov, a Russian expert in Islam, wrote in the early 20th century: “The Russian law created the Muslim clergy as a social group, mullahs with rights and duties.” He went on to say that “in the Northern Caucasus—in the Kuban and Terek regions and the Stavropol Gubernia—as well as in the Dagestan region, the system of administration of the spiritual affairs of the Muslims was set up through the practice and instructions of the local administrations. The mullahs are elected by the people and confirmed by the regional and gubernia officials.”

- Under the Conscription Regulations (1897, Code of Laws of the Russian Empire), “in Muslim families where polygamy is allowed all children of the same father are regarded as one family, therefore the son who is the only male offspring in the entire family is treated as the only son,” who had the right to be exempted from conscription.
- Caucasian Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov pointed out that in the Northern Caucasus “the Muslim population, in addition to the taxes enumerated above, pays a special military tax as a substitution for conscription.” The obligation to pay the military tax was introduced in 1887 for all Muslims of the Transcaucasus, Terek and Kuban regions, and Stavropol Gubernia, as well as for the Christian Abkhazes of the Sukhumi area.
- The Rules of the Military Council On Paying Travel Money to Mullahs and Rabbis Sent to the Troops for Spiritual Services, as well as Oath Taking from Rank-and-File Muslims and Jews (1855) established the right of the Muslim military of the Independent Caucasian Corps to Muslim services payable from the state treasury.
- After setting up a judicial system in the Northern Caucasus in the form of mountain people’s courts, the Russian administration secured the right of the local Muslims to use the Shari’a in divorce and inheritance cases.

The memorandum of Caucasian Viceroy Grand Prince Mikhail Nikolaevich “On Measures Designed to Improve the Standard of Civilian Well-Being and Spiritual Achievements of the Peoples

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27 See: Ibid., pp. 190-254.
29 See: Shornik zakonov o musul’manskom dukhovenstve v Tavricheskom i Orenburgskom okrugakh i o Mago-metanskih uchebnykh zavedeniakh, Kazan, 1902, p. 1.
34 See: Islam v Rossiiskoi imperii..., pp. 159-160.
of the Caucasian Area” dated 187936 played an important role in the later developments in the region. It was submitted for approval to the Caucasian Committee (1845-1882) set up to rule the Transcaucasian area and the Caucasian region. The structure, which was accountable directly to the emperor, performed the function of legislative discussion and administration. The committee, which was staffed with top bureaucrats, was set up at the same time as the Caucasian Vicegerency to serve a link between the local Caucasian administration represented by the viceroy, the highest state structures, and the emperor personally. The following, to put it in a nutshell, was suggested by the viceroy and the Caucasian Committee: to have a civilizational impact on the locals, establish strong contacts with the empire, and ensure civilian well-being in the area.37

The Instructions of the Head of the Kuban Region and the Appointed Hetman of the Kuban Cossack Army of 30 July, 1892 formulated additional rules for mosque-building in the Kuban Region (part of the Northern Caucasus) to supplement the all-Russia principles for organizing new Muslim communities and new mosques. New mosques could be built under several conditions: (1) if the faithful of a certain settlement asked for a mosque and (2) if the governor agreed. The document appeared because the general rules of mosque-building were violated by those who built privately owned mosques without the consent of the local people. “Having enlisted, through relatives and friends, a congregation for their mosques, such people are conducting services and delivering sermons in a spirit frequently undesirable for the government thus stirring up enmity and strife among the locals, etc.” The head of the Kuban Region demanded that the construction rules be observed and took the process under his personal control.38

The Russian authorities kept strict tabs on visits to the holy places. The Central State Archives of the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria contain any number of documents in Arabic in which local people requested permission from the head of Kabarda to make a trip to Turkey or to perform hajj to Mecca and Medina.39

In the Terek Region the Nalchik Mountain Oral Court of Justice introduced exams for those contending for spiritual posts and corresponding commissions under a qadi of the court entrusted with the task of examination. One of the archive sources contains information about certificates for village and quarter effendis of the 1st-3rd degree.40 At that time those who filled spiritual posts were duty bound to obtain approval from the Russian administration. Under the draft Rules of the Administration of Auls of the Terek Region dated 1862, the aul mullah was the head of all the village clerics. He was elected by the head of the district “from among those who have demonstrated the greatest loyalty to the government, are known for their intellect, honesty, and fairness, and have adequate knowledge of the Shari’a.”41 The Commander of the Caucasian Line had the right of their final endorsement. The Rules were confirmed in the early 1890s; on 8 January, 1893 head of the Terek Region ruled that “the village mullahs in the Muslim villages should in future be chosen by the regional qadi and approved by myself.”42

In the Kuban region everyone contending for the post of mullah had to pass an exam in full conformity with the Instructions of the Head of the Kuban Region of 30 July, 1982 On the Exams for the Title of Mullah. The qadi issued certificates of adequate knowledge of Islam.43 The exam consist-

38 See: N.M. Reynke, N.M. Agishev, V.D. Bushen, Materialy po obozreniu gorskih i narodnykh sudov Kavkazskogo kraia, St. Petersburg, 1912, pp. 63-64.
39 CSA KBR, Record group I-2, Inventory 1, File 564.
40 CSA KBR, Record group I-6, Inventory 1, File 841, sheets 44-44rev.
41 CSA KBR, Record group I-2, Inventory 1, File 656, sheets 2-3.
42 CSA KBR, Record group I-6, Inventory 1, File 271, sheets 45-45rev.
43 N.M. Reynke, N.M. Agishev, V.D. Bushen, op. cit., p. 21.
ed of two levels: theoretical and practical (the latter required knowledge of prayers and songs). To be examined the claimant had to obtain from the local police “a certificate of high moral qualities and loyalty,” as well as certificate from the qadi confirming his adequate level of knowledge. The local civilian authorities could ban services in private mosques that disobeyed the above rules and also supervised services in mosques. The mullahs could preach only in the main mosques in the presence of elders.

Early in the 20th century the Russian authorities never slackened their grip on Islamic life in the Northern Caucasus; while shaping their official treatment of Islam they tended to limit the pre-Islamic faiths and traditions based on the adat in preference of the Shari’a. In 1911, for example, a meeting chaired by the hetman of the Ekaterinodar Division of the Kuban Region discussed measures designed to do away with the tradition of bride kidnapping (practiced among the mountain people according to the norms of customary law). The meeting was attended by the qadi of the local Mountain Court, the superior enddis (mullahs) of all the mountain communities of the Ekaterinodar Divisions, and members of the mountain communities well-versed in the Shari’a. “After discussing the problem from all sides and taking into account that the frequently practiced method of bride abduction is based neither on the Shari’a nor on folk customs but is done contrary to the girl’s will and without the consent of her parents,” the meeting ruled that offenders should be punished according to the laws of the Russian Empire.44

Not all measures designed to create a social group of Muslim clerics friendly toward Russia proved successful; some of its members remained hostile. In 1883 Tari Melkhaunov, an enddi of the village of Khaptsevo in Lesser Kabarda, organized opposition to pro-Russian elder Misost Boriev. The confrontation developed into large-scale troubles that attracted the attention of the military. The investigation revealed that Melkhaunov had abused his power by convening a village meeting at which he incited those in attendance to disobey the elder and the rules established by the Russian authorities. The rebel lost his post.45

The Law on Religious Tolerance adopted on 17 April, 1905 that declared freedom of religion and lifestyle for the followers of alien confessions proved to be the high point in the process through which the status of the Muslims in the Russian Empire was determined. The Russian authorities followed up with rules binding for all Muslims that finally unified the legal statuses of the Muslims living in various parts of the empire.46

The general regulatory acts of the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries were related to the status of the Muslims realized through the system of spiritual administration: in 1896 the Codes of Institutions and Rules of the Administration of Spiritual Affairs of Alien Faiths of both Christian and Alien Believers47 said the following about the sphere belonging to the Muslim clergy: “The local administration of the spiritual affairs of the Muslims belongs to their clergy at the higher and local levels” (Art 1342).48 By that time two spiritual administrations had been actively functioning: in Taurida and Orenburg. The time had come for the North Caucasian Muslims to set up a single Islamic governing body patterned on the Orenburg Spiritual Muftiat. The same document identified the principles for the functioning of the Transcaucasian Spiritual Administration (1872) that, as distinct from the principles of the Taurida and Orenburg administrations, had certain purely political functions: on the one hand, the state still tightly controlled the Muslim clergy (Section 3, Chapters 1-2); on the other, the Transcaucasian Muslims retained some of the privileges that the Muslims of other parts of the

44 Ibid., pp. 68-69.
45 CSA KBR, Record group 6, Inventory 1, File 25, sheets 252rev.-253.
empire had lost: the Transcaucasian Muslim clergy was exempt from payments, they could not be subjected to corporal punishment, and, finally, the rules of the Transcaucasian Administration contained a section absent in the rules relating to Taurida and Orenburg, namely “On the Obligations of the Transcaucasian Shi‘a Muslims.”

For a long time the North Caucasian Muslims remained beyond the reach of the newly set spiritual administration. S. Rybakov, an official of the Ministry of the Interior, wrote: “In the Northern Caucasus—in the Kuban and Terek regions and Stavropol Gubernia—as well as in the Dagestan area, the administrative system of the Muslims’ spiritual affairs evolved through the practice and decisions of the local administrations. The mullahs are elected by popular vote and approved by the regional and gubernia heads.” The same author described how in 1912 the Muslims of the areas under the Muslim spiritual administrations of the Kuban and Terek regions were organized: “The village mullahs were selected by decisions of the village communities and approved by the Viceroy of the Caucasus or the regional head.” Permission from the regional heads was required to open a Muslim religious school (maktab or madrasah). S. Rybakov pointed out: “Investigation revealed that, according to the local military and civilian power, the system of spiritual administration of the Muslims based on practice was, on the whole, acceptable. It would have been advisable, however, to legally attach these mountain dwellers to one of the functioning Muslim spiritual institutions.”

Early in the 20th century the State Duma actively discussed the possibility of setting up a spiritual administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus.

A. Dondukov-Korsakov, who commanded the troops of the Caucasian Military District, put forward this idea in the late 1880s: he suggested that a spiritual administration of the Muslims in the Kuban and Terek regions could be set up on the strength of the existing Regulations of Administration in the Steppe Regions (1891, Arts 97-100). The central military structures (the General Staff, the Ministry of the Interior, and the War Ministry) were dead set against the idea. Similar attempts were repeated later with equal success. Early in the 20th century the newly appointed viceroy in the Caucasus repeatedly pushed forward the idea.

Between 1907 and the 1910s State Duma deputies also made several attempts; in 1913, in particular, 39 deputies drafted a law on the spiritual administration for the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus, which was declined by the Russian government. The fundamental work by D. Arapov offers a detailed analysis of the numerous projects designed to change the spiritual life of the North Caucasian Muslims. Pan-Islamism was the main reason why the Russian authorities did not hasten to set up a North Caucasian Muftiat. As the memorandum of Caucasian Viceroy I. Vorontsov-Dashkov “On the Spread of Ideas of Pan-Islamism in the Caucasus” (1912) (a product of the joint efforts of the viceroy and officials of the special department of his Tiflis Chancellery for the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Alien Confessions of the Ministry of the Interior) testifies the top Russian authorities had the fears of Islam of the early 20th century.

On the whole, pan-Islamism was not very popular in the Northern Caucasus. Caucasian Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov wrote: “There are no direct indications that pan-Islamism is promoted among the Muslim population of the Terek Region, however, according to information supplied by our agents, there are traces of agitation.” And further: “When talking about the Muslim population of the

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47 S.G. Rybakov, Ustroystvo i nuzhdy upravlenia dukhovnymi delami musulman Rossi, p. 276.
48 Ibid., p. 277.
49 See: Ibid., p. 283.
50 Ibid., p. 312.
53 Ibid., p. 183.
Caucasus I should say that we would do best to fear separatist sentiments among certain Caucasian nationalities in the future.”

The Muslim congress convened in 1914 in St. Petersburg drafted the Statute of the Administration of the Spiritual Affairs of the Muslims of the Russian Empire. The delegates were convinced that new spiritual administrations with the institution of muftis, including the Administration of the Northern Caucasus (the North Caucasian Administration—Stavropol Gubernia, the Kuban and Terek regions), should become the pivot that would change the legal status of the Russian Muslims. The Ministry of the Interior, in turn, insisted that the already functioning institution of muftis was accepted as “a means promoting Islam and shows that the state, by appointing the muftis by imperial power, has recognized the special status of this religion. New muftiats would create new centers of Islam the heads of which might prove responsive to progressive ideas incompatible with the interests of the Russian state.”

**Christian Missionary Activities of the Synod in the Northern Caucasus**

Russia launched its Christian missionary activities in the Northern Caucasus back in the 17th and 18th centuries. On 21 January, 1752 the Senate of the Collegium for Foreign Affairs issued a decree On Christianization of the Mountain Peoples of the Northern Caucasus which specified measures conducive to Christianization of the Ossets: first, to reward those elders who convinced their neighbors to be baptized and, second, to grant privileges to the newly converted Christian Ossets who traded with Russians.

In the first half of the 19th century the Russian Empire stepped up its missionary involvement among the Ossets with several important aims in view:

1. limiting the impact of Islam seeping in from Kabarda;
2. encouraging Ossets to become Russian citizens, and
3. adding vigor to the process of Russification of the North Caucasian peoples.

Together with the missionary activities in the Northern Caucasus Russia actively developed the Christian education system, one of the most effective ways to draw the mountain peoples into the public spirit of Russian life. The Ossets, with a greater share of Christians, were the main target of the Russian state’s educational zeal. The Society for the Restoration of Christian Orthodoxy in the Caucasus operated on money supplied by the Holy Synod and the state.

Until the mid-19th century Orthodox missionary activities in Ossetia were not involved in the primary education system; starting in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries primary and secondary Orthodox schools appeared.

During the reform of the military and civilian administration system, in 1860 Viceroy of the Caucasus Alexander Bariatinsky set up the Society for the Restoration of Christian Orthodoxy in the Caucasus based in Tiflis to coordinate the efforts of academics, the Orthodox Church, and missionaries.

In 1861 the St. Olga school for girls was opened in Vladikavkaz. By that time all the primary schools in Ossetia belonged to one of three types: either run by the Zemstvo, by the Ministry of

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57 Vsepoddanneyshiy otchet (namestnika Kavkaza) za vosem’ let upravlenia Kavkazom, St. Petersburg, 1913, p. 9.
59 Ibid., p. 29.
Education, or by the Holy Synod. The parochial schools in which Osset and Russian teachers (mainly graduates of the Tiflis Alexander Teachers Seminary) pooled their efforts to teach the Scriptures, the fundamentals of Christianity, the Holy Bible in Russian, and the history of the Old and New Testament showed the best results. Popular Osset priests Alexey Gatuev, Alexey Koliev, and others taught at the Missionary Religious Seminary opened in the Osset village of Ardon; there was a fairly popular Religious Orthodox College in Mozdok. All the Orthodox schools of Ossetia functioned under the supervision of Bishop Leonid Alaverdskiy, an ethnic Osset. The educational frenzy of the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries was supported by the no less active publishing activities. The Ir Publishing Society of Ossetia published Orthodox books in the Osset language and created the Osset alphabet presented in 1891 in the form of the *Osset ABC* compiled by Inal Kanukov.

Early in the 20th century the ideologists (N. Il'minskiy and R. Ostroumov) of Orthodox proliferation (in the form of missionary work and education) in the empire’s ethnic margins came forward with the idea of reforming the process: parochial schools were not very popular across Russia and had shown no spectacular results. The new methods were widely discussed at numerous Orthodox and missionary congresses held at the turn of the 20th century: the 3rd All-Russia Missionary Congress in Kazan in 1897; the missionary congress in Nizhniy Novgorod in 1907, the 4th All-Russia Missionary Congress in Kiev in 1908; and the missionary eparchial congress in Kazan in 1910. Those who insisted that religious and secular education should be divided favored the idea of developing education in Russia on the basis of public parochial schools. This was finally accepted in the early 20th century: in the 1910s the system of primary education in Ossetia was transferred from the Holy Synod to the Ministry of Education. The parochial schools were replaced with the Ministry’s; priests were gradually replaced with Osset teachers trained at the secular Tiflis Alexander Teacher’s College (later transformed into the Alexander Institute). The Society for the Restoration of Christian Orthodoxy in the Caucasus was replaced in 1883 with the Society for the Proliferation of Education and Technical Knowledge among the Mountain Dwellers of the Terek Region, which was an instant success.

The Muslim religious elite of the region was obviously concerned about the growing popularity of secular education in the Russian language. The Russian administration was less than enthusiastic about the Muslim religious leaders’ efforts to set up village schools at mosques using their own money. The process became extremely complicated: those wishing to start such a school on their own initiative had to convene a village meeting, obtain its consent, then mail the document for approval and financial support to the Ministry of Education, which never declined such requests but never funded the projects.

**Conclusion**

In the Northern Caucasus the Russian state worked toward favorable conditions for the local peoples who became part of the empire, on the one hand, while it strengthened state security in order to undermine the efforts of those who wanted state independence, on the other. An analysis of the main vectors of Russia’s policies toward the mosque and the church suggests that the structures of both the state and the Synod saw their task as formulating the basic rights and duties of the North Caucasian Muslims as subjects of the Russian state, on the one hand, while they spared no efforts to change the local peoples’ religious preferences, on the other. This was largely accomplished in Ossetia. In fact, the Russian government fully tapped the potential of religion as a way to shape Russia’s identity in the Northern Caucasus and cement its position in the region.

An analysis of the factors that affected religious policies in the Northern Caucasus has revealed that in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries (when the Caucasian War finally ended in 1864) the military retained their central role in cementing Russian statehood in the region. They acted
much more harshly than secular power could have done within the secular Russian laws. This explains why the legal status of the North Caucasian Muslims was determined mainly by military instructions and regulations of indefinite duration.

In fact, the rights and duties of the Muslim clergy and Russian Muslims were determined by two mechanisms:

(1) the Russian secular laws that took into account the norms of the adat and the norms of Muslim law (the Shari’a) and

(2) temporary instructions and rules.

The legal status of the Russian Muslim population was determined by civil laws, however Muslim laws remained applicable in issues relating to marriage and family relations, as well as to inheritance.

It took the Russian secular legislation that regulated the legal status of the Muslims of Russia a long time to develop from scattered legal documents reflecting the decisions made in individual cases (that created precedents) to general legal foundations relating to all the Muslims of the Russian Empire (the Northern Caucasus included). On the whole the process remained incomplete: until 1917 the local Muslims were still subordinated to the local military authorities while Muslims elsewhere lived under their own spiritual administrations that served as a link between the Russian (mainly civilian) government and the Islamic communities.

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RUSSIA’S ISLAMIC POLICIES IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: HISTORICAL PARALLELS

Abstract

The author tries to reveal the meaning of Russia’s Islamic policies in the Northern Caucasus by looking back at imperial and Soviet times. His diachronic comparative analysis brought to light clear parallels created by the inner continuity of the aims and close ideological kinship of the twists and turns in its political line. This suggests that the religious-political radicalism in the region is a manifestation of the worldwide anti-colonial trends and a response to outside pressure at a time of sharp social and cultural crises amid the Muslim communities.
An analysis of the current North Caucasian political realities leaves everyone more or less familiar with the period when the Northern Caucasus became part of the Russian Empire and its existence within the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation with the vague impression that history is repeating itself. This impression comes into bolder relief by means of closer scrutiny of Russia’s Islamic policies at different times. Here I have attempted a diachronic comparative analysis of Russia’s Islamic policies to answer the question: Were the outward similarities between the religious and political situations of different epochs the products of certain regularities or coincidental? If the former is true, we would like to know: Is there a deeply rooted reason why the implicit doctrinal approaches to Islam and the Muslims in the Northern Caucasus repeated themselves? Perhaps this explains the fact that the highly varied political regimes—absolute monarchy, communist, and “sovereign democracy” of today—pursued similar policies in the Northern Caucasus.

Before answering these questions I shall outline several reservations to clarify what is being discussed. First, at all times the state’s Islamic policy in the Northern Caucasus has been following, and is following, the changing realities, which makes it inconsistent, therefore I shall limit myself to the mainstream trends. Second, I shall limit my diachronic analysis to the Russian state’s Islamic policies without touching upon the internal sociopolitical and other factors behind the flare-ups of religious-political sentiments among the North Caucasian mountain dwellers. Any attempt to identify the ideological parallels and the similarity of aims and methods would have made my discussion too difficult to follow—this subject should be treated separately.

A Russian anthology on the sociology of religion says that the Volga Bulgars were the first to embrace Islam within Russia’s borders, which happened in the 9th century. Whether deliberate or not, this is an error: Islam appeared in contemporary Russia in the 7th century among the North Caucasian peoples. In 685-686, Arabs captured Derbent to be used as a toehold to press further into Daghestan. Documents confirm that the first jumah mosque was built in 779 in Kumukh; by the 15th century the inner regions of Daghestan had become completely Islamic. In the early and mid-18th century Chechnia became Muslim; Ingushetia followed suit in the latter half of the 18th century. In the 17th and 18th centuries the larger part of the Adighes, Kabardins and, later, a small part of the Ossets embraced Islam.

By the time it started moving into the Caucasus the Russian Empire had gained rich experience in governing Muslim regions: the Muslim population of the newly conquered Kazan and Astrakhan khanates had been forced to embrace Christianity in great numbers. Islam, their former religion, was subjected to discrimination. Later, under Peter the Great, those noble Tartar families who had rejected Christianity were registered as tax-paying commoners. It was only under the decree of Catherine the Great of 22 February, 1784 “On Permission for the Tartar Princes and Murzas to Enjoy the Privileges of Russian Nobles” that those who could prove their noble origins had their rights restored.

In 1788, the Orenburg Muftiat was set up to pursue the official religious policies and keep the empire’s Muslim subjects under strict control. With the Crimean Khanate incorporated into Russia, part of the Northwestern Caucasus was also united with the Russian Empire; the Taurida Muftiat was set up very soon after that. In the 1783 Manifesto on the unification of the Crimean Khanate Catherine the Great promised “to protect and defend [all its newly acquired Muslim subjects], their temples and their native faith” and vowed that “the right to freely follow it and perform all lawful rites will be defended forever, and all the relevant rights will be freely practiced.” The document obviously included those Northwest Caucasian Muslims who lived on the territory of the former Crimean Khanate.

In 1859, in his Manifesto on the End of the Caucasian War, Prince Alexander Bariatinskiy made a similar promise, in the name of the emperor, to the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus: “The Russian government allows you to freely follow the faith of your forefathers forever.”

The famous address of the Council of People’s Commissars to the Toiling Muslims of the East and Russia of 20 November, 1917 said: “Muslims of Russia, Tartars of the Volga Area and the Crimea, Kirghiz and Sarts of Siberia and Turkestan, Turks and Tartars of the Transcausus, and Chechens and mountain dwellers of the Caucasus, whose mosques and prayer houses were ruined and the faiths and customs of whom were trampled upon by the czars and oppressors of Russia! From this time on your faith and customs, your national and cultural institutions, are declared free and immune. You are free to organize your national life without hindrance.”

Every time the state was either too weak or apprehensive of riots in the recently conquered Muslim areas it brandished its tolerance. On the whole, the Russian Empire, Soviet Russia, and new Russia at all times practiced and practice two main approaches: either *Suo quisque riti sacrificium faciat* (each should offer sacrifice according to his own rite), but under strict control and in the interests of the colonial administration, or openly hostile treatment of Islam as a “militant and fanatical religion.” The latter predominated throughout the history of relations between the Caucasus and Russia even though it was never pushed to the extreme, being alternated with promises of religious tolerance easily forgotten once the crisis was over.

**Islamic Clergy Created: Integration into the System**

From the very first days of Russia’s domination in the Northern Caucasus there was no shortage of those determined to organize the life of the local Muslims as they saw it fit. In 1830, General Vel’iaminov came out with a project for a three-level vertical of Muslim clergy, all of them appointed by the state and drawing a state salary. Ill-timed—the war was still going on—the project remained on paper. Later, the Caucasian Department of the Imperial Chancellery, the Caucasian Committee, the Department of Spiritual Affairs of Alien Faiths at the Ministry of the Interior, and other structures deemed it necessary to supply their own projects. However, they proved unrealizable during and after the war waged under slogans of jihad, since they were potentially conducive to new riots. The administrative experience in the form of the Orenburg and Taurida muftiats proved useless in the Northern Caucasus.

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It was believed that, by taking a firm grip on the Caucasian Muslims’ spiritual life, the imperial authorities were seeking the following political aims:

1. to provide the government with means for monitoring and controlling those who due to their religious convictions could ignite “a fire of enmity and disobedience;”

2. to oppose “excessive corporate feelings” among the “Muslim clergy” detrimental to Russian interests;

3. to prevent the infiltration of “alien clergy, especially of anti-Russian convictions” from Iran and Turkey;

4. to limit, to every extent possible, the range of the clergy’s authority among the Muslims “without encroaching on the people’s religious convictions;”

5. to make the influential part of the “Muslim clergy” directly dependent on the government by causing their material interests to relate to their service to the government;

6. to put Muslim religious schools under more or less effective control;

7. to take measures to tighten the government’s control over all sorts of revenue created by “religious property” that might be used to support “Muslim circles abroad.”

An analysis of the above suggests that even though these aims were not publicized the Soviet authorities in the past and the Russian authorities today implicitly agreed with practically all of them.

The fierce Caucasian war and the local post-war conflicts never allowed the Russian state to move to the next stage, viz., administration of the spiritual affairs of the North Caucasian Muslims. In fact, the government and prominent politicians could not agree on adequate approaches. It can be said that centralization and unification of the spiritual administration patterned on the Orenburg and Taurida muftiats might have helped to establish control and administration, but the government did not want the local Muslims to unite even under its own structure. As late as 1872 Alexander II endorsed the Regulations of the state-supported Trans-Caucasian Muslim administrations of the Sunni and Shi’a clergy. Despite the numerous projects, a centralized structure in the Northern Caucasus was never set up, even after the stormy events of 1905-1907 when the czarist government was forced to issue the Decree on Religious Tolerance that presupposed, among other things, a Muslim administration in the Northern Caucasus.

The Bolsheviks likewise failed to set up a centralized spiritual administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus. It was only in 1944, when the Karachais, Ingushes, Chechens, and Balkars had been deported, that the project of the North Caucasian Spiritual Administration was finally realized. The structure survived until 1989. In December 1945 there were plans to restore the all-Union Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims headed by the Great Mufti of the U.S.S.R. In his memorandum to Deputy Chairman of the Council of People’s Commissars Viacheslav Molotov, Chairman of the Council for Religious Cults at the C.P.C. of the U.S.S.R. I. Polianskiy wrote: “Besides the obvious importance of this center for much better organization of religious life and coordination of activities of the territorial spiritual administrations it would have served as an effective political tool.” The suggestion was buried for the same reason: united the Muslims might gain more influence countrywide.

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8 See: Islam v Rossisskoy imperii..., pp. 181-182.
Struggle against Muridism:
No Frontline

Instead of keeping the Muslims disunited some political figures suggested that the role of Islam should be diminished. Witness the words of R. Fadeev, one of the “hawks” of the Russian Empire: “In the Muslim regions it is advisable to support the adat (the customary court) as opposed to the Shari’a (the religious court) that puts fanatical clerics to the fore. If forced to follow the Christian civil laws, the local people will feel that their faith is being subjected to violence at every step down to and including the smallest details of everyday life.”\(^{10}\) The authors of the Regulations on the Mountain Village (Aul) Communities endorsed on 30 December, 1870 pointed out: “The adats and the related village administrations will serve as a firm foundation in the coming struggle (which for a long time will remain latent) for influence on the people against the local Muslim clergy that will not passively accept its waning influence on the flock.”\(^{11}\)

There were other tools designed to undermine the position of the Muslim community: the clergy was used as an instrument of the state’s Islamic policies. From the very first days of its presence in the Caucasus the Russian administration was engaged in a tug of war by luring at least some of the mullahs to its side. In 1836, Chief of the Corps of Gendarmes Alexander Benkendorf reported to the czar: “In the Caucasus great advantages, if not greater then at least comparable to those gained by the force of arms, can be achieved by luring the class of the effendis to our side.”\(^ {12}\) Bribes were merely one of the methods. In his report to Minister of War Chernyshev Baron Rozen wrote: “Seid, the Qadi of Arakan, is working hard to incite the people against the Qadi mullah; he added vigor to his efforts when informed about the pension granted by His Imperial Majesty.”\(^ {13}\)

In its struggle against Muridism the Russian government relied on the spiritual leaders of the Russian Muslims. In 1834, Mullah of Kazan Tajedin Effendi came to the Caucasus to become the mufti of the Transcaucasian Sunnis with the mission of persuading the mountain dwellers to abandon Shamil. His failure was followed by the similarly unsuccessful missions of Kazakh Qadi Osman Effendi and Orenburg Mullah Khalilul. Crimean Qadi Khalil went even further and was awarded the Order of St. Anna. Azerbaijani Mujtahid Aga-Mir Fettag, who proved useful in preventing the Transcaucasian Shi’a from siding with Gazi-Magomed and Shamil, received nobility along with a landed possession in the Shirvani province.\(^ {14}\)

After the war the clergy appointed by the military administration received certain privileges—they did not pay taxes or duties and were relieved from billeting. The “official” clergy “was part and parcel of the colonial administration system in the Caucasian area; it gradually grew accustomed to its position and started serving czarism.”\(^ {15}\) The administration, however, did not control the situation: members of so-called non-mosque Islam represented by the Muirid brotherhoods and unofficial clergy remained very active, which forced the authorities to recur to repressive measures.

The administration, which was military-police in nature, took into account the degree to which the Islamic elements were represented in the North Caucasian peoples’ ethnic and cultural identity. By the time the Russian Empire came to the Northern Caucasus, the Islamic influence among the local peoples varied: being much stronger in the east it gradually weakened as it moved westward. Islam, as

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\(^{11}\) Quoted from: M.M. Gasanov, Daghestan v sostave Rossii (vtoriaia polovina XIX v.), Makhachkala, 1999, pp. 205-206.


\(^{13}\) A.A. Alov, N.G. Vladimirov, F.G. Osvienko, Mirnye religii, PRIOR Publishers, Moscow, 1998, p. 313.

\(^{14}\) See: N.A. Smirnov, Muuridizm na Kavkaze, Moscow, 1963, p. 16.

an integrating civilizational factor, was an important element of the mountain peoples’ identity, civil law, and, most important, their regional identity and integration. From the very beginning this bred conflicts in the empire in which Christian Orthodoxy was the official and privileged religion. Until its end the czarist regime relied on it in its political practice. More than that: “In Russia the Orthodox Church was recognized by law as the main one with a monopoly on missionary activities within the state. There were laws that established the order of embracing the dominant religion, a system of privileges for the newly converted, and measures designed to prevent secession from Orthodoxy. Christianization and conversion to Christianity were functions of state governance.”

According to General R. Fadeev, Prince Bariatinskiy dreamt of Christianization of the top Muslim estate; he even set up the St. Nina Society for this purpose. According to another pre-revolutionary author, “the teaching of Muridism assumed an extreme form as a protest against the system of repressions against the Muslims created by Ermolov.” The government camouflaged and partly justified its policies by the religious fanaticism of the “savages” that should be quenched by its “civilizational mission.” It brainwashed the Russian public with its allegations about the mountain peoples’ inborn aggressiveness and fanaticism. “They succumbed to Islamism precisely because it justified their cruelty and ennobled it… Muridism served as an outlet for their main passion and the main feature of Islamism: hatred of the unfaithful who occupied the country.”

Much later, during the years of official atheism that persecuted all confessions, the Muslims were even less trusted than the others and were subjected to stricter control. Islam was held responsible for the fact that the Muslim nations preserved, longer than the others, the “reactionary vestiges of the past.” As soon as the communists gained enough strength, they moved against Islam. The following is one of the most graphic illustrations of communist anti-Islamic aggressiveness. The first step of the newly appointed Secretary of the Ingush Regional Committee of the AUCP (B) Chernoglaz was to set up the Union of Militant Atheists and tell the people of Galashki village that he would build a pig farm in their village and force them to look after the pigs. The amazed villagers cut off the secretary’s head and took it away. When asked to return it the elder of the village said to the Cheka men: “He had no head—if he had had one, he would never have intended to build a pigsty in our village.”

Stalin regarded the North Caucasian Muslims as an anti-Soviet (anti-Russian) hostile element—the region responded with the rejection of godless power and the regime. The deported Ingushes and Chechens referred to the “Father of All Peoples” as Dajal—Antichrist. R. Kurakhvi has pointed out that “the spiritual and ideological Sovietization of the local population served as a powerful factor of ideological consolidation and the emergence of a new generation of people aware of their Soviet nature and kinship irrespective of ethnic, cultural, historical, social, or psychological specifics. This policy, however, failed among the ethnically consolidated peoples, tightly knit together by their social organization and their belonging to Islam as a universal ideology alternative to the Soviet one. This specific ‘non-freedom’ and the deep social roots of the Caucasian peoples inside their communities allowed some of the mountain population to remain free for a long time from the myths of the Soviet mass consciousness and from complete identification with the system.”

18 S. Esadze, Istoriicheskie zapiski ob upravlenii Kavkazom, Tiflis, 1907, p. 40.
20 N.A. Smirnov, op. cit.
Have the authorities learned anything at all from the Caucasian War or at least recent history? This is an important question: in the Northern Caucasus Islam remains an inalienable part of the ethnic identity manifested not so much in rigorous religiosity as in specific social and personal behavior and self-identity. For this reason “Islam turns out to be the consolidating element of ethnicity in the face of the Russian majority (even though the Russian Muslims have their own ethnic disagreements). The personal feelings of man as member of a religious minority are further confirmed by the rising xenophobia and Islamophobia (which is a part of it) among the Russians. The Muslim peoples are increasingly aware of their separateness; they are becoming more convinced of their religious specifics and are resorting to additional efforts to confirm them.”

No matter how much the historical context changed, Russia invariably remained aware of the North Caucasian Muslims’ special identity. Any attempts to impose an alien identity invited fierce responses from the mountain Muslims, which accounts for their conservatism and the absence of a wide reformist follow-up in a form similar to Jadidism, which is rightly discussed in the context of the Muslim reformist movements in India, Egypt, and Iran. However, the efforts of Russian power, especially during the period of Soviet atheism, were not in vain. This makes the contemporary religious and political extremism in the Northern Caucasus not merely a product of imported ideologies and resources (a process that is undoubtedly taking place and is encouraged by globalization), but also as an inadequate response to the ethnocultural identity crisis at the personal and group levels.

The czarist government and local authorities diligently fanned ethnic enmities among the Muslims and contradictions and conflicts among the top Muslim figures. This and the subjective specifics of Muslim society did not allow the Muslims to move together to defend their rights, even though disjointed attempts were made before the 1917 revolution. The 1st Muslim Congress of August 1905 set up a social-political organization called Ittifaq al-muslimin. This was an important event. The new organization endorsed its Statute at the 2nd Congress in January 1906; in August of the same year the 3rd Congress transformed it into a political party, the All-Russia Alliance of Muslims. The Muslim factions present in all convocations of the State Duma also played an important role.

V.-G. Jabagiev, an active member of the Muslim movement, had to admit however: “It seems that common origins, shared religion, common languages, and the same lifestyles should have brought the Muslims, living in an atmosphere of lawlessness, together into a strong political group—very much like the Jews or Armenians. This, however, has never happened. The Muslim community, which because of its size and volume can be described as huge, is nevertheless a split, inert, and passive block…” This fully applies to the current state of the Muslim community of the Russian Federation.

Fifty years after the end of the Caucasian War, after the February Revolution, the Islamic religious and political movement stirred into action once more. The anti-Denikin movement of the moun-
tain peoples, in which at some point Bolsheviks and Islamists were fighting side by side (the N. Gika-
lo unit in the army of Emir Uzun-hajji as Salti may serve an example), was unfolding in some places
under the slogan “Long Live Soviet Power and the Shari’a!”26 In the first years of Soviet power
Shari’a courts were functioning in the Mountain Republic and Dagestan while some of the religious
leaders even sat on revolutionary committees. The period of flirting with the Muslims was short-
lived: very soon mosques were consistently destroyed together with the “kulak and mullah elements.”
Nevertheless, hundreds of clandestine religious organizations and primary schools that taught the
Quran and the fundamentals of Islam were functioning under Soviet power and even in the cruel con-
ditions of deportation.27 After 70 years of intensified atheist efforts an ideological bureaucrat com-
plained: “Unfortunately, in the Northern Caucasus religion still holds in its embrace a large part of the
autochthonous population… In the Chechen-Ingush A.S.S.R. for example, over half of the marriages
are entered according to the Shari’a. Rituals with newborns and burials are performed according to
the Muslim rules… The Muslim clerics’ insistent activities among the children cause special con-
cern.”28

Immediately after the death of the Soviet Union the state proved unable to maintain law and
order, social and national justice, and adequate living standards, which led to an acute identity crisis.
This had happened before—in the mid-19th and especially early 20th century. In the more or less sim-
ilar post-Soviet conditions of an ideological vacuum, social demands took on religious forms and
nostalgic feelings about the “imaginary past” of regional history. Alexey Malashenko has rightly
pointed out: “The interest in religion, especially in Islam as a profoundly socialized religion, is ex-
plained by the deep cutting systemic crisis of the region with no end in sight, along with unemploy-
ment and crime. Frustrated society is seeking an alternative, which means that the Islamic revival is
inevitably acquiring political overtones and a great deal of radicalism. The experience of other Mus-
lim countries has already demonstrated that the hope for a better future might transform into faith in
the golden age of the past.”29

The religious transformations in the region, which began simultaneously with Russia’s imperial
expansion to the Caucasus, inevitably radicalized Islam, which existed in the Northeastern Caucasus
in the form of the Sufi Naqshbandi Tariqah that moved first to the inner regions of Dagestan and later
to the other areas of the Northeastern Caucasus. The Russian Empire’s colonial conquests led to the
prolonged Caucasian War and gave rise to Muridism, a new religious-political doctrine rooted in the
Naqshbandi Tariqah. It was expected that Muridism would bring together the ethnic patchwork of
Dagestan and Chechnia into a single Islamic state and supply the liberation struggle with an ideolo-
gy that, in the historical context of the time, could be nothing other than religious.

It is equally important to note that Muridism as a response to aggression and colonization
stemmed from traditional (the term is used here for want of a better one) Islam: being different in
many meaningful respects, Muridism never rejected Islam and even legitimized itself through the
Naqshbandi Tariqah. (Most of the Tariqah sheikhs, however, were hardly its supporters.) The reli-
gious transformations underway in the Northern Caucasus differ radically from the 19th-century con-
text: the Caucasian variant of Wahhabism was obviously imported and is trying to legalize itself by
rejecting so-called traditional Islam and fighting against it.

The genesis and development of both phenomena, though, have something in common: first,
in the 19th century and the late 20th century they moved to the fore as a response to outside pressure
while the Muslim communities were living through sharp sociocultural crises. Second, both times
the religious and political radicalism manifested in the region was an outcrop of the worldwide
trends.

26 Islam i politika na Severnom Kavkaze, p. 176.
27 For more detail, see: A.A. Alov, N.G. Vladimirov, F.G. Ovsienko, op. cit., pp. 318-238.
It has been pointed out more than once that the national-liberation movements that unfolded at almost the same time as the movement of the Caucasian mountain peoples also relied on Sufism for their organizational forms and ideologies. Such were the movements of the Sudanese dervishes (late 19th-early 20th centuries); the war of the Acehs for independence against the Dutch (late third of the 19th-early 20th centuries), and the war of the Algerians against the French (1830-1840). The North Caucasian peoples, the Indonesians, the Wahhabis, and the Sudanese Mahdists and their ideas were obviously interconnected. “Islam in Indonesia maintained close contacts with the religious centers of Arabia where the Aceh pilgrims were exposed to the anti-colonialist ideas of the Wahhabites, Sudanese Mahdism, and the North Caucasian Tariqah.”

At approximately the same time another large Islamic region of the Russian Empire (between the Volga and the Ural) and its Islamic spiritual governance, which for many years remained part of the Russian political and sociocultural context, suddenly developed an active movement for the purity of Islam. In 1862, the Veysi movement appeared, which was named after Vaise al-Qurani, a Naqshbandi sheikh of the old times. Bagautdin Vaisov, who headed the movement, set up the Vaise Divine Host of Muslim Old Believers that left the jurisdiction of the Orenburg religious assembly. The movement set itself the aim of “driving the Giaurs away,” its members refused to pay taxes, serve in the army, or carry passports. In 1884 the police had routed the movement that came back to life later, in 1905, with a following of 15 thousand who pursued political aims. After the death of its founder, Bagautdin Vaisov, the united structure fell apart; Cheka destroyed its small fragments in 1920-1921.

In the early and mid-20th century, religious political sentiments returned to the scene in the form of mass movements that enveloped the Muslim world. V.-G. Jabagiev had the following to say on this score: “Today Muslim liberation movements have engulfed the Zond Archipelago (contemporary Indonesia), British India, Hither Asia … and South Africa … dissatisfaction with life and the foreign influence has been spreading among the Muslim nations in all corners of the world. This is not … ‘pan-Islamism’ … but merely a popular movement free from religious fanaticism of all sorts. The Muslim peoples are pooling their forces (mainly for moral rather than political reasons) only because their enemy is also united. The nationalism of certain Muslim peoples refutes the Tale of Islamic pan-Islamism. At the same time, we should not deny that there is spiritual brotherhood and unity of the Islamic world based on the shared religion, culture, and traditions born by the long history of living side by side in the caliphates of the Omeyyads, Abbasids, and Ottomans.”

Extrapolated to the present day, the processes have revived the old anti-Islamic slogans in a new wrapping. M. Iandieva has pointed out that the awakening of the Islamic world observed today is directly associated with the Islamic threat or the political Islam doctrine revived in the 1990s as a direct outcome of the fall of communism. In the early 21st century the formula of the clash of civilizations (in fact, a clash with Islam), at first vague and later (after 09/11) realized in practice in the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, determined the future of all mankind. Today, the world (the state territories of the so-called New Middle East) is re-divided. The process hypocritically described as the “clash of civilizations” has nothing to do with ideology but rather with the area’s rich natural resources. Russia, with interests and preferences of its own, undoubtedly belongs to the new “Grand Chessboard.” Here I shall limit myself to identifying the current worldwide process in relation to Islam in Russia’s policies.

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The Tale of Pan-Islamism has put on the garbs of “Islamic terrorism.” Today, in the early 21st century, as in the past (in the mid-19th, early and mid-20th centuries), the state’s essentially coloni- alist policies provoke responses from Islamic society. The first Chechen war started religious extremism in the Northern Caucasus. The recent Great Power course of the Kremlin ignited openly extremist and nationalist movements among the Russians, who not infrequently rely on Orthodoxy as their ideology. The response was immediate. Prof. D. Malysheva, who has studied the situation, concluded: “…while criticizing religious extremism in the Northern Caucasus and forecasting its spread we should not detach it from the countrywide context. It is an outcrop of a wide and alarming trend: society living in the clutches of a structural crisis tends to hail extremism, national-socialist ideas bordering on fascism or even undistinguishable from it.”

The above analysis of state Islamic policies in the Northern Caucasus has clearly revealed the parallels between the imperial, Soviet, and “new” Russian policies determined by the continuity of the state’s essence and close ideological kinship. V.-G. Jabagiev wrote 100 years ago: “There is no pan-Islamism in Russia so far…, until it is created by the state itself, that might limit the Muslims’ political, civilian and religious rights.” Today the state itself is responsible for the religious and national contradictions. In the past, both the empire and Soviet Russia camouflaged their hostility toward the Muslims and Islam with fine talk about their “civilizatory missions” and the “fight against the vestiges of the past.” New Russia “wants the best” in its Islamic policies, but alas “gets the usual.”

Conclusion

The Tale of Pan-Islamism has put on the garbs of “Islamic terrorism.” Today, in the early 21st century, as in the past (in the mid-19th, early and mid-20th centuries), the state’s essentially coloni- alist policies provoke responses from Islamic society. The first Chechen war started religious extremism in the Northern Caucasus. The recent Great Power course of the Kremlin ignited openly extremist and nationalist movements among the Russians, who not infrequently rely on Orthodoxy as their ideology. The response was immediate. Prof. D. Malysheva, who has studied the situation, concluded: “…while criticizing religious extremism in the Northern Caucasus and forecasting its spread we should not detach it from the countrywide context. It is an outcrop of a wide and alarming trend: society living in the clutches of a structural crisis tends to hail extremism, national-socialist ideas bordering on fascism or even undistinguishable from it.”

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36 V.-G. Jabagiev, “Musul’mane Rossi.”
In the context of the Islamic economic doctrine, the efficiency of any redistribution policy largely depends in the long run on non-utilitarian behavior in the form of “distributional sacrifice” rather than on government measures. Keeping in mind the importance of both trends, it is nevertheless worth taking a look at the collapse of the radical socialist model, as well as at the current rather inefficient functioning and growing non-competitiveness of the “welfare state” model. Globalization

processes have undermined the government influence on the market both in developed and developing countries.\(^2\)

**Waqfs and Poverty Alleviation**

The Islamic conception of redistribution is based on non-utilitarian behavior related to the corresponding form of property of the public sector (*irfag*). The institution of *irfag* existed as early as the times of the Prophet Muhammad and continued to develop as a way of providing social security. It consisted of waqfs (charity organizations) and other voluntary endowment mechanisms. This kind of public sector (with a religious base) also existed in non-Muslim countries.\(^3\) As Gary S. Becker notes, “charity is a form of self-insurance that is a substitute for market insurance and government transfers.”\(^4\) It was precisely the widespread use of the latter that led to a decrease in the social role of charity.

All the same, there has been an increase in the West recently in the role of philanthropy and the conception of social business responsibility, which is in complete correspondence with the conception of redistribution in any Islamic economic model. Relying on his research studies, Tag el Din claims that even when the emphasis is placed on an increase in material productivity, its higher rates are achieved by introducing special human development programs that also advance technical productivity regulations and ethic standards of fair distribution.\(^5\)

It is worth noting too that in spite of all the social orientation of the Islamic economic model, it rejects extreme paternalism on the part of the state.\(^6\) Under normal circumstances individuals should take care of themselves. If for some reason this becomes impossible, close relatives, neighbors, and society as a whole become responsible for their care.\(^7\) The state as a public institution should create conditions in which a person can be provided with the necessary help only in an emergency.

So the state itself should be free of negative elements. While parents, the education system, and society form a springboard for enterprising and independent thinking, only transparency in the state management system, the rule of law, and other democratic institutions create conditions conducive to shaping individuals as self-fulfilled citizens of their country and a competitive workforce.\(^8\)

Recently time and effort have been put into elaborating an institutional approach toward poverty alleviation. M. Çizakça notes that many basic social services—health care, education, municipal, and communal, and so on—have never been offered at the state’s expense throughout history.\(^9\) They were not implemented by means of redistributive taxation, as in the West, but by voluntary contributions and local initiatives. In this way, the institution of waqf has been the main tool for fighting poverty in the Islamic world. Moreover, it was in the West that this institutional approach experienced

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\(^3\) See: S. Tag el Din, op. cit., pp. 187-207.


\(^7\) See: S. Tag el Din, op. cit., pp. 187-207.


a rebirth through the tempestuous development of the nongovernmental (nonprofit) sector.\textsuperscript{10} The most vivid example is Germany, where the principle of subsidiarity is used, that is, the nongovernmental sector is responsible for resolving local social problems and rendering social services.\textsuperscript{11} This approach, in which there is no duplication of activity and clear division of labor between the government and nongovernmental sector, is worthy of attention and application in countries with a transitional economy.

A waqf is established by donating private property for charitable purposes to be used perpetually and on the condition that the revenue it produces be spent correspondingly. A distinction should be made between religious and philanthropic waqfs.\textsuperscript{12} The latter may be more beneficial in securing poverty alleviation.

A look at history of waqfs reveals that this institution has existed for one millennium.\textsuperscript{13} It provided social services through voluntary contributions from the wealthy strata of society, thus being a voluntary institution of poverty alleviation in the Islamic world.\textsuperscript{14} Azerbaijan also has a rich history of waqfs; they played a leading role in financing social projects and building infrastructure.\textsuperscript{15}

So, at the turn of the 20th century, the Azeri bourgeoisie directly and through the charity funds it created began to finance educational, cultural, religious, public health, infrastructure, and other development projects. The names of G.Z. Tagiev, M. Mukhtarov, A. Ashurbekov, A. Dadashov, A. Guliev, Sh. Asadullaev, I. Gajinsky, and others, as well as the Neshir-Maarif, Nijat, Safa societies, the Baku Muslim Charity Association, and so on, have gone down for perpetuity in Azerbaijan’s history.\textsuperscript{16}

By rendering important services to society without drawing on budget revenue, the system of waqfs can significantly cut back on state spending. This, in turn, is helping to reduce the budget deficit and size of the state debt, as well as the effect of private investments being squeezed out by government spending, which means lower interest rates and stimulated investments and growth.\textsuperscript{17} This also makes it possible to lower the tax burden, thus raising the income of consumers and producers, as well as having a positive effect on aggregate production with a simultaneous decrease in outlays. So prices are falling, opening the way to noninflation growth of production.\textsuperscript{18}

Waqfs also solve the problem of insufficient supply of the social benefits frequently seen in a contemporary market economy.\textsuperscript{19} Here the state’s role consists of ensuring their normal functioning by providing an efficient judicial system and protection of the property rights of waqfs.

History is abundant in cases of the state’s violation of waqf property rights. The development of waqfs was cyclical, involving the expansion then confiscation of property and sequential centralization and decentralization processes. Western countries and colonizers played an immense role in ultimately undermining this institution. For example, in 1860, at the end of the Crimean War, when a peace treaty was signed, the British government insisted on waqfs being abolished.\textsuperscript{20} Europe, which

\textsuperscript{10} See: M. Iqbal, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{11} See: M. Çizakça, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{14} See: M. Çizakça, op. cit.
\textsuperscript{17} See: M. Çizakça, op. cit., p. 264.
\textsuperscript{19} See: M. Çizakça, op. cit., pp. 263-296.
believed in those days in the strength of the state and was suspicious of “intermediary organizations,” did not hesitate to impose this approach on the Islamic world, where the absolutist regimes were happy to accept it and centralized alternative sources of financial resources and influence.

Now the opposite process is being observed throughout the world, guided by the example of the U.S., where the nongovernmental (nonprofit) sector is having a real heyday. Conditions are being created in one form or another in Western countries for developing this sector. This could also have implications for the Muslim countries in the form of a revival of the institution of waqf.

In countries that function under common law, the closest to waqf in the organizational respect is a trust that places a particular person (trustee) in charge of the endowed property to administer it in keeping with the donor’s wishes. In countries (like Azerbaijan) that function under Roman law, the closest to waqf is a fund that is also entrusted with a certain endowment donated by a sponsor.

Regardless of its form, the relations between the principal and the agent are important in this type of institution, as well as the motivations of the latter regarding efficient resource management. In the West, a special group of managers has also been formed who specialize in administrating nonprofit institutions. The question of efficient management should not be underestimated since most waqfs historically suffered from poor administration and inefficient management, corruption, and lack of transparency. This also applies today in the NGO sector, which at times is no worse than state management in this respect.

The principle of subsidiarity practiced in Germany can be considered the closest to the conception of waqf. Here the state does not provide social services where an NGO is rationally operating. In this way, subsidiarity helps to establish cooperation and promote division of labor between the government and the nongovernmental sectors. This conception is being actively implemented by other European countries and the international community as a whole. For example, the growing international support of emergency and humanitarian aid development projects is being provided precisely through the nongovernmental sector. According to the estimates of the International Red Cross, NGOs are now spending more than the World Bank.

Particular attention should be paid to the taxation of nongovernmental organizations, which should be divided into taxation of NGOs themselves and taxation of the donations to them. For example, in the U.S. all the income of nonprofit organizations is exempt from federal profit tax, and donations to charity organizations enjoy benefits. Waqfs were traditionally exempt from taxes. In contemporary Muslim countries they are taxed to the fullest extent of the law.

Present-day NGOs, like traditional waqfs, are actively engaged in commercial activity, which in many countries is taxed. The logic of this approach lies in the fact that benefits create unequal opportunities for commercial and nonprofit structures, which undermines the foundations of fair competition. An exception is Australia, where any commercial activity is exempted from income tax if it is used for charitable purposes.

So reform of the waqf system in the Islamic world, including in the post-Soviet republics, would be very conducive to alleviating poverty. This primarily requires amending the current legislation and studying the practice of other countries, particularly regarding cooperation between the state and NGOs, as well as the relations between waqfs and companies. Cases in point are the experience of the Turkish Koç Company, the multitude of waqfs in Kuwait, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, and so on. For example, as early as 1993 the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation was established to reinforce the status

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22 See: M. Çizakça, op. cit.
25 See: M. Çizakça, op. cit.
of waqfs as a third sector and to participate in the country’s development policy. One of its tasks is to activate the role of waqfs as an efficient institution in socioeconomic development and the resolution of social problems. Incidentally this institution is an excellent example of a successful state-independent waqf which is managed as a nonprofit charity fund and is actively engaged in socioeconomic development programs.

The experience of other states shows that the activity of waqfs can be enhanced even more by coordinating all charity organizations, which will help to avoid duplication of activity and promote division of labor. A single data base of target groups will be another plus in the coordination of these institutions. This will help to resolve the problem of identifying the poor and monitoring the actions carried out. A mutual exchange of information among these organizations, as well as between the corresponding state structures and NGOs, will be useful in planning projects, policy, and strategy for alleviating poverty.

The governments of some countries are conducting a corresponding policy in order to encourage charity and develop the institution of waqf. For example, the tax legislation of Malaysia (which is a secular state with a mainly Muslim population) allows zakat to be paid from tax credits. In this way, physical persons can pay their zakat donations by means of mandatory tax payments.

Although traditionally the revenue from zakat and waqfs were used for providing direct material aid, in the fight against poverty efforts must also be made to raise potential and improve prosperity. In addition, direct material aid is related to high moral risk and encourages dependency psychology. For example, the Central Council for zakat in Pakistan uses most of the available funds to finance rehabilitation and professional training.

The potential of the institutions of zakat and waqf in poverty alleviation depends on several factors. It stands to reason that as the financial resources of these structures increase so does their ability to attend to as many poor people as possible. Moreover, as the population’s prosperity increases so does the taxable base and, correspondingly, charity activity. In turn, the development and expansion of these institutions will depend on several operational and organizational factors. Here we should make a stipulation about zakat and other Islamic taxes. Due to the secular structure of the Azerbaijan Republic these taxes (primarily zakat and khums) will have to be voluntary and so will be included in the revenue for waqfs. Whereby attracting charity donations in the form of Muslim taxes requires raising the efficiency of collecting and distributing these funds, which causes people to trust these organizations and want to contribute to them.

This money could be used to acquire all kinds of social benefits and increase the prosperity of able-bodied people by providing them with human and financial capital and rendering direct material assistance to the disabled.

One of the reasons for the small number of waqfs in the world is that they are associated with land and real estate, the cost of which is very high nowadays. This limits the number of potential donors. So we need to move away from the traditional forms toward monetary waqfs similar to the philanthropic humanitarian funds in the West. NGOs with a trustee board that controls the fund’s operations and employs professional managers are the most optimal organizational structure for waqfs.

The success of waqfs also depends on the efficiency of their organizational structure and management, as well as on their understanding of the importance of their social mission. So the institution’s success is based on a clear and precise social task, legitimacy, support, and organizational

31 Ibidem.
possibilities, that is, the prestige of the public organization is measured by the degree to which its mission is realized. Keeping in mind the dependence of this kind of structure on donors, it is important that their activity is transparent, which can be achieved by establishing financial reliability and an internal mechanism that makes it impossible to use the funds unconscionably. In addition, the responsibilities for making, carrying out, and monitoring financial decisions should be divided among different branches of the organization. Conducting independent audits which present the public with a full report of their results is extremely important. Unfortunately, our country’s NGOs and religious organizations are not quite up to this yet.

The participation of respected and well-known people on the trustee or supervisory boards of these organizations will also help to raise trust in them. As the literature notes, the managerial procedures of waqfs depend on their size, whereby the larger ones have the advantage of scale effect. In addition, they will also have more opportunity to attract qualified managers and employees and introduce innovations for achieving efficiency. Small organizations are valuable in that they are more flexible and closer to the target groups. This factor is especially important for efficient local socioeconomic development (the development of communities).

In order to render help directly to those who need it most, these structures should create a network of volunteers that does not require a lot of spending and helps to identify and assist target groups directly in the regions. Then these organizations will also be able to join together and coordinate their efforts in order to achieve better results. As we have already noted, the most important thing is to have a coordinating independent structure.

The Waqf Property Investment Fund created by the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) in 2001 can assist the institutional development of waqfs. It is called upon to mobilize financial resources for promoting and developing the property of waqfs throughout the world and informing Muslims about waqfs, as well as to help the IDB achieve its goals with respect to the socioeconomic development of member countries and other communities.

In this context, waqfs can perform the following functions:

1. **Collection and accumulation of zakat, khums, and donations from Muslims.** This function implies a streamlined and transparent system for collecting and using funds, as well as educational and marketing activity to increase the number of “taxpayers” and donors and attract more contributions and payments.

2. **Support and insurance of the socially vulnerable strata of the population in order to keep them above the poverty line.** As we understand it, the Islamic economic model offers several alternatives. First, it grants interest-free loans (gard al-hasana) to this segment of the population. One of the loan conditions could be helping to finance the particular waqf after improvement of the family budget. For example, in Sudan, the Divan al Zakat organization issues interest-free loans to farmers at the beginning of the agricultural season so that they can buy all they need. The loan is returned after the harvest has been gathered. This policy has increased the productivity of farms and the collection of zakat from farmers to 74.4% of the sum of the issued loans.

3. **Funding of waqfs.** This method was proposed by H. Ahmed and implies issuing certificates to waqfs32 at an acceptable nominal cost. Anyone wishing to contribute to and help the waqf can do this by buying a certificate. This method is called sukkuk al intifa and implies the transfer of the right to use certain assets of a waqf to the purchaser of the certificate for a certain length of time.

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33 See: H. Ahmed, op. cit.
4. Islamic microfinancing institutions based on waqfs. Accumulated funds can be used to finance small businesses and individual businessmen from among the low-income population based on the division of profits and losses or by granting the poor interest-free consumer loans for improving their standard of living. This principle of microfinancing in different forms is actively used in Western countries and has been named “community capitalism.”

Nevertheless, the significance of waqfs in poverty alleviation should not be overestimated, nor should we expect them to replace state intervention in socioeconomic processes. At the present stage in development, full delegation of communal, educational, medical, and other social services to the nongovernmental sector is unrealistic and undesirable. This sector should play an auxiliary role.

Waqfs and Microfinancing

In principle, waqfs can apply two approaches to revenue spending. According to the first, the roots of poverty lie in the fact that the low-income strata of the population are disorganized and in an economic, social, and political trap. Therefore the only long-term solution to the problem of poverty will be to offer this category of people help in overcoming their unenviable status by increasing their awareness and education.

The second approach is more materialistic. It suggests that poor people need more than just increased consciousness and greater awareness; they need material assistance that will help to raise their income. Loans are a key element in this approach. It is called upon to help poor people extricate themselves from debt dependence and invest in their own income-yielding business. But studies show that the official banking sector is unable to reach poor people (particularly in rural areas) due to high operational costs. In this respect, the main principles of Islamic economics lead us to believe that the most realistic Muslim approach would be to create micro-lending institutions and credit unions in the spirit of Islam.

An example of how Islamic NGOs can help to alleviate poverty is the extensive rendering of microfinancing services to the poor in Bangladesh. In contrast to the traditional micro-lending organizations, Islamic NGOs do not issue money loans but apply the concept of bai muajal—the sale of productive assets with deferred payment and a margin of approximately 12%. Micro-lending is an efficient way to create jobs, raise family income, and alleviate poverty. But there is another opinion, according to which, despite its declared intention to fight poverty, micro-lending rarely reaches the low-income strata of the population, that is, the recipients of loans are families that are not so poor. The microfinancing mechanism can be briefly described as follows. Poor women and men form groups that are responsible for paying each others’ loans in the event of a default. In order to receive a loan, a small deposit must be placed in an account as a form of mandatory

34 M. Stegman, The Rise of Community Capitalism (with focus on Community Development Venture Capital), Presentation for The Humphrey Seminar, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, April 2006.
savings. The difference between secular and Islamic NGOs lies in the interest rate. Credit unions that are also close to Islam in spirit are another example of microfinancing and the rendering of financial services to the low-income strata of the population, who are frequently of no interest to the banking sector.\(^3\)

According to Islamic doctrine, the state and society are responsible for fighting poverty. As stated above, the economic philosophy of Islam requires that poverty be alleviated primarily by meeting basic human needs, as well as reducing the difference in income between the low-income and well-to-do strata of the population and using the available resources for the benefit of human prosperity.

Islamic public organizations should try to use mosques to achieve their goals and encourage the clergy and believers to take a more active civil stance. The clergy needs to be reoriented in order to adapt to today’s realities. In this respect, radical reform of the status and structure of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus and its interrelations with other Islamic organizations and corresponding state structures is on the agenda.

The Potential of Waqfs and Islamic Microfinancing in Azerbaijan

Waqfs on the whole and monetary waqfs (essentially charity funds) in particular are undergoing revival today in the Muslim world. Their role in financing social projects, including by means of micro-lending, is also growing. To be fair, it should be said that most waqfs are property-related and religious. But in secular countries with a Muslim population, monetary waqfs are just as important, which is due to the weakness of traditional waqfs.\(^4\) In this respect, it is worth noting the experience of the National Awqaf Foundation of South Africa (AWQAF SA). Established in 2001, the organization’s aim is to mobilize the capital of the Muslim community and reinvest it in social development. Community development and support of poor Muslims and the low-income strata of the population are the main priorities of the AWQAF SA’s plan of action. AWQAF SA is engaged in mobilizing and collecting funds, while the substructure it created, the South African Islamic Development Agency, implements development and target group support programs, including by means of microfinancing. In spite of its young age, AWQAF SA has already carried out several successful projects and gained recognition not only in the country, but also abroad. In so doing, it should be noted that the SAR Muslim community comprises the minority of the population (approximately 2%), and most Muslims, being dark-skinned, suffered from the apartheid regime and are among the low-income segment of society. The success of AWQAF SA, which led in a short time to the development of the Muslim part of the country, indicates the great potential of waqfs in fighting poverty and promoting the development of local communities with efficient management even under unfavorable conditions.

The institution of waqf has not been legally enforced in Azerbaijan, although the word “waqf” is used in the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Freedom of Confession. But in the event a corresponding law is adopted on charity activity and charity funds, the institution of waqf (particularly monetary) will acquire a clearer legislative base for its activity and development.

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\(^4\) See: H. Ahmed, op. cit.
As President of the Heydar Aliyev Foundation Mekhriban Alieva noted, a national conception for the development of charity in Azerbaijan should be drawn up which sets forth the main areas for building a charity system as a tool of social policy in which the state as well as businesses and NGOs participate. In addition, the main problems in carrying out charity activity should be identified, as well as ways to resolve them, and mechanisms for streamlining partner relations among the executive power structures, local self-government structures, and public institutions should be set forth.41

In the context of poverty alleviation in Azerbaijan, the following problems can be singled out which microfinancing institutions based on waqfs could resolve:

- Shortage of financial resources and access to banking services in the rural regions and among the urban poor;
- Non-performance of the principles and values of the Islamic economic model to the benefit of society in spite of the growing interest in Islam in the country;
- Non-attraction of alternative sources of financial resources;
- Poor cooperation among the population;
- Low level of social business responsibility;
- Mistrust of the traditional ways of collecting donations and religious endowments due to their lack of transparency;
- Ethics crisis and lack of trust (low social capital).

These problems are encompassing different aspects of the country’s socioeconomic life. A comprehensive solution to the problems could be found by carrying out measures that would affect them all. This means that mechanisms for evaluating this influence must be identified.

Introducing a community development model by creating credit unions involving waqfs in keeping with the principles of Islamic economics could meet the challenges posed by all the above-mentioned problems (including if the necessary prerequisites exist for forming this type of microfinancing institution).

The experience of different countries shows that when forming the corresponding institutional structure and during efficient management various interest-free micro-lending schemes are extremely effective in alleviating poverty at the meso level.

In this respect, there are two main ways to provide the low-income strata and rural residents with the necessary access to financial lending services. One of them involves developing principles of so-called "community (national) capitalism," the execution mechanisms of which are credit unions and other cooperatives. The second is the development of Islamic financial institutions and instruments. But attempts have been made recently to join these two approaches (keeping in mind their many similar features) and develop community capitalism among the religious Muslim population.

The development of “Islamic community capitalism” is an extremely realistic project. This strategy is aimed at obtaining profit and attracting additional investments, as well as creating jobs and economic opportunities in impoverished communities with support of the state and civil society. The latter consists of rationalizing the legal environment, encouraging investments in the infrastructure and services which exist in more prosperous regions (communities), improving the business environment, and increasing the potential of the workforce, all other things being equal. This will make it possible to strengthen cooperation in society and mobilize market forces, which in turn will enhance

41 See: Mekhriban Alieva: “There are several serious obstacles to the development of the charity sector in Azerbaijan today,” available at [www.day.az], 20 March, 2008.
A healthy economic environment that provides jobs, income, and prosperity for the local population at rates that at least do not lag behind the average level nationwide.

The Islamic component consists in

1) ensuring the requirements of Islamic law (for example, interest-free loans);
2) minimizing any possibility of exploitation;
3) incorporating Islamic funds, waqfs, where monetary resources are accumulated.

So it seems the following measures can be carried out within the framework of a pilot model:

1. Creating waqfs on the basis of existing well-known shrines, that is, pirs where large donations are collected.
2. Carrying out public awareness campaigns to inform the population about waqfs and credit unions.
3. Increasing money endowments to waqfs by means of religious “taxes” and voluntary donations, grants from international organizations, and so on.
4. Creating a credit union in which a waqf holds a share of the authorized capital.
5. Providing technical support of the efficient work of such credit unions.
6. Strengthening waqfs and credit unions, encouraging their independent activity.

Of course, a waqf can also act as an NGO that will engage in microfinancing, but this will be harder to carry out since such organizations can only conduct limited operations. This will be difficult to adapt to the existing legislation, which is still not very “friendly” toward Islamic financing. Based on the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Credit Unions, these financial institutions issue loans under the conditions enforced in their charters, which provides more freedom for introducing the Islamic models of financing we will show below.

Fig. 1 shows the activity of waqfs based on the Model. A waqf is created on the basis of an existing shrine in a village where the residents are distinguished by religiosity and a community spirit,
that is, where there is the necessary social capital. In addition to funds from the waqf founders, there are donations (grants and contributions) from donors, community members, other physical persons, the business sector (endowments, religious taxes, and so on), and the waqf’s business activity, including the credit union’s to be mentioned below.

In turn, functioning of the Model itself is shown in Fig. 2. The waqf, residents of the community, and companies working in the village voluntarily create a credit union. The waqf, on the strength of its financial possibilities and contribution to the authorized capital, is the main founder. It also intends to obtain profit from the credit union in order to carry out its charity mission. The credit union will strengthen cooperation and interaction among the community members and with the waqf, which will help to increase the social capital.

According to Islam, a credit union can carry out the following lending services:

- Loan with deferred payment (*murabaha*)—the credit union buys the commodities the borrower needs in its name and resells them to the borrower with a service charge on the condition of deferred payment agreed upon in advance.

- Interest-free loan (*gard al-hasana*) issued for purchasing goods and services in keeping with the requirements of Islamic law. At the end of the year, the borrower must pay a certain surcharge in addition to the amount of the loan, in order to partially cover the effects of inflation and the credit union’s operational costs relating to the issue of this loan. The service charge is established in advance and does not depend on size of the loan.

- Leasing (*ijara*)—the credit union rents out its equipment and transportation means.

- Mortgage loans—the credit union buys housing for the borrower, but in its name, with deferred payment. Until the loan is repaid, the borrower pays the credit union rent.

- Other operations in compliance with the legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic.

The organizational foundations of the Model imply principles and special features of the organizational structure of corresponding waqfs and credit unions. The difficulty lies in the fact that the
institution of waqf as such does not yet have any legal underpinning and is purely hypothetical. However, on the whole, this institution can function on the operational principles of nongovernmental religious organizations. The organizational structure of credit unions is regulated by the corresponding legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic.

In so doing, three main aspects should be kept in mind:

1. Management structures and procedures: this includes not only the adoption and implementation of decisions but also issues relating to transparency, personnel, innovations, efficiency, and profitability.

2. Augmentation of profit and revenue: issues relating to interaction with existing and potential donors, marketing and information, image and trust.

3. Distribution of revenue: identifying the recipients of aid and loans, service provision system, coordination of activity with other organizations, assessment of financed projects, distribution of profit, and so on.

So the organizational structure of the Model implies the existence of such structures as a General Assembly, Supervisory Board, Board of Directors, and Credit Commission. The latter should include specialists in Islamic law and business project assessment. The representatives of the waqf, as the main founder, should be members of the Board, which carries out direct supervision of the credit union.
A waqf, in turn, should have a General Assembly of Founders, Board of Directors, Board of Trustees, and Revision Commission in its structure. The Board of Directors carries out direct management of the waqf and creates corresponding organizational units for managing the waqf’s affairs.

**Conclusion**

If it is successfully implemented and all other things being equal, the Model will be able to resolve corresponding problems (see Fig. 4).

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**How the Model Effects Problem-Solving**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Result</th>
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<tr>
<td>Insufficient financial resources and access to banking services in rural regions and among the urban poor</td>
<td>The credit union issues interest-free loans and provides some banking services for its members</td>
<td>Availability of financial resources and access to banking services in some rural regions and among the urban poor</td>
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<td>Non-performance of the principles and values of the Islamic economic model for the benefit of society, despite the growing interest in Islam in the country</td>
<td>The credit union functions in strict correspondence with Islamic law</td>
<td>Use of the principles and values of the Islamic economic model for the benefit of society</td>
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<td>Non-attraction of alternative sources of financial resources</td>
<td>The funds of the waqf and community members are used to finance the credit union</td>
<td>Use of alternative sources of financial resources</td>
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<td>Poor cooperation among the population</td>
<td>The credit union unites community members</td>
<td>Increased cooperation among the population</td>
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<td>Low level of social business responsibility</td>
<td>The credit union also uses funds obtained from donations</td>
<td>High level of social business responsibility in places where the project is carried out</td>
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<td>Mistrust of traditional methods of collecting donations and religious endowments due to their lack of transparency</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Ethics crisis and lack of trust (low social capital)</td>
<td>Example of possible successful activity in compliance with ethic principles and with mutual trust</td>
<td>Decline in ethics crisis and high social capital in places where the project is carried out</td>
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The Model can be evaluated in the absolute (with respect to the set goals) and relative (compared with traditional credit unions) sense after a certain amount of time set in advance (for example, 5 years) and providing monitoring is carried out on a regular basis.

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ISLAMIC FINANCE AND ITS USE IN AZERBAIJAN

Abstract

This article examines some theoretical and applied aspects of Islamic economics. The author underscores its fundamental differences from Western models and explores the foundations of the Islamic economic system, the essence of loan interest and its influence on economic well-being. The question of the development of Islamic banking in Azerbaijan is seen through the prism of Islamic financial instruments.

Introduction

In economic theory, the economy is taken to mean the national economy of a given country or part thereof, including certain industries and lines of production. The theoretical foundations of Islamic economics were developed by such jurists as Abu ‘Ubaid al-Qasim ibn Sallam, Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Malik al-Baghdadi (better known as Ibn Zandjavih), Muhammad ibn Muhammad al-Ghazali, Ahmad ibn ‘Abd al-Halim al-Harrani (known as Ibn Taimiyyah) and others.

The Islamic economic model based on the principles of the Quran and the Sunnah (the body of Islamic custom and practice derived from the words and deeds of Prophet Muhammad) is aimed at achieving broad public welfare in contrast to the material well-being of individual members of society. Based on the free expression of the will of business entities, open competition and rejection of monopoly, this model is gradually finding its way into the traditional capitalist formation.

Specific Features of the Interest-Based Banking System

Banks are a key institution in the financial system of any country. They ensure the operation of the national payment system and act as financial intermediaries. From the standpoint of Islam, a banking system based on interest has several negative aspects.
First, interest-based transactions violate the principle of economic justice. The borrower has to pay interest on a loan at a predetermined rate even if he has suffered losses or if the profit earned is disproportionate to the interest on the loan.

Second, the interest-based economic system is unstable. Due to interest charges, money fortunes rapidly increase at regular intervals of time, i.e., they grow exponentially. The period required to double the invested amount of money is 24 years when the interest rate is 3% per annum, 12 years when the rate is 6%, and 6 years when it is 12%. Even at 1% per annum, interest ensures growth that will double the initial amount in about 70 years. This means that in the long-term perspective payment of interest is impossible both mathematically and in practice. There is an insurmountable conflict between economic necessity and mathematical impossibility. It becomes clear that the interest rate mechanism is the main reason for the pathological growth of the economy with subsequent inevitable destruction of the latter. The “dead weight” of interest rates in periods of depression results in “ailing” industries, with negative consequences in the sphere of employment.

Third, the interest-based system is oriented not so much towards growth as towards protection from risk. In assuming obligations to depositors, banks are interested in guaranteed repayment of provided loans and interest on them. As a result, banks limit the range of borrowers to large companies or such organizations or persons as have proved to be sufficiently safe. If banks believe that such ways of investment are inadequate, they prefer to invest funds in government securities with guaranteed income. This excessive concern about the preservation of assets hinders growth, because such a system separates financial flows from large numbers of potential entrepreneurs, whose efforts could increase the gross national product but who are short of assets to meet bank requirements for creditworthiness. Excess supply of capital to well-known companies and restrictions on its supply to a large segment of the population also lead to growing inequality in property status and income.

Fourth, the interest-based system does not encourage innovation, especially at small enterprises. Large industrial firms and big landowners can afford to experiment with new technologies, because they have sufficient reserves in case their innovations do not generate the expected profits. Small enterprises are reluctant to implement new production methods using borrowed funds, because they have to ensure payment of interest and principal regardless of the results achieved, whereas their own funds are very limited. In agriculture, for example, small farmers do not apply new methods of cultivation precisely for this reason. This not only has an adverse effect on growth rates, but also increases income inequality.

Fifth, under the interest-based system, banks are only interested in enterprises capable of creating a flow of funds that would ensure interest payments. In other words, banks are interested in the profitability of their customers. At the same time, they pay insufficient attention to potential profits from projects and give priority to companies with considerable experience, which leads to disproportionate distribution of resources.

There is yet another important argument in favor of interest-free financing, shared by many Western economists. If investments in fixed or working capital are financed by bank loans, entrepreneurs seeking to ensure an acceptable rate of return are obliged to add a certain markup to the price of the final product in order to compensate for future interest payments. So, a kind of “superstructure” inevitably arises over the price, and consumers have to pay for it. As a result, in the process of economic exchange the whole of society and each of its members are “taxed” in favor of the bank. This amounts to misappropriation of a part of the value added, which in actual fact impoverishes all of us and leads to a waste of resources.

In view of these circumstances, Muslim experts in economics and banking have made a careful study of the possible ways of replacing loan interest as the basis for banking activity. They have de-
veloped economic models of an interest-free economic system, analyzed the consequences of the abolition of interest for economic growth and income distribution, and provided a theoretical basis for Islamic banking.

The History of Islamic Banking

The first attempt to implement Islamic principles in banking was made in Egypt (Mit Ghamr Savings Bank) in 1963. It was a form of savings bank whose activity was based on profit and loss sharing. This experiment continued until 1967, when there were already nine banks of this kind operating in the country. They did not charge or pay interest, investing mainly in trade and industry by direct financing or jointly with other investors, while the profit received from the successful implementation of such projects was shared with depositors.

In 1974, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) founded the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), which initially served interstate purposes in providing capital for projects to develop the economy of OIC member countries. IDB operations are mainly based on Shari’a principles. In the 1970s, many duly established Islamic banks came into existence in the Middle East, such as the Dubai Islamic Bank (1975), Faisal Islamic Bank of Sudan (1977), Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt (1977), Bahrain Islamic Bank (1979), and also Islamic banks in the Philippines, Malaysia and India. Islamic banks have also been set up in Europe.

The first Islamic bank in the West, Islamic Finance House, was founded in Luxembourg in 1978. Major Western banks (ABN Amro, Société Générale, Goldman Sachs, ING, Nomura Securities, JP Morgan Chase, and others) have long had divisions providing Islamic services. In July 1997, Citibank founded a subsidiary Citi Islamic Investment Bank in Bahrain with an initial capital of $20 million. Another major bank, HSBC, took the same path, setting up an institution called HSBC Amanah Finance, initially based in London and then in the United Arab Emirates. In 2006, Deutsche Bank opened an “Islamic window.” In June of the same year, Lloyds TSB began providing Islamic banking services in the territory of Britain. Today there are three finance companies in Britain operating in full compliance with Shari’a rules: the Islamic Bank of Britain, the European Investment Islamic Bank, and the Bank of London and the Middle East.

The world leader in the amount of Shari’a-compliant financial assets is Iran ($154.9 billion), followed by Saudi Arabia ($70.1 billion) and Malaysia ($65.2 billion). The top ten countries also include Kuwait, Bahrain, Pakistan, Lebanon and Turkey. Britain is ninth in the world in the amount of Shari’a-compliant assets ($10.4 billion).

The world market of financial services consistent with the precepts of the Quran and Shari’a rules has tripled in the past decade: from $150 billion in the mid-1990s to $531 billion in 2006. According to international rating agency Standard & Poor’s, the potential market for these services could be $4 trillion, over seven times its current size.1 In 2005, the total assets of Islamic investment funds reached $11 billion. The number of such funds has exceeded one hundred.2

Islamic Economic Categories

In order to understand the forms and methods of operation of Islamic economic institutions, it is necessary, in the first place, to examine the main categories of the Islamic economic model: mal, gharar, maysir, naqd and riba.

1 [http://www.rbcdaily.ru/2008/01/22/world/314863].
First category: mal, or property. Islam regards the individual not as an absolute owner of a certain resource possessing market and social value, but as an agent entitled to manage these resources for a time in accordance with the will of Allah, their true owner. These resources should not be hoarded (kept idle) or be used for speculative purposes. The resources entrusted to an individual should be used prudently for the benefit of the “manager” and, as far as possible, for the benefit of the whole of society. In other words, material goods should serve people, and not the other way round.

In the light of the above, a mandatory tax on certain kinds of property (zakat) can be regarded both as a measure designed to fight the accumulation of idle assets (hoarding) and as a mechanism for the social protection of low-income strata of the population.

Second category: gharar, or risk. The various kinds of gharar can be divided into two groups:

(a) purchase and sale of goods that are not in the possession of the seller at the time of the conclusion of the contract (for example, the sale of unborn cattle);

(b) purchase and sale of goods without a complete specification of the terms (for example, when the parties make a deal without specifying the exact price, “at the current market price” or without specifying the time for the performance of contractual obligations).3

Consequently, gharar can be characterized as excessive risk. Shari’a does not condemn risk in general; on the contrary, none of the parties may seek to protect themselves from possible risk-related losses at the expense of the other party. Uncertainty in the terms of the transaction increasing the degree of risk above the usual level is believed to be unjustified and is prohibited by Islam.

Third category: maysir, or speculation. This concept is close to the previous one and implies income received as a result of an accidental concurrence of circumstances, without inputs of capital or labor (for example, stakes in gambling games). Maysir also includes the movement of huge amounts of money for the purpose of one’s own expanded reproduction without producing real wealth, either tangible or intangible. Destructive flows of such speculative capital were observed during the 1997-1998 Asian crisis.

In investing their customers’ funds, professional investors (brokers) use financial instruments classified as maysir: futures, swaps, etc. In contrast to Shari’a-compliant investments in shares, exchange goods or currency, investments in such instruments are a financial game, because money here is not involved in the production process and does not make society wealthier in real terms.

Fourth category: naqd, or money. As we have already noted, the Shari’a attitude to the market of fictitious capital, to turning money into an independent quantity serving to augment the wealth of successful operators but of little benefit to society is completely (or almost completely) prohibitive. Islamic economics regards money as a medium of exchange, a measure of value and partly as a store of value. Paper money is seen only as an instrument without any value of its own, no different from, say, equipment at an enterprise. Money in the Islamic economic model cannot bring any fixed or guaranteed compensation. Islamic economics also draws a distinction between money and capital. But turning money into capital requires the active participation of the owner of monetary resources, i.e., he should get a part of the profit but certainly no interest.

Fifth category: riba, or increase (interest). There are two kinds of riba: nasiah (interest resulting from time delay, e.g., loan interest) and fadl (interest resulting from differences in

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quantity, e.g., exchange of gold for gold in different quantities). According to Islam, exchange of gold for gold, silver for silver, wheat for wheat, dates for dates or salt for salt is permitted only in equal quantities and from hand to hand. As regards other articles of commerce, different schools of religious law have differed about the permissibility of their exchange in equal quantities.

The Quranic prohibition of riba determines the fundamental differences between the Judeo-Christian and Islamic economic systems. Whereas in Western economic models interest plays a decisive role in savings and is a key instrument of monetary policy, Islam regards credit as an act of compassion. Shari’a encourages lending money to the needy without any compensation for the time value of money.

Islamic Banking Instruments

Islamic banks base their activities on Shari’a principles and create their capital using liabilities. These can be customers’ funds on current, savings and investment accounts. Investment deposits represent different kinds of mudaraba, which will be examined below. As for current and savings accounts, they can take the form of qard hasan and amanah.

The Arabic expression qard hasan means “good loan.” It is a deposit implying the absence of any income, on the one hand, and allowing the use of the funds received, on the other. The word amanah means a “thing placed for safekeeping.” It is a kind of deposit which the bank is not entitled to use to create assets. In practice, banks more often use qard hasan accounts, rewarding their holders.

In order to earn profit, the bank conducts active operations based on two principles: the principle of profit and loss sharing and the debt principle.

The first of these two principles—proportional participation in profits and losses—is realized through mudaraba and musharaka.4

Mudaraba is a form of business partnership in which one of the parties invests capital, and the other (a manager called mudarib) is engaged in organizational, management, production and other kinds of activity. The profit earned is divided between the parties in a proportion agreed in advance. If the enterprise suffers losses, the burden of financial losses is borne by the investor alone. According to Shari’a, the other party’s losses (uncompensated inputs of time and physical, mental and intellectual efforts) are just as significant as lost money. According to the principles of mudaraba, the investor does not interfere in the affairs of the enterprise: neither in management, production, sale nor accounting, although he is naturally entitled to control the activities of the enterprise. At the stage of coordination of the parties’ positions, the investor may formulate any conditions he thinks appropriate, and the business manager, if he agrees, will have to strictly comply with these conditions in the future.

The mudarib is not bound by obligations regarding losses, but can be brought to account if these losses are caused by his negligence or incompetent actions. Ideally, profit sharing should take place not on a calendar basis, but only upon the completion of the contract. In practice, however, this principle is not always taken into account, and contracts are concluded for a period. The contract may also be terminated ahead of time on the initiative of either party. The mudarib is also entitled to take part in the enterprise by investing his own funds.

Islamic banks often use an operating model developed on the basis of mudaraba. The bank accumulates depositors’ funds, concluding contracts with them and pledging to invest their funds in assets capable of earning income, but not guaranteeing such income. At the same time, the

bank operates as an investor, using depositors’ money to perform various Shari’a-compliant operations.

Mudaraba can be restricted and unrestricted, i.e., the customer is entitled to determine the kind of assets in which his funds are to be invested or leave the matter to the bank’s discretion. Mudaraba can also be special and general, i.e., it is up to the customer to decide whether his funds will work separately from the funds of other depositors or be part of a common pool. An advantage of special mudaraba is lower risk associated with the bank’s total profit, while its shortcoming is lower profit in view of the limited amount of funds involved.

Musharaka is a form of business partnership with predetermined capital and with profit and loss sharing between the partners. Musharaka can be permanent and diminishing. Permanent musharaka is where the partners’ shares in the company’s capital and profits do not change throughout its entire life cycle. In the event, the partners are allowed to sell their share. Theoretically, each partner may authorize the rest to manage his capital, but in practice, where an Islamic bank is the project manager, it plays an independent role in determining the project’s goals, the parameters of the production process, etc.

A distinctive feature of diminishing musharaka is that the bank from the very beginning declares its intention to withdraw from the business before the end of the company’s life cycle. In other words, the customer pledges to buy out the bank’s share either by lump-sum payment or by periodic payments.

The second principle of active operations is debt financing. The most popular form of financing is murabaha. Its advantage consists in the short-term nature of the operation, the right to demand security for the customer’s obligations and the high likelihood of profits.

The first stage of such cooperation is the conclusion of an agreement under which the bank undertakes to find the necessary goods in the market, and the customer undertakes to purchase these goods from the bank for a certain amount, either fixed or expressed as a percentage of the purchase price. In this case, the goods themselves are regarded as collateral for the bank. An important element of this agreement is the time and form of payment (cash or deferred payment, full amount or in installments). Thus, the bank makes profit according to the “cost plus” formula. Hence the conclusion that murabaha is a commercial finance operation in which the final price increases by the amount at which the bank assesses the service provided to the customer.

Another kind of debt financing is salam. It is the sale of goods for future delivery against cash payment and is rarely used in active operations. In practice, the procedure is as follows: the bank provides a credit in an amount equal to the price of the goods, and the customer undertakes to supply the goods by a specified time. The customer here is in a more advantageous position, because he obtains working capital without which his project would be impossible. The bank, for its part, has no particular need for these goods, but it can conclude a parallel contract of salam, this time as a supplier of goods. Salam is mainly used in agriculture and very rarely in industry.

The next kind of debt financing is istisna, which is designed to provide services, for the most part, to large-scale production. This kind of financing has much in common with salam, but in this case the subject of the contract does not exist at the time of its conclusion. A contract of istisna is valid where it stipulates the price of the goods to be produced and their basic characteristics. A major distinction between this kind of financing and salam is that payment for goods in istisna is not made in the form of a lump-sum prepayment but as works are performed by the producer of the goods. In case of the customer’s refusal, the bank concludes a parallel deal with the producers of goods or works (for example, construction works), paying for them at its own expense. The bank’s profit results from the difference between the price under the first contract and the price paid under

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the second contract. In view of a high degree of risk, istisna (just as salam) has not gained wide currency.

Yet another kind of debt financing is ijara, which combines various kinds of leasing and rental. Leasing implies, so to speak, the renting out not of the goods themselves but of their useful properties. Ijara has two widespread forms: operating lease and lease with subsequent purchase.

Operating lease is an agreement between the bank and the customer under which the bank buys equipment from a producer and then leases it to the customer at his request. The term of the lease and the amount of lease payments are agreed in advance. In this case, the equipment remains in the ownership of the bank. This kind of lease is common in financing production, construction works, etc.

Lease with subsequent purchase differs from the above in that the customer undertakes to purchase the equipment by the end of the lease period at a price agreed with the bank, which includes the amount of previously made lease payments. In other words, the customer makes lease payments to the bank and partly pays off the cost of the equipment, and at the end of the term of the agreement becomes the rightful owner of the asset. Another option is where the customer makes lease payments alone, and at the end of the term purchases the equipment from the bank at an agreed price.

As we see from the above, the Islamic financial system is not speculative, but deals with investments in real production, which protects this system from financial crises and defaults. Due to a prudent investment policy, active financing of production, and attractive banking services, Islamic finance is acquiring an internal capacity for reproduction.

But the Islamic financial system has its problems as well. Its weak point is the low efficiency of mechanisms for promoting long-term investment. And if a single bank operating on this basis does not have a tangible effect on the economy, a whole system operating in this mode can cause significant damage to the process of economic growth. But although these problems do exist, Islamic banking should be seen as a fait accompli, as a kind of financial business with potential for development.

Liquidity management remains an important problem facing Islamic banks. It is known that any investor demonstrates a natural human quality: aversion to excessive risk. As experience shows, depositors of Islamic banks are still unprepared to invest funds at the risk of losing their initial investment. As a result, the resource base of Islamic banks is very short-term, with obvious consequences for their active operations.

The performance of conversion (forex) operations also meets with restrictions, because forex operations are mainly associated with futures risk. At present, currency trading is permitted in the spot market, with delivery of currency within 24 hours. But the dealer may be unable to enter the market immediately if the currency at his disposal does not interest potential customers.

The use of securities markets for proper management of Islamic bank liquidity is just as difficult. In effect, out of the wide range of securities Islamic banks can only handle shares. Debt instruments of corporate issuers (bonds, bills of exchange) structured in accordance with Shari’a principles are today virtually absent. The same applies to government securities, the most reliable and popular instrument of bank liquidity management. Due to their concern over this situation, Islamic governments have combined their efforts to further institutionalize Islamic banking and improve the organizational environment for its operation.

In November 2001, Bahrain, Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sudan and the IDB signed an agreement establishing an International Islamic Financial Market (IIFM), which began functioning in August 2002. Its purpose is to resolve the problem of liquidity management in the sector and create new Islamic financial products.

A new organization called Liquidity Management Center (LMC) was established in February 2002. It is designed to set up large pools of assets acquired from governments, financial institutions
and corporations, securitize them in the form of Islamic bonds (sukuk) and offer them to Islamic banks for investment of temporarily surplus funds. At the same time, the LMC ensures a secondary market for these securities, adding depth to this market and diversifying risks through a variety of assets and their sources.

Another problem is the lack of the necessary legal framework in many states. As noted above, Western banks sell money, while Islamic banks sell goods. The latter are thereby involved in the activities of their clients in the non-financial sector. This is a source of serious contradictions. For example, Art 5.4 of the Law of the Azerbaijan Republic on Banks and Banking Activity (1996) says: “Credit institutions are prohibited from engaging in production, commercial and insurance activities.” This means that an Islamic bank, in effect, has no opportunity to operate in accordance with Shari’a rules. In order to organize legal activity, it is obliged to set up subsidiaries, entrusting them with the performance of certain operations. This is quite permissible, but highly ineffective from the standpoint of management. Islamic banks also encounter difficulties in creating liabilities. For example, the Civil Code of the Azerbaijan Republic obliges banks to pay interest on any deposit, which is why banks offer their clients only settlement and current accounts.

Azerbaijan’s integration into the world community involves, among other things, the establishment of close political, economic and cultural ties with the Islamic world. Expanding cooperation with Islamic financial institutions, on the one hand, and an increase in the number of believers observing Shari’a principles in daily practice have added urgency to the question of introducing Islamic banking in Azerbaijan. In 2006, a seminar on Islamic banking (corporate governance, transparency and disclosure) was held under a project of the World Bank’s International Finance Corporation. Representatives of 35 banks took part in this seminar.

The pioneer among Azerbaijan banks in implementing an Islamic finance model was the International Bank of Azerbaijan (IBA). The model was called “installment sale” and was implemented with a line of financing from the Islamic Corporation for the Development of the Private Sector, an IDB subsidiary. The corporation’s authorized capital is $1 billion, including an IDB stake of $500 million, with the rest to be contributed by the participating countries. Azerbaijan’s stake is $2.5 million. Participation in this corporation will enable the private sector to obtain, without government guarantees, credits of $2 million and over. 6

It should be noted that the IDB is the most active initiator of the implementation of Islamic finance in Azerbaijan. In 2007, it expressed a desire to help establish the Caspian International Investment Company (CIIC), which operates according to religious canons. Its founders were the IDB (75%) and the Azerbaijan Investment Company (25%).

In my opinion, the citizens of Azerbaijan are very interested in Shari’a-compliant banking products and services. Some people want this for purely religious reasons, and others regard the investment business as the most rapidly developing business which makes it possible to reduce risks associated with inflation and losses.

The most promising sectors of the economy for Islamic investors include information and communication technologies, transport and construction. At present, the first Shari’a-compliant financial institution in the country is Kovsar Bank. It was founded as a commercial bank under the name of Universal Bank, and in 2001 was renamed by decision of its founders, with subsequent re-registration at the Ministry of Justice of Azerbaijan.7

6 [http://www.businesspress.ru/newspaper/article_mId_21960_aId_93245.html].
Today there is a customer segment in Azerbaijan wishing to operate within the framework of Islamic finance. This is the consumer segment, and also small and medium entrepreneurs who are prepared to make deposits and obtain funds in accordance with Shari’a rules. People are interested in consumer finance (consumer goods, cars, opening of savings accounts and participation of funds in permitted financing), in mortgage programs, education and research funding. In fact, this part of society can utilize amounts far exceeding the loan portfolios of many private banks in the territory of the country.

Drawing on the experience of different countries, the bank formulated three basic propositions necessary for work in Azerbaijan:

(a) to apply Islamic banking technologies without violating Azerbaijan legislation;
(b) to provide funds for social purposes by assisting disabled persons, pensioners and other low-income strata of the population;
(c) to set up an Advisory Council to perform the functions of a Shari’a Board.

In 2002, Kovsar Bank obtained a license from the National Bank of Azerbaijan. It is a member of the General Council of Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions under the IDB, and also of the Auditing Association of Islamic Banks and Financial Institutions. The bank’s current activity is aimed to attract funds from individuals and legal entities by two main methods of Islamic banking: mudaraba and musharaka, and also by selling bank drafts. In investing funds, the bank uses traditional mechanisms.

The draft is analogous to sukuk. The customer issues a draft and sells it to the bank at face value, using the funds obtained to finance his activities. The purchase of the draft is documented as a repo, i.e., it is coupled with the conclusion of an agreement containing the customer’s obligation to repurchase the draft at a premium at maturity. The repurchase price is determined based on the market price of the goods and services produced by the customer and financed in this way prevailing at the time of the conclusion of these agreements plus the cost of the services provided by the bank.

At present, Kovsar Bank cannot conduct active operations in the form of murabaha, because Azerbaijan legislation prohibits banks from engaging directly in wholesale or retail trade, production, logistics, agriculture, mining or construction, and also from equity participation in these sectors.

In 2008, the Azerbaijan State Committee for Securities registered a prospectus for interest-free book entry bonds to be issued by Kovsar Bank in the near future. Their issue will be in compliance with the financial principles of Shari’a. An investor purchasing these shares becomes an actual shareholder in the Kovsar Bank project for which the funds are raised. The bank is to issue 32 thousand bonds with a face value of AZN 200 each. In the event of successful and, most importantly, complete distribution of these securities, the bank will raise AZN 6.4 million, which could be one of the largest bond distributions in the country’s stock market.

One of the latest innovations in the Azerbaijan financial sector is a project being implemented by CJSC Unileasing. The main specific feature of this project, launched in February 2008, is that relations with customers in leasing transactions are interest-free. This leasing system will be applied to all products of the company, so that it will have an opportunity to finance construction equipment, transportation facilities, medical and industrial equipment and commercial real estate.

Muslims make up a large part of the population in Azerbaijan, and there is every reason to believe that the development of Islamic banking will give new impetus to national economic development and help to put into circulation the savings of those who observe Shari’a principles.

8 [http://www.ceo.az/businessobserver/finance/9093.html].
9 [www.unileasing.az/?id=108&page=islamic_leasing].
To summarize, let us say once again that the main specific feature of the Islamic economic model is greater emphasis on value orientations. The forms and methods of operation of Islamic financial institutions have been developed with due regard for the fact that people’s growing needs constantly come up against resource constraints. Rising income and price reductions in the Islamic model do not always lead to an increase in consumption, because this violates the Shari’a principle of moderate consumption and prudent use of resources. The integration of Azerbaijan’s financial institutions into the world network of the Islamic Finance and Services Industry provides new opportunities for attracting foreign investment (primarily into the non-oil sector of the economy) and should be seen as an effective step towards a balanced development of different sectors of industry, agriculture and the services market.
Nazim MUZAFFARLI (IMANOV)

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professor,
editor-in-chief of The Caucasus & Globalization
(Baku, Azerbaijan).

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND RELIGIOUS DEVELOPMENT IN AZERBAIJAN

Abstract

This article analyzes the methodologies prevailing in the world for measuring religious freedom and the results of inter-country comparisons obtained on their basis. The range of religious freedom in Azerbaijan is assessed by comparing the number and severity of its legislative and practical restrictions with those of other countries of the region, particularly with those of the states of the Central Caucasus. The author regards the high religious tolerance of Azeri society confirmed by the rating studies of international analytical centers as one of Azerbaijan's comparative sociopolitical advantages. Azerbaijan's main problems in religious development bring the author to conclude that a new strategy should be drawn up in this area, the basic idea of which he believes should be a gradual rejection of legislative and administrative methods for preventing religious fanaticism and a transfer to a higher level of its prevention based on using the creative force of religious values themselves and educating a new generation of clergy.
Freedom of religion, which is one of the fundamental principles of political democracy, is much more difficult to measure than certain other human rights. For all intents and purposes, this is most likely because the concepts “freedom of confession,” “freedom of conscience,” “freedom of religion,” and so on are rather complicated in themselves and are not unequivocally defined in the scientific literature. The idea envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights,1 which says that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance (Art 18), can be taken as the general basis for such a definition. But these freedoms defy direct measurement by their very nature. So all the prevailing methodologies of inter-country comparisons of religious freedom are based, just like many other democratic freedoms, on work-back calculation. That is, in order to determine the range of religious freedom, we must establish the extent to which it is restricted in theoretical and real (legislative and practical) terms, as well as ascertain the number of times it is directly violated. This is the only way that full-fledged inter-country and interregional comparisons of the range of religious freedom can be made. Comparison of the range of religious freedom in states classified according to religious characteristics as such (“inter-religious comparisons of religious freedom”), when Muslim and Christian countries are compared with each other for example, is also based on this methodology. When using this methodology, researchers nevertheless come up against rather serious problems.

It would hardly be right to regard the restriction of the rights of believers in general as religious harassment. In other words, their rights are frequently violated not because they confess a particular religion, but for other reasons (political, ethnic, racial, etc.). Consequently, a violation of human rights can only be described as restriction of religious freedom if such rights were eliminated when an individual turned to a different faith.

Two aspects of religious freedom are usually distinguished—individual and community. Whereas the former reflects the freedom of each individual to confess the religion he chooses, wear religious attributes, or not follow any faith at all, the latter is related to the rights of groups of people (communities) to perform religious rituals in the way they choose, to set up prayer houses, hospitals, and other institutions, to put out printed matter, and to manage their own internal affairs.

The main difficulty here is how to determine the acceptable range of such freedoms. In other words, how to find the boundary beyond which they begin to turn into a real threat to national security—internal and external. We also need to decide how this acceptable range is differentiated in different countries and societies. It is also important to keep in mind the generally accepted restrictions of religious freedom. For example, there are many cases when parents do not allow their underage children to follow a different faith, which, however, cannot be qualified as a restriction of freedom of confession since internationally recognized standards permit parents to make such decisions.

These circumstances make inter-country comparisons of religious freedom even more difficult. All the same, the difficulty of such comparisons naturally does not exclude the essential possibility of

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carrying them out, although it raises the degree of their conventionality. Even a fleeting glance shows that in some states the range of religious freedom is much higher than in others (for example, in Ireland or the Netherlands compared with Iran or North Korea). But strict scientific comparisons require assessment criteria that are universal for all countries, which, as already noted, is problematic due to inter-country sociocultural differences.

General Assessment of the Range of Religious Freedom

One of the most authoritative institutions for carrying out comparative analyses of the range of religious freedom is the Center for Religious Freedom (CRF), which positions itself as a human rights organization fighting against the persecution of people throughout the world for religious reasons. “It (Center for Religious Freedom.—N.M.) insists that U.S. foreign policy defend Christians and Jews, Muslim dissidents and minorities (italics mine.—N.M.), and other religious minorities…” This, objectively speaking, is a rather strange formulation since it presumes the protection of ordinary believers in some cases, and of dissidents and minorities in others.

The CRF’s most well-known publications are the annual reports on religious freedom and persecution in the world (Religious Freedom in the World: A Global Report on Freedom and Persecution). At the time this article was written, the report for 2007 had not yet been published, so we had to content ourselves with its preliminary results. However it is pretty safe to say that they will appear in the final version of the report essentially unchanged.

The criteria by which the CRF carries out its inter-country comparative analyses on religious freedom have been drawn up on the basis of the International Pact on Civilian and Political Rights, the U.N. Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, and the European Convention on Human Rights. In so doing, the Center keeps in mind that religious freedom (persecution) is not manifested “in pure form,” but somehow intersects with other human rights.

- First, it is related to the unhindered activity of various structures such as churches, educational and humanitarian organizations, and so on.
- Second, it applies to specific forms of worship services, clothing, proclamations, food, and so on.
- And finally, third, violations of general human rights (or the rights of a group of people) can be classified as restrictions of religious freedom if they are made on the basis of an individual’s or group’s religious affiliation.

Not only in the last, but also in each of these three versions, freedom of confession intersects with other human rights. For example, being able to publicly declare one’s faith or religious convictions without fear of persecution is also an element of freedom of speech. In other cases, freedom of confession intersects with the freedom of press, associations, and gatherings. From this it follows that

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2 Established in 1986 under the International Nongovernmental Organization “Freedom House” (U.S.). At present, it functions as an independent structural unit of the Hudson Institute (Washington, U.S.). The institute is an independent rightist-centrist research center that advocates such values as the market economy, individual freedoms and responsibility, and respect for cultures and religions.

3 See: [http://freedomhouse.org/religion/about/about.htm], September 2006.

4 For more detail on the conclusions of the 2006 report and the author’s comments, see: N. Muzaffarli, Reiting Az- erbaidzhanu, Kavkaz, Baku, 2006, pp. 77-83.
inter-country comparative analyses on the range of religious freedom inevitably have to deal with other freedoms and human rights.

The prevalence of “non-religious” motives in violations of freedom of confession does not change their nature; in this case, the end result is more important than the motive. If the government “persecutes” churches in the same way as it restricts the activity of political parties, nongovernmental organizations, or the mass media (for the mere reason that it does not want to have any public opinion centers in the state), this does not stop violations of religious freedom from being precisely that.

The general index of religious different freedom the CRF calculated for 111 countries of the world takes account of a wide range of different factors, including the number and severity of the restrictions existing in the country, as well as the harshness of the punishments imposed for failure to adhere to them. Each state is rated on a scale of 1 to 7 points. Those which receive 1-3 points are classified as free, those with 4-5 points are partially free, and those with 6-7 points are not free.

According to the classification of the world’s regions adopted in this research study, Azerbaijan is one of the “countries of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe” and in terms of its general range of religious freedom shares 17th-19th place with Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>8-16</td>
<td>Moldova</td>
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</table>

The leaders of the group of 22 countries are Hungary and Estonia, which have the best possible rating. Ukraine is the only CIS country classified as free in the religious sense with a rating of 2 points and sharing 3rd-5th place. Most of the CIS countries, including Azerbaijan, are classified as partially free, while Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan round off the ranking with the worst possible rating.

In addition to regional classification, the CRF also groups countries according to the religious factor as such. The general conclusion drawn from these comparisons is that the range of religious freedom in states where Islam predominates is much lower than in others. Protestant countries have the highest range, followed by Catholic and then Christian Orthodox. Even the “worst” of the former have good ratings: Zimbabwe (5 points) and Tanzania (4 points), which, although they occupy the last places among these countries, are classified as partially free in the religious respect. Only Ireland and Hungary of the world’s non-Protestant states have the highest rating of 1 point.

### Table 1 (continued)

<table>
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### Table 2

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*Compiled according to: The Range of Religious Freedom, September 2007.*
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</table>

Among the 34 Muslim countries studied only Mali and Senegal are classified as free and share 1st-2nd place (see Table 2). Seven states have the worst rating (7 points). Azerbaijan belongs to the group of countries that share 9th-22nd place and looks a little better in this rating than in the previous.
But this is undoubtedly only because religious freedom in the Muslim countries in general is not that high.

As already mentioned above, the CRF analyzes not only legislative support (restriction) of religious freedoms, but also their actual status. Otherwise the range of religious freedom in Azerbaijan would be much higher. For example, Art 48 of the Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic guarantees every citizen freedom of conscience and the right to independently determine his/her own attitude toward religion, confess a particular faith either alone or in community with others, or not confess any religion at all, as well as express and share his convictions about his attitude toward religion. What is more, the Basic Law declares the separation of religion from the state and the equality of all confessions before the law, prohibits the promulgation and propaganda of religions that debase human worth and contradict the principles of humanity, and declares the secular nature of the state education system (Art 18).

These legal regulations are in complete compliance with the generally accepted international standards and, since they are itemized in the proper manner (that is, in keeping with the spirit of the Constitution) in other legislative acts, could form the basis for realizing religious freedoms.

The Center does not assess or rank governments, although their activity largely determines the religious situation. The real range of religious freedoms is established under the sum impact of a large number of diverse and at times contradictory factors. The role of the government in regulating the religious environment and specific religious processes is much more limited than in the political sphere.

The need to account for these and other specific features of religious freedom gave rise to the appearance of new approaches toward measuring it, which in turn made it possible to expand the possibilities of corresponding inter-country comparisons by making them deeper and more specific.

Three Indices of Religious Freedom

In 2007, along with the general ratings according to the 7-point scale, the CRF placed the results of more detailed inter-country comparative analyses on religious freedom carried out by analysts from Pennsylvania State University (U.S.) on its website for the first time. They were construed on the calculation of three indices:

- Social regulation of religion index—SRRI
- Government regulation of religion index—GRRI
- Government favoritism of religion index—GFRI

— The first index measures religious restrictions established (or applied) by society itself (by the representatives of other confessions or society as a whole, its national culture in the broad sense) on the activity of certain religious groups, including on their performance of religious rituals. Here such factors are taken into account as negative social attitude toward “other” religions, public condemnation of a change in faith, and negative perception of attempts to recruit people to one’s faith. This index is also lower if the predominant

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confessions do not allow the spread of new ones or public movements are against particular religions.

— The second CRF index measures legislative restrictions of religious freedom, as well as restrictions caused by the state’s policy and targeted administrative measures carried out in the country. The specific indices include the following: a prohibition on missionary activity, restrictions on any religious propaganda that aims to recruit new supporters and on citizens’ rights to change their confession, and interference in citizens’ private rights to engage in religious worship. The index worsens if there is no legislative protection in the country of the freedom of confession, if the government does not show the proper respect for religious freedom, and if the policy it conducts does not promote its expansion.

— Finally, the third index is used to determine the degree of state protection in favor of one or several religions to the detriment of others, which would be the same as expanding the religious freedom of some groups by infringing on others. Such favoritism is primarily indicated by the existence of an official state religion in the country. Whether or not there is an imbalance in financing different confessions is also taken into account, including with respect to subsidizing religious education, building and maintaining churches, the clergy, the press, as well as certain charity organizations, religious rituals, and missionary associations.

The annual reports by the U.S. State Department on religious freedom (U.S. State Department: International Religious Freedom Report) comprise the factual basis for calculating all three indices. They consist of country reports, each of which has several sections: (i) introductions (general assessment); (ii) “religious demography” (that is, the structure of the country’s population according to religion); (iii) state of religious freedoms (including legislative support, restrictions and direct violations of religious freedom, coercive change in religious affiliation, anti-Semitism, positive changes in observing religious freedoms); (iv) social violations and discrimination in the religious sphere; (v) U.S. state policy in the religious sphere in the country in question.

Moreover, the State Department reports are in a text form and do not allow quantitative intercountry comparisons to be carried out, although such are extremely beneficial for other political and analytical purposes. The authors of the indices coded the information contained in them and made them measurable with the help of mathematical statistic methods. Some of the results they obtained are presented in Table 3.

According to the Government Regulation of Religion Index, Azerbaijan is an outsider in the ranking (it is 20th among 22 countries), ahead of only Turkmenistan and Belarus, while in terms of the Government Favoritism of Religion Index it is among the five most advanced countries, and it occupies the middle 11th-15th position in terms of the Social Regulation of Religion Index. Noticeably lagging behind the two other Central Caucasian states in terms of GRRI, Azerbaijan is ahead of them with respect to the other indices, whereby it has a significant advantage in terms of GFRI. This means that the government in Azerbaijan exercises stricter regulation over religious relations than the governments in Georgia and Armenia, but in so doing, in contrast to them, it does not conduct a clear protectionist policy in favor of one particular religion to the detriment of others.

A no less important aspect of inter-country comparative analyses on religious freedom is Azerbaijan’s more favorable index (compared with Georgia and Armenia) on the regulation of religious relations by society itself. Armenia shares 18th-19th position with Macedonia in terms of this index, whereas Georgia is among the outsiders (in 20th place). It should be kept in mind that this indicator is the main index of religious tolerance immanently inherent in a particular society.

8 These reports are open for public perusal and available at [http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf].
It can easily be noticed that in some cases there are very significant differences among the various indices for one and the same countries. For example, Azerbaijan occupies 4th-5th place in terms of GFRI, but is 20th in terms of GRRI; Belarus is in 4th-5th and 22nd place, respectively; Georgia, which is among the world leaders in terms of GRRI, holds 20th place in terms of SRRI; Kyrgyzstan is one of the regional leaders in terms of GFRI (3rd place), while it is only in 17th place in terms of SRRI; Lithuania, vice versa, occupies a rather high position in terms of SRRI and a low one in terms of GRRI.

### Table 3

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of GFRI; Rumania, which shares 8th-9th place with Bulgaria in terms of GRRI, is an outsider both in terms of GFRI and SRRI; Slovakia is a leader in the world ranking in terms of GRRI and SRRI, while it occupies only 16th-17th position in terms of GFRI and so on.

The thing is that the tougher the restrictions generated by society itself, the predominant religion in it, or the various religious groups and organizations expressing, according to the government, present and future state interests, the more lenient policy a state may conduct with respect to religious restrictions in order to achieve its goals. When a state conducts an essentially protectionist policy regarding a particular faith, there is naturally less need to introduce general restrictions on religious freedom. Consequently, when a state improves its rating with respect to a particular index, even if this means a drop in another, it is a question of choice of priorities at the present moment and for the future.

Another extremely important aspect of the problem must be kept in mind. There are several factors that objectively cause the restriction of certain religious freedoms in advanced countries. In contrast to political and, particularly, economic freedoms, religious freedoms are unbinding and do not always promote democratic development; on the contrary, they sometimes hinder this. Even the most progressive measures from the global (universal) perspective can be interpreted as infringement of the religious rights of certain groups of citizens. For example, although the fact that state structures or head nongovernmental religious administrations restrict the activity of sects that potentially have elements of radicalism and extremism lowers the country’s religious freedom rating, it is nevertheless necessary (at least temporarily).

Approximately the same thing applies to the participation of religious figures in political life. Azerbaijan’s state structures are intercepting attempts to politicize religion, including the organization of political religious parties or the use of churches (mosques) for engaging in political propaganda. They do not permit religious humanitarian organizations to function in the country if there is reason to suspect them of being related to extremist and, particularly, terrorist centers. Sometimes it ends in the deportation of foreigners whose activity the government regards as propagandizing religious extremism. Of course, the state must be extremely careful when incriminating anyone (including foreigners) of religious radicalism. Even if such suspicions are fully substantiated, they could be perceived as religious persecution and lower the country’s corresponding rating.

The restriction of the rights to election of religious figures can also be regarded as an infringement on religious freedom. As we know, in compliance with Azerbaijani legislation, they have the right to elect, but not to be elected to the Milli Mejlis (the country’s parliament). This restriction periodically gives rise to fervent discussions in society, particularly on the eve of elections. In 2005, the Central Elections Committee of the Azerbaijan Republic refused to register most of the Muslim leaders who wished to ballot for deputy, although the courts subsequently cancelled some of their decisions. This fact clearly shows society’s ambiguous perception of this kind of restriction.9

All the types of religious freedom restrictions mentioned above have the right to exist as long as they are not the state’s strategic policy, but merely temporary measures aimed at eliminating precedents of religious fanaticism, radicalism, and extremism from public life during the establishment and strengthening of statehood. Such restrictions die out as the country acquires systemic political stability and a sufficiently high level of economic power.

It would be logical to calculate the sum country index of religious freedom from the total of the three above indices. Since, having a very obvious correlation among them,10 SRRI, GRRI, and GFRI

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9 It is interesting that E. Abramov, a representative of a religious community of Mountain Jews, was registered without a problem and subsequently elected as a deputy. This circumstance was grounds for unregistered Muslim figures to accuse the government of injustice.

10 The correlation among these indices is analyzed in relative detail in the abovementioned article by B. Grim and R. Finke.
mutually supplement each other and assess, although in different aspects, the same thing—the religious situation in the countries of the world. But unfortunately this is not done: calculation of SRRI, GRRI, and GFRI, on the one hand, and the range of religious freedom according to the 7-point scale, on the other, are separate analyses, which was confirmed by the CRF experts in personal correspondence with the author of this article. There are serious reasons to believe that the CRF studies would be more systemic if they calculated the overall index of religious freedom, for example, as an average weighted value of the three indices.

Azerbaijan’s Pros and Cons

As the classification of Muslim countries regarding the range of religious freedom shows, as well as from the opinions of many experts on theology and religious freedom, Azerbaijan is among the most tolerant of the states in which Islam is the predominant religion.

For example, when speaking at a seminar on The Role of Islam in Forming Tolerance in the Southern Caucasus (June 2004), German ambassador Klaus Grewlich noted the unique model of religious relations in Azerbaijan that allows religious communities not simply to live side by side, but also to actively interact. “Azerbaijan’s model of interrelations between the state and religion,” he emphasized, “could be exported to other countries. Religious tolerance and patience are your fortune.” Patriarch of Rome Bartholomew I spoke in almost the same vein, noting that state-religious relations, as well as relations between the traditional and non-traditional faiths in the Azerbaijan Republic, are exemplary: “I am satisfied with the level of tolerance here,” he said. “In Azerbaijan, each person can confess his/her faith and perform rituals as he/she wishes.”

Religious tolerance of this level is so uncharacteristic of contemporary Muslim states that we classify it as Azerbaijan’s comparative sociopolitical advantage.

There are more than 350 state-registered religious communities functioning in the country, thirty of which are non-Islamic (Protestant, Russian Orthodox, Jewish, Molocan, Krishnaite, and Bahai). The number of people who traditionally follow Shi’ite-style Islam is a little higher than the number of Sunnis. It is extremely important that over the lifespan of many generations of people, all of these various confessions have come to berth in Azerbaijan in a very friendly and peace-loving way and no significant problems have been registered in their interrelations.

It is extremely symbolic that, in a show of prudence, the head of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus Sheikh ul-Islam A. Pashazade only participates in any religious and secular undertakings in the company of the spiritual leaders of the country’s Russian Orthodox and Jewish faiths. The constant dialog, cooperation, and friendship between them is evaluated as extremely positive not only by the local, but also by the foreign community.

But despite such a high level of tolerance, the religious environment in the country is not free from problems that are profound and acute enough to deserve special attention and the specifics of which are such that their resolution cannot be left to the monopoly of religious figures and state structures. This requires the public’s broad participation.

Keeping this in mind, in November 2001 the author of this article sent a special communiqué to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus (SAMC), the State Committee for Work

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11 See: [http://azerbaijan.az/_GeneralInfo/_TraditionReligion/_traditionReligion_r.html].
13 In 1994, the author of this article had the occasion to see how greatly their joint arrival at a conference in Madison (Wisconsin, U.S.) on the sociopolitical processes in Central Asia and the Caucasus affected the international auditorium that gathered there.
with Religious Formations, as well as to all the country’s clergy, which touched upon the most urgent problems of religious development. The questions raised in the communiqué aroused quite a widespread response, which shows a real need for their public discussion.\footnote{See, for example: “Nazim Imanov Addresses the Clergy,” Ekho, 10 November, 2001; “Nazim Imanov Suggests Testing,” Zerkalo, 10 November, 2001; “Nazim Imanov Addresses the Administration of Muslims of the Caucasus,” Sharg, 10 November, 2001 (in Azeri), etc.}

Subsequently, both the SAMC and the State Committee generally supported the recommendations put forward in the address, publicly stating that they would exert efforts to implement them.\footnote{See, for example: “Haji A. Pashazade Welcomes the Address of Nazim Imanov,” Eni Musawat, 16 November, 2001 (in Azeri).}

But, despite the significant progress the country has achieved in the religious sphere during the years of independence, many problems are still acute.

One of them is the change of faith by some citizens. Viewed broadly, the fact in itself is nothing unusual, but Azerbaijan’s public opinion reacts rather severely to such transformations.\footnote{Such condemnation of some citizens changing their faith is, as mentioned above, one of the factors that has an impact on the Social Regulation of Religion Index.} It stands to reason that the acceptance of Islam and its rejection give rise to directly opposite emotions. All the same, the main “internal” religious problem occupying the minds of the Muslim majority is the stratification within Islam itself and the spread in recent years of trends that are non-traditional for the country.

This process began at the end of the 1980s when “neo-missionaries” began to find their way into Azerbaijan, mainly radical Shi’ites, Wahhabis, and Nursites. The country, which was in the throes of a struggle for independence and experiencing difficulties with the transition to a new socioeconomic system at that time, opposed these external and internal missionaries with public condemnation, which was inevitably accompanied by demands to toughen up the restrictions on their activity established by the law, right down to deportation from the country. Public opinion was inclined to criticize the state bodies and nongovernmental structures responsible for the religious sphere for not clamping down sufficiently on the activity of religious figures promulgating Islamic trends that are non-traditional for Azerbaijan.

In the almost 20 years that have passed since then there have been no radical changes in public opinion, or in the behavior of the corresponding government structures and nongovernmental administrations, unless we mention that the demands have become even tougher than before.

Meanwhile, the fundamental question is why some Azeris are rejecting traditional Islam that has stood the test of time in order to embrace Tariqahs that are alien to the country. The socioeconomic difficulties the people are experiencing and the financial aid certain neo-missionaries offer citizens are usually given as the reasons for this. This position is not entirely convincing, keeping in mind, first, the subsidies are very small and, second, the fact repeatedly confirmed by history that financial difficulties are more inclined to bring people closer to their religion than separate them from it. So the true question is what way are these new trends attractive to believers.

On closer examination, it turns out that they do not have anything essentially different from traditional Islam. Evidently the answer to the above question should be sought in the fact that the newly-sprung missionaries are more insistent and consistent than the country’s clergy and promulgate general Islamic values, trying to present themselves as the \textit{only true} Muslims.

For example, there is nothing unusual in someone calling on Muslims to be simple and modest in designing their memorial headstones: this religious-moral regulation has been preached by Islam since the beginning. But when the centers of traditional Islam are not energetic enough in their opposition of festive and pompous headstones, they are somehow allowing the fact that such tombstones are in compliance with Islamic values (at least this is how most believers perceive it) and are “voluntarily” giving the initiative to “religious dissidents.”
Dozens of similar examples can be given, and all of them give the unprejudiced analyst more reason to believe that taking the initiative and being progressive (advanced) in propagandizing general Islamic values are almost the only effective antidotes against “religious dissidence” and the introduction of non-traditional radical-extremist trends in the country.

One of the most excruciating problems is the insufficient, according to public opinion, financial transparency of religious organizations and churches. It is not even a matter of financial unscrupulousness in the religious sphere, but of the public’s real concern over this. Society cannot respect the calls of its religious leaders to embrace faith and moral purity if it is not absolutely sure of the honesty, decency, and unselfishness of these leaders themselves. Ensuring complete transparency of the budgets (revenue and spending) of churches and religious organizations can play an invaluable role in preventing the spread of non-traditional Tariqahs in the country.

It stands to reason that the separation of religion from the state does not in itself mean that all interaction between them stops or, even more, that the state cannot support the development of religious values in society.

One of the main areas of this support can and should be cooperation in educating a new generation of religious figures who are far from superstition, fanaticism, and radicalism, who have not only religious, but also fundamental secular knowledge, and who understand the political, economic, and civilizational processes going on in the country, region, and world. Too many Azeri young people are studying the fundamentals of Islam abroad today, which is quite a significant channel of foreign intervention in religious life. 17 The country should educate most of its religious figures itself. This is extremely difficult and most likely impossible without active state interference.

Moreover, the state should render assistance for organizing scientific-practical undertakings (conferences, symposiums, and so on) to study and promulgate general Islamic rules and values, publish and disseminate progressive religious literature, write textbooks on religion, and assist religious enlightenment in general. These and similar problems should not be ignored by referring to the separation of religion from the state. On the contrary, a preventive policy and precise definition of the state’s position on all the urgent issues of religious development are needed.

Carrying out the last two recommendations might at first lower the Government Favoritism of Religion Index. But this can be avoided if the state distributes the resources provided for this purpose fairly among the main religions of the country. Fairness in this case must and should be interpreted as distribution of resources in proportion to the number of people who confess different religions. The fact that most of the country’s residents are Muslims does not at all mean that the state can disregard the education of the Christian and Jewish clergy, the upkeep of non-Islamic churches, and religious enlightenment among religious minorities. A fundamental principle of the democratic structure of society is that all the country’s citizens have equal rights, including regardless of their belief, and the right to count on equal support from the state.

**Conclusion**

The most important thing is for the state to draw up and publicize its own development strategy for the religious sphere. To sum up the above, the main idea of this strategy can be formulated

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17 With the assistance of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus, a little more than 500 people are studying abroad. According to experts’ estimates, a total of around 2,000 young people are acquiring a religious education and, correspondingly, upbringing abroad, but this figure is not confirmed by official sources. This may not seem that many for a state with a population of close to 9 million, but we should keep in mind the correlation between the number of future religious figures who are acquiring their education within the country today and those acquiring it abroad.
as a gradual rejection of legislative and administrative methods for preventing religious fanaticism and a transition to the next, higher level of its prevention based on the use of the creative force of religious values themselves (primarily traditional general Islamic values), as well as on educating a new generation of comprehensively educated, honest, and deeply respected clergy.

It is very important in terms of the range of religious freedom that the country strive not for a perfunctory increase in its rating, but for a harmonious interweaving of religious rights and freedoms into the secular state structure, consistently excluding the possibility of any forms of radicalism and extremism arising on its territory.

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TOLERANCE AS THE BEDROCK OF CONFESSIONAL AND SOCIOCULTURAL HARMONY IN AZERBAIJAN

Abstract

The author bases her conclusion that the experience of many centuries of peaceful coexistence of different ethnic groups and confessions in Azerbaijan can provide answers to the challenges of the globalizing world on her detailed analysis of the past and present of religious tolerance in this country.

Introduction

In the age of globalization, which has accelerated all aspects of human development, the rising and gradually internationalizing wave of violence and permanent ethnic and religious conflicts made it clear that all social forces worldwide should pool their efforts to try to restore civil peace and sociocultural harmony. Since the late 20th century this task has been coming to the fore in everything the international community has been doing to fully tap the potential of peaceful coexistence among peoples and religions mankind has accumulated throughout the centuries. There are regions, which, due to unique historical circumstances, became crossroads of civilizational, ethnic, and confessional cooperation and acquired a unique and harmonious social climate.

It can be justifiably said that Azerbaijan is one such historical zone of religious and ethnic tolerance, a country with many centuries of dialog among peoples and confessions behind it. Azerbai-
jan’s ancient, medieval, modern, and recent history has supplied us with numerous examples of respect for people with different religious convictions and tolerance of their ideas. We may ask: Is the above an overstatement? To provide an answer I have organized the relevant material into several key groups:

- the meaning of tolerance today;
- an overview of the recent history of relations between the state and confessions;
- the roots of confessional tolerance in Azerbaijan, something that most experts and religious figures never fail to praise.

**Tolerance as Mankind’s Intellectual and Moral Solidarity**

By adopting the Declaration of Principles on Tolerance on 16 November, 1995, the UNESCO General Conference and the international community announced that religious peace and harmony was one of their priorities. Under Art 1:

- Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world’s cultures; tolerance is harmony in difference; a moral duty, a political and legal requirement;
- Tolerance is an active attitude prompted by recognition of the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of others; tolerance is to be exercised by individuals, groups and States;
- Tolerance is the responsibility that upholds human rights, pluralism (including cultural pluralism), democracy and the rule of law;
- Tolerance means accepting the fact that human beings, naturally diverse in their appearance, situation, speech, behavior and values, have the right to live in peace and to be as they are.¹

So far, the fairly contradictory interpretations of the phenomenon of tolerance (English borrowed the term from Latin *tolerantia*) ranging from unquestioned acceptance to active rejection have been preserved across the world. On the one hand, Western mentality ascribes to tolerance a magic ability to bring together, in the most natural way, wide communicative characteristics and the freedom of self-identification that individuals or groups of individuals can enjoy; in this context, tolerance is an inner characteristic that denotes a special sociocultural way of dealing with the contradictions any society accumulates in the course of time. On the other hand, not infrequently tolerance is seen as a factor that destroys nations and states; as a process allegedly leading to the ruin of everything that united individuals into ethnic and confessional groups and states. Some people try to find a difference in meaning between patience and tolerance and set them against each other.²

The primordial ideas of tolerance and its varieties (social, ethnic, religious, etc.) as an immanent quality typical of all nations are also widely accepted. Some of the contributors to the All-Russia Scientific Conference on Preserving Tolerance in Polyethnic and Multi-Cofessional Regions held in Makhachkala in March 2007 insisted that ethnic tolerance is an inalienable feature of any ethnic

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¹ [http://www.unesco.org/cpp/declarations/tolerance.pdf].
group and part of its ethnic mentality. These optimistic statements are unfortunately refuted by the cruel realities of the early 21st century in the Caucasus and elsewhere.

In 2008 prominent international developments testified that tolerance is not merely a cultural-psychological attitude designed to preserve compatibility but one of the key peace-keeping instruments at all levels of human communication: local, regional, and even global. During the crisis around South Ossetia the world came face to face with the fears and prejudices that have been piling up inside societies for decades, an obvious inability and unwillingness to respect the positions of the opponents and the notorious “double standards” as their result.

This forces mankind to exercise a fresh approach to the potential of tolerance since the alternative philosophy—development through multilateral cooperation—turned out to be a philosophy of decline and ruin brought about by disintegration. This makes tolerance not only the most important principle of socioeconomic development of all peoples but also a necessary prerequisite for the world’s continued peaceful existence.

This explains why Azerbaijan’s independent development was closely connected with the consistent and purposeful application of the traditions of tolerance. Public and religious figures believe that the democratic development vector of Azeri society and the state have added vigor to confession-al tolerance.

It should be said that religious tolerance in Azerbaijan is not a product of someone’s decision or of pressure exerted by international, no matter how important, organizations. It is rooted in the long history of peaceful coexistence of different religions (Zoroastrianism, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) that goes back two thousand years. In other words, tolerance cannot be brought in from the outside—it must grow from the very nature of the nation and its mentality. It is a historical tradition bequeathed by one generation to the next. Abraham Cooper, who heads the Simon Wiesenthal Center, offered the following extremely apt comment: “Many countries hold forth about tolerance—this is a highly adequate political term, but few countries can achieve it. Your country is an exception. Here tolerance is rarely discussed but frequently practiced; it is one of your national features. Tolerance in Azerbaijan is an inexhaustible category.”

World Religions and the Azeri Model of Tolerance

**Christianity**

Christianity came to Azerbaijan some 1,700 years ago. In 313, the Albanians together with King Urnayr were baptized by St. Gregory the Illuminator, which made Christianity the state religion of Caucasian Albania. Since that time (with the exception of a very short period in the mid-6th century when they fell away to Monophysitism), the Albanians, unlike the Armenians, remained Orthodox Christians (Dyophysites). Later, when Arabs came to the Caucasus, most of the local population changed their religion, however the traditions of peaceful coexistence among all confessions struck root.

In the post-Soviet period some of the Russian-speakers preferred to leave the republic thus decreasing the number of Orthodox Christians. Today, about 200 thousand (about 2.5 percent of the republic’s population) of all nationalities (Russians, Byelorussians, Ukrainians, Greeks, etc.) are free

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to remain Orthodox Christians.\footnote{[http://www.pravoslavie.ru/put/070126150112].} The Russian Orthodox churches are united into the Baku-Caspian Eparchy, which began functioning again on 28 December, 1998; the eparchy headed by Bishop Alexander (Ishchein) consists of five churches in Azerbaijan—the Cathedral of the Nativity of Our Most Holy Mother of God, the Mother Church of the Holy Wives, the Cathedral of the Archangel Michael in Baku, the Cathedral of St. Alexander Nevsky in Ganja, and the Cathedral of St. Nicholas in Khachmaz.

The St. George Church in the village of Gakh-Ingiloy (the Gakh District) where Ingiloi Georgians live in a compact group is functioning under the jurisdiction of the Georgian Orthodox Church. There are 11 Molokan communities in Azerbaijan that follow the traditions of Old Believers (they are found mainly in villages in Shamakha, Ismaili, and some other districts).

Head of the Baku-Caspian Eparchy Right Reverend Bishop Alexander has pointed out that “Azerbaijan has developed an optimal system that allows people of different nationalities to live together... We are grateful to God who placed us in this country among these wonderful people.”\footnote{“Vladyka Aleksandr: ‘My blagodarny Bogu, chto zhivem v etoy strane,’” available at [http://www.azkongress.ru].}

In the last five years the level of relations between the state and the confessions has become much higher because the state structures have started paying more attention to the religious communities and their problems. For instance, the state helped to restore the Mother Church of the Holy Wives in the republic’s capital. In other words, Azerbaijan is pursuing a wise policy of cementing ties among the world religions traditionally represented in the country and between them and the state.

This experience has already attracted the attention of several countries: in 2007 an inter-religious Azeri delegation was invited first to Kuwait and then to the Republic of Belarus to share its experience of peaceful coexistence among world confessions and its experience of implementing all sorts of projects.

Father Alexander is convinced that this unique tolerance is rooted in the Azeris’ national mentality, their psychological makeup, and their very special history. In the past, their territory was inhabited by the followers of different traditional religions (Judaism, Islam, and Christianity) who shared the joy of victories and the bitterness of defeats.

Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II took into account this historical background of religious tolerance in Azerbaijan when he said that the republic was an example of how friendly cooperation among the traditional religions can be maintained. He also supported the initiative of the Chairman of the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus Sheih-ul-Islam Hajji Allahshukuir Pasha-zade who suggested that Baku host an extended summit of the religious figures of the CIS countries in 2009. “This will be an important event since religious leaders come together not to discuss religious dogmas but to speak about the need to preserve moral and spiritual values. This is our common task. Going back in my mind to my visits to Azerbaijan I can say that this is a country of religious tolerance and good relations among all confessions,” added Alexy II.\footnote{[http://news.trend.az/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=1172809&lang=RU].}

The Assembly of Hierarchs of the Russian Orthodox Church, the highest governing body that gathered in Moscow on 24-29 June, 2008, expressed its satisfaction with the tolerance level in Azerbaijan and praised the dialog between the state and confessions, between different confessions, and the contacts between the highest governing body of the Russian Orthodox Church and Azerbaijan.\footnote{[http://news.trend.az/?show=news&newsid=1237179&lang=RU].}

President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Medvedev spoke highly of the efforts of traditional confessions present in the republic to bring people closer irrespective of their ethnic or religious affiliations. This comment made at the president’s meeting with the religious leaders of Azerbaijan

Chairman of the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus Sheih-ul-Islam Hajji Allahshukiur Pasha-zade, Right Reverend Alexander, Bishop of Baku and the Caspian and Chairman of the Community of Mountain Jews S.B. Ikhiilov) confirmed that stability and religious tolerance in Azerbaijan were highly appreciated.\(^9\)

**Judaism**

According to some sources, Judaism appeared in Azerbaijan some two thousand years ago; it should be said that throughout this long history there have been essentially no instances of animosity toward its followers. It is common knowledge that the well-known traditional ethnic and religious tolerance of the local populations attracted Jews from all corners of all empires: Sassanian, Arab, Seljuk, Mongol, Safavid, Russian, and Soviet. This largely explains the Krasnaia Sloboda (the Quba District) phenomenon with its 11 synagogues in 1920. There are still a compact group of 4,000 Mountain Jews,\(^10\) the only one across the post-Soviet expanse.

In his greeting to the Jewish community of Azerbaijan in connection with the Roshashon holiday President Heydar Aliev wrote: “The Jews that have been living in our country for centuries were never persecuted or subjected to discrimination; they have preserved their national cultural traditions and everyday way of life. Today the Jews are actively involved in the academic, cultural, social, and political life of our country; they are fulfilling their duties as citizens with honor while contributing to the development of our independent state.”\(^11\)

According to the information supplied by the Jewish community of Azerbaijan, today there are three Jewish communities in the country: the Mountain Jews, Ashkenazim, and Georgian Jews. According to information supplied by the religious communities, there are about 16 thousand Jews, 11 thousand of which are Mountain Jews (6 thousand of them live in Baku, and 1,300 in other places); 4,300 are Ashkenazim (3,300 in Baku) and about 700 are Georgian Jews. The Mountain Jews have preserved their language, traditions, and customary way of life; they are generally considered to be more orthodox than the other communities.\(^12\) Certain other sources insist that there are many more Jews in Azerbaijan—they also count those who carry passports with different nationalities registered in them (for various reasons). According to the religious organizations of the Mountain Jews, for example, there are over 30 thousand of them in Azerbaijan; they are all served by three synagogues in Baku, one in Quba, and another one in the Oguz District.\(^13\)

During the years of independence the country acquired a branch of the International Association of Judaism and Jewish Culture in 1992; a course in Hebrew was introduced at Baku State University; in 1997 the Georgian Jews’ synagogue was restored. The country organized an exhibition called “Jews in Azerbaijan” held at the Art Museum in 1999 and the Museum of History of Azerbaijan in 2001. In 2001 the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan organized a seminar called “The Mountain Jews of the Caucasus;” a new Ashkenazi synagogue was built in 2003, etc. In July 2008 the president of Azerbaijan passed a decision to build a new synagogue for Mountain Jews in Baku—today the site is being selected; there are plans to open a synagogue in Sumgait.\(^14\)

\(^9\) [http://www.day.az], 3 July, 2008.
\(^12\) Based on the materials of *Confronting the Jewish Agenda*. The Jewish Community of Azerbaijan, available at [http://www.ijc.ru/istoki46.html].
An international scientific-practical conference on Relations between the Press and Ethnic Groups held in New York in 2007,\textsuperscript{15} as well as a number of publications abroad, pointed to the high level of religious and ethnic tolerance in Azerbaijan. Gabriel Lerner, editor of \textit{La Opinion}, the largest Spanish-language newspaper of Los Angeles, described Azerbaijan in his article “Azeri Jews: Centuries of Coexistence in Azerbaijan” that appeared in the \textit{Los Angeles Jewish Journal} after his visit to this country as a model for religious liberty in the world, “especially compared to Armenia,” he emphasizes, where “there are not even 10 Jewish families today.”\textsuperscript{16} Ambassador of Israel to Azerbaijan Arthur Lenk totally agrees with him and describes the republic as an example to be emulated by other Muslim countries.\textsuperscript{17} This ethnic and religious tolerance is one of the reasons why relatively few people moved from Azerbaijan to Israel.

Chief Executive of the U.S. Jewish Committee David Harris has pointed out that Azerbaijan is a good example of tolerance. “We consider Azerbaijan to be a real model of tolerance. We also hear it from the Jewish community of Azerbaijan, with which we maintain good relations. We think it is really like that and certainly Azerbaijan may serve as an example for other countries, especially in the Muslim world. We need such a model of tolerance. We want to tell everyone, especially, the world Jews, about what is going on in Azerbaijan, as I want to repeat that in this region Azerbaijan is an important country and a model of tolerance to us and the present-day world really needs such a model.”\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Catholicism}

Catholicism is a relative newcomer in Azerbaijan—it reached the country in the latter half of the 19th century at the crest of the first oil boom in Baku. Early in the 20th century a Catholic community appeared that built a Catholic cathedral, one of the architectural landmarks in the very center of Baku. The second oil boom of the mid-1990s and especially the visit of Pope John-Paul II to Azerbaijan in 2002 revived the Catholic community; it was registered in 1999 and has a membership of over 400 foreigners and local people. The state allocated it a site not far from the center of the capital for building a cathedral. Five years later, in March 2007 at the ceremony of opening the Cathedral of Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary it was said that “the Vatican highly appreciated religious tolerance in Azerbaijan, of which the new cathedral was another confirmation.”\textsuperscript{19} Today services are conducted in this cathedral and in the parish chapel of Christ the Redeemer of the Salesian Fathers. There is also a shelter for the homeless run by the sisters of Charity of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Ordinary Jan Chapla is head of the Catholic Church in Azerbaijan.

Pope Benedict XVI confirmed the atmosphere of good ethnic and confessional relations in Azerbaijan and successful contacts between Azerbaijan and the Vatican by saying that religious tolerance in Azerbaijan is at a high level.\textsuperscript{20}

\textbf{Conclusion}

On 16 November, 2007 Baku hosted a conference called “Azerbaijan as a Model of Tolerance” at which the contributors pointed out that “tolerance in Azerbaijan may serve as an example

\textsuperscript{15} [http://news.trend.az/index.shtml?show=news&newsid=994644&lang=RU].
\textsuperscript{17} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{18} “Head of U.S. Jewish Committee: ‘We are Azerbaijan’s Friends,’” Interview with David Harris, chief executive of the U.S. Jewish committee, 15 August, 2008, available at [http://www.day.az/news/politics/127630.html].
\textsuperscript{20} [http://ru.apa.az/news.php?id=59381].
for the rest of the world.”21 In this article I have done my best to demonstrate that these are not mere words and not a tactical maneuver used to secure domestic or foreign political aims. The laws that ensure the freedom of conscience allow the believers to practice their faiths. It is obvious, however, that tolerance depends, first and foremost, on what the religious leaders do and say and on the position of the state. Recently the state has been doing a lot to demonstrate that it wants to promote tolerance.

At the same time, neither state power nor the religious leaders will be heard if there is no favorable social, cultural, and spiritual atmosphere in which the people and confessions feel at ease. The Azeri nation has many positive cultural features, the main being its amazing ability to patiently seek and achieve mutual understanding with different ethnic groups and religions. It has been demonstrating this throughout its history. “The world is studying our experience. In the future the role of Azerbaijan as an area of tolerance in which a religious and cultural dialog is being encouraged will increase throughout the world.”22


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BAHAISM AND ECUMENISM IN THE CONTEXT OF RECENT SOCIOCULTURAL TRENDS

Abstract

The author analyzes some of the current sociocultural specifics of Baha-ism and ecumenism and their place in the republic’s public and religious life.

Introduction

Globalization as a sociocultural, political, and economic phenomenon that has enveloped all spheres of life has also affected its spiritual and religious component. As a product of Western civil-
zation, globalization manifests itself in the worldwide cultural-religious process as a Western post-
secular, post-modernist, and even post-Christian phenomenon. Much has been written about this state
of Western consciousness.¹ This trend testifies that the West might be aspiring to spread its religious
experience across the world—in fact global interpenetration has already permitted this. My choice of
Bahaiism and ecumenism is not accidental: being very close in many respects they serve as the best
illustration of the worldwide tendencies described above.

“The Unity in Diversity”—
the Latest Conception of the Universe
for All of Humanity

Ecumenism (Gr. Oikoumene—inhabited world) as a conception is a generic term used to de-
scribe all sorts of initiatives, actions, organizations, and movements striving to achieve worldwide
unity. Technically it faithfully reflects what globalization strives to achieve in practical terms as an
element, albeit secondary, of religious globalization. The primitive discrepancy between the aims
and the means, however, pushed religion to the backburner, while a banal quasi-religious process
moved to the forefront to embrace a huge variety of contemporary cultural-religious ideas and no-
tions.

Bahaiism can be placed among the phenomena called upon to help mass consciousness adjust to
the idea that all social, economic, and political formations and structures will be inevitably brought
together under stringent world governance. The statements coming from the Universal House of Just-
ice, the supreme Bahai structure in Haifa (Israel), add specific meaning and nuance to all the world-
wide developments. Here are the bedrock principles designed to bring people together in a new social
formation Bahais call the New World Order:

- recognition of the pivotal principles and fundamental doctrine of the Faith and the basic unity
  of religions;
- independent search for truth;
- condemnation of all forms of prejudice, harmony between religion and science;
- introduction of compulsory education;
- abolition of the extremes of wealth and poverty;
- equality between men and women;
- adoption of a universal auxiliary language;
- institution of a world tribunal for settling disputes between nations.

The Bahais are working toward a world status for their religion. According to various sources,
there are about 6 million Bahais around the world organized into a strictly hierarchical structure with
branches in more than 200 countries; its members belong to over 2,100 nations and peoples living in
116 thousand regions all over the world. The works of Baha’ Ullah, founder of Bahaiism (Mirza Hos-
eyn ‘Ali Nuri, 1817-1892), have been translated into 800 languages. In 1948 the Bahai International
Community was registered at the U.N. Public Information Department as an international non-gov-
ernmental organization. Today it is officially represented at the international level and cooperates
with the U.N. In 1970 the Bahai International Community acquired a consultative status in the

¹ See: A. Kyrlezhev, “Postsekulrnarnaia epokha;” A. Zhuravskiy, “Religioznaia traditsia v usloviakh krizisa sekular-
izma,” Kontinent, No. 120, 2004.

Ecumenism as an organized international movement is barely one hundred years old. Started as a bridge to span the gaps that separated Christian communities, it was expected to draw them into harmonious cooperation and to achieve unification of the Christian churches in the future. The first ecumenical missionary conferences met in Edinburgh (Scotland) in 1910, Geneva (Switzerland) in 1920, and Lausanne (Switzerland) in 1927. The movement took its final shape in 1945 at a conference in Stockholm (Sweden). The first general assembly convened in Amsterdam (the Netherlands) in 1948 set up the World Council of Churches as the guiding ecumenical structure that united three Protestant movements (Faith and Order, Life and Work, and the International Missionary Council). Today the Council unites 306 organizations from over 100 countries (440 million followers) and 33 associated members. The Assembly, convened once in seven years, is the supreme governing body; between assemblies the Council is administered by the Central Committee of 150 members. They do not limit themselves to religious issues: social problems, peace and disarmament, and scientific and technical progress are also discussed. In recent times the World Council of Churches has been paying much more attention to new international economics and the free dissemination of information.

The ecumenical organization has not yet achieved all-Christian unity, however its followers have come forward with conceptions that go far beyond Christian integration to embrace ideas closely connected with the religion of the so-called “global society.” According to F. Potter, one of the general secretaries of the WCC, church unity is closely connected with the “unity of mankind.” This means that ecumenism has shifted the principles of Christian cooperation to the sphere of relations between Christianity and other religions; as such it can be regarded as a globalization instrument and a fairly powerful ideological tool of the “new world order,” a term that the Bahai ideologists have been actively exploiting since the late 1920s. This means that the ecumenical process was conditioned “by a situation in which Christianity is once more offering itself to the non-Christian world; man who in the act of personal choice becomes a Christian less frequently inherits the confessional culture of his ancestors while the mutual claims of different confessions rooted in hoary antiquity are losing their urgency in his eyes.” Logic suggests that ecumenism has formally entered into competition with those religious doctrines that have already positioned themselves as spiritual consolidators of mankind on a global scale. It is probably not by chance that one of the latest ecumenical slogans—Unity in Diversity—repeats, practically word for word, the Bahai conception of human universum. In fact, universalism was the most typical feature of the Bahai teaching. Baha’ Ullah called on his followers to be like the fingers of one hand or like the parts of one body. “So powerful is the light of unity that it can illuminate the whole earth,” said he and continued: “you are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch.” “The Faith of Bahai that preaches unity of humankind is harsh about all types of fanaticism and intolerance—religious, national, patriotic, racial and political—the Bahais never tire of saying.”

Researchers have pointed out that ecumenists today are fully aware that “the desire to achieve a compromise in the realm of spiritual values leads to religious syncretism, the desire to seek unity for the sake of secular aims and short-term interests creates, more likely than not, a mêlée of ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ values and may develop into new forms of ‘integrism’ and ‘triumphalism’ as variants of...”

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2 [www.bahai.ru].
5 Rosy liubvi. Teksty dlia razmysleniia (Izbrannye tsitaty iz bahaiistskikh pisaniy), Transl. from the German, Hofheim-Langerhey, 1990, p. 19.
6 K. Kazem-sade, Korotko o vere bahai, Baha’i-Verlag, 1992, p. 4.
the theory of ‘interreligion’ that has recently gained popularity.” This warning does not mean that the ecumenists avoided these pitfalls or have won the competition with their ideological rivals. Today an ecumenical approach to unification of mankind presupposes a politically correct dialog among all religions and religious pluralism, which means that all sorts of spiritual values can be freely promoted. Peter Berger offered a highly apt description when talking about bureaucratization of religious institutions and using the term “ecumenism.” He used inverted commas to demonstrate that it does not necessarily a priori correspond to certain theological ideas about the religious interpretations of the term. Something that looks very much like the present ecumenical movement, he goes on to say, could have been born by pluralism outside its theological underpinnings. He comes to the conclusion that no matter which road religious structures would have selected in the face of pluralism they would have been confronted by the sum-total of problems which today are described as a “crisis of theology” or “crisis of the church.” There is no doubt that unification of religious values in these conditions would lead to syncretism and eclectics. In this context contemporary ecumenism and Bahaism become practically undistinguishable.

Bahaism looks like a graphic example of Peter Berger’s bureaucratization of religious institutions. The governing Bahai structure has the right to publish, in full compliance with the demands of the times, the laws that Baha’ Ullah never mentioned in his works. This is an important development: the mechanism of self-regulation dated to 1963 allowed Bahaiism to choose the paths of subsequent development and to easily adjust to the changing historical and geographic contexts. On the other hand, flexibility robbed Bahaiism of its specific features and made the movement more formalized.

Early in the 20th century Abd-ol-Baha regarded a Universal Bahai Community as his final aim achieved through gradual proliferation of his teaching in Western Europe and Northern America where the ideas of “Oriental ecumenism” were hailed by the precursors of contemporary globalists as the ideological underpinnings of a platform still resting on Western financial and economic interests. I am convinced that by embracing Bahaiism the West adjusted, albeit without much success, the Oriental ideas to its own in the hope of infiltrating the East using the Islamic origins of Bahaiism as a latchkey.

It should be pointed out that from the very first days, Bahaiism, which was born in the fold of Shia Islam, entered into a bitter confrontation with it and at all times ignited active resistance among the Muslim clergy. This means that Bahaiism, and ecumenism for that matter, should be discussed in the context of Protestant ethics. Bahaiism was born in Iran in 1844; by 1863 it had developed into a consistent religious doctrine through the efforts of Baha’ Ullah, its founding father. In 1927 Bahaiism

9 Abd-ol-Baha—son of Baha’ Ullah, the founder of Bahaiism, who did a lot to promote the teaching in the West.
acquired the official status of a religious community after the Appellate Religious Court of Beba (Egypt) ruled in 1925 that the Bahais were not Muslims.\(^{10}\)

The confrontation between Islam and Bahaism, which ended in a split, was to have been expected. Early in the 20th century some of the authors were aware of this: “While extracting national ideas from the earliest sources and borrowing on a grand scale from abroad, Bab\(^{11}\) grafted onto Islam the ecstatic conceptions of India, the mystical compassion of Christianity, and a random collection of theories or hypotheses of contemporary Europe.”\(^{12}\) The question is: Does Islam need this? The “relationship went askew” because Islam as a self-sufficient and genuinely universal religion rejected the “alien body” of the Bahai religious philosophy: it rejected the eclectic nature and syncretism of the new teaching rather than any other of its aspects.

It should be said that in the context of unfolding globalization the Muslim world rejected the post-secular Western religious-cultural conscience: the Islamic religious doctrines proved immune to secularization. Azerbaijan, as part of the post-Soviet expanse where the religious-cultural continuity was disrupted or at least pushed to the background by communist totalitarianism and where Islam is basically a secular phenomenon, might serve as an adequate testing ground for the latest sociocultural trends.

The low level of religious knowledge among the youth and the middle-aged and the republic’s confessional diversity create a perfect breeding ground. There is a frequently voiced opinion that “Islam in Azerbaijan is a purely ethnic phenomenon or a strange secular religion,” even though it is admitted that “Islam is accepted as an inalienable part of the national identity.”\(^{13}\) The religious and ethnic homogeneity of the Azeris as the region’s numerically largest nation makes large-scale infatuation with any Universalist quasi-religious conception improbable. What the Bahai religious community is trying to accomplish in the republic can be described as ecumenical ideas in action or a touchstone of sorts of the sociocultural trends of globalism—a product of the neo-liberal West. It is still very hard to predict the outcome of these efforts and the role Azerbaijan might play in the process: as distinct from the other Soviet-successor states,\(^{14}\) Bahaism has been and remains one of the traditional religions in a country which borders on Iran.

Bahaism supplies us with one of the variants of the inter-civilizational dialog that plays an important role in shaping the world outlook of the new times and shows its prospects. Some of the contemporary philosopher-experts on religion agree with this. G. Seyfi, for example, is out to prove that all religions display breakthroughs to humanism that intensify in the course of the historical process and make it easier to seek, and achieve, harmony among people in order to move out into the vast expanses of civilizational harmony instead of remaining “in the shell of the traditional world religions.” This will create “a dialog through which the healthy tree of a new world outlook with a new scale of spiritual values can grow.”\(^{15}\)

His approach to the possibility of rapprochement between Islam and Christianity on the basis of their anthropomorphic features is much more specific, which makes his approach to Bahaism very

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\(^{11}\) Bab (Siyyid Ali-Muhammad), spiritual precursor of Baba’ Ullah, founder of the Babid movement in Iran in the mid-19th century.

\(^{12}\) V. Berar, *Persia i persidskaia smuta,* St. Petersburg, 1912, p. 274.


\(^{14}\) Turkmenistan is an exception, even though it is a country of Sunni Islam. Bahais settled in the Russian part of Turkestan in the late 19th century. The Ashghabad Bahai community was larger and more influential than the one in Baku. The first Bahai temple—Marshak al-azkar—was opened in Ashghabad in 1907.

interesting. He has highly assessed the significance of the anthropological and rationalist revolution Bahaiism accomplished in Islamic ideology and insists that similar trends may play a positive political role. The revival of Bahaiism, he argues, is promising, at least in some parts of the post-Soviet expanse.

Bahaiism tried, and partly succeeded, to bring Islam and Christianity somewhat closer together by combining, unconsciously, elements of Muslim and Christian ethics and morals on both the economic and the spiritual plane. From the point of view of Bahaiism, which claims originality and self-sufficiency, this experience can be described as a doubtful advantage, but any experience should be carefully studied.

Ecumenism with “Bahai Makeup” in Azerbaijan

For obvious reasons Bahaiism could not be developed and promoted in Soviet Azerbaijan; it was late in the 1980s that the Administration for Religious Affairs of Azerbaijan contacted the local Bahais; out of the 20 Bahais who lived in Baku at that time only three were bold enough to scorn the potential repression and attend a meeting to announce that they intended to set up the Bahai Spiritual Conference of Baku.

In the post-Soviet period Bahaiism successfully resumed its activities: on 22 May, 1992 the local Bahais convened the Constituent Congress in Baku, thus officially reviving their pre-revolutionary community. In 1993 they were registered at the Ministry of Justice, which supplied them with all necessary legal rights. This was not plain sailing, however: in 1992 the annual Bahai conference attended by the leading Bahai dignitary, Amatu’l-Bahá Rúhíyyih Rabbíí (née Mary Sutherland Maxwell), widow of Guardian of the Cause of God Shoghi Effendi, as well as guests from the Netherlands, Germany, France, the U.S., and other countries, was attacked by an aggressive crowd that staged havoc.

Despite this and other similar cases in the early 1990s, Bahaiism was successfully revived in the republic and attracted at least 500 followers. In 2002 the Bahai community was officially registered by the State Committee for Religious Organizations of Azerbaijan together with another 150 religious communities that had submitted all the relevant documents on time.

Under the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the Freedom of Religion passed in 1992, each citizen is free to determine his or her attitude to religion; they have the right to profess any religion either individually or collectively and express their religious views and attitudes. This allows the Bahai community to go on functioning; in fact it is one of the best organized, active, and lavishly funded religious organizations. Bahais are scattered across the republic while in Baku, Sumgayit, and Balakhany (in the outskirts of Baku) there are spiritual assemblies. This means that it is highly important to identify the place and role of Bahaiism in the republic’s society and look at its future role in the state-religion-society construct.

Today Bahaiism has mainly attracted the intelligentsia (school and pre-school teachers and doctors) and to a lesser extent academics and creative workers, who make up a smaller percentage of the

16 See: Ibid., p. 110.
17 [www.bahai.ru].
19 [www.bahai.az].
community members consisting mostly of young people and students. The Baku community is an international structure; it is involved in public life as part of the conception of Azerbaijan’s political and ideological development. The Bahais never miss their meetings and are active in all sorts of public and cultural events intended for children and adults alike. From time to time the spiritual assemblies offer all sorts of educational circles and courses and organize the members’ leisure. Regular prayer sessions held under the aegis of spiritual closeness and unification and according to a timetable are open to all. Azeri Bahais alternate Bahai texts with extracts from the holy Islamic, Christian, Judaist, Hindu, Zoroastrian, and Buddhist texts. Recently, on instructions from Haifa, the Bahai community started the so-called fire-side meetings in private homes practiced all over the world where Bahai ideas are actively promoted.

Today a council of the leaders of the three traditional religions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism) is successfully functioning in the republic albeit without a legal status. Other countries should take a closer look at this highly useful practical experience; there is also the Forum of Religious Communities of Azerbaijan that brought together members of the three confessions and of other faiths represented in the republic. Bahais are involved along with Baptists, Catholics, Lutherans, and Protestants, Krishnaites, and the restored Albanian-Udin Christian community. In short, the Forum unites nearly all the confessions present in the republic.22 In 2004, out of the 260 religious communities registered in the country, Bahai and 23 other communities are officially registered as non-Islamic.23

In October 2002 Baku hosted the OSCE Conference on “The Role of Religion and Belief in a Democratic Society: Searching for Ways to Combat Terrorism and Extremism,” which gathered about 400 people from over 50 countries: state delegations, members of international and non-governmental organizations, religious confessions, and the media. The Bahai International Community and the Bahai Community of Azerbaijan also attended.

Today, the Bahai community is freely developing in Azerbaijan, which is a democratic state; at the same time the state keeps religious organizations of a destructive nature under control to preserve the balance of healthy forces in society.24

Conclusion

Throughout its history mankind has been persistently seeking the key to religious interaction. The Parliament of the World’s Religions held in Chicago in 1993 in commemoration of the first parliament held in this city 100 years before adopted an important document entitled Toward a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration, the result of two years of consultations among about 200 academics and theologians from all corners of the world; it was signed by over 150 leaders of religious communities.25

In fact, the unity of mankind and its ties with the superior forces were not discovered today. Plutarch in his time said that northern and southern peoples have the same gods; that there were no separate gods for the Barbarians and the Greeks. Gods, like the sun, the moon, the sky, the earth, and the sea are shared by all people. The Greek historian pointed out that, despite the multitude of names people use to describe them, only one Logos and only one Providence rule the world. The same forces are in play everywhere even though people use different names for them. This means that there is no novelty either in the ideas of Bahaiism or of ecumenism.

23 See: R. Aliyev, State and Religion (Articles and Statements), Baku, 2004, p. 49.
24 See: Ibid., pp. 50-51.
It should be said that I referred to ecumenism in its wide, inter-confessional, context. If scrutinized in the narrow, “inner-Christian,” context, it can be concluded that its followers should have concentrated on removing the internal contradictions rather than playing the roles already claimed by the numerous new and non-traditional religions and movements acting out their parts on the globalization arena. So far it remains one of the many social utopias.

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ISLAMIC TRADITION
IN THE CAUCASUS:
AMIDST TRADITIONALISM,
REFORMISM,
AND SECULARISM

Abstract

Islamic tradition is never questioned by its followers, yet for centuries it has remained and still remains a subject of all sorts of interpretations. This article attempts to grasp the meaning of Islamic traditionalism by assessing its impact on Islam in the Caucasus along with the potential of Islamic revivalism and the future of Islam in secular states.

Introduction

The way Islamic tradition is treated in Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus (the specifics of Islamic development notwithstanding) is one the major factors of religious life in both of them. The traditional clergy, finely tuned to the slightest political changes, claims exclusive right to interpretation of Islamic tradition. However, remaining as it is in pinching religious-cultic limits, it is not yet ready for a dialog with its religion opponents. It is unable to fully tap the social and spiritual potential of Islam, which undermines confidence in it and in Islamic tradition as a whole. The void is gradually being filled by preachers of revivalist Islam who, being disunited ideologically and organizationally, are vulnerable in the face of the internal and external forces that use groups of Muslim (mainly young) activists to alter the vector of religious development. The government, which never tires of repeating that the moral and ethical values of Islam are indispensable for cultural development and a dialog between civilizations, still treats the Muslim communities with caution.
This is an attempt to assess the religious development in the Caucasus and its short-term perspectives by identifying the specific features of Islamic traditionalism, its influence on domestic policies, the most typical trends of religious thought in the Caucasus, and their analogies elsewhere in the Islamic world. In the Caucasus, Islam is developing in secular states, which makes it necessary to demonstrate how the limits of secularism change from one state to another and to assess the prospects of political Islam in the region.

**Specifics of Islamic Traditionalism**

Western social thought has been interested in cultural-historical traditions and their impact on personal and social development since the 17th century. The historical-political reasons for the critical attitude toward traditions apart, we must admit that traditions are an inevitable feature of any mature ideological system. David Gross, an American sociologist, pointed out that certain “naturally surviving traditions” find themselves “subsisting in a context that is by no means conducive to it: a context dominated by a state, market, and culture industry whose basic collective interests are anti-traditional.”

There is a multitude of approaches to the problem, yet different interpretations of the term “tradition” are very close. Sometimes it is described as “a component of the social and cultural heritage which for a long time remains alive in society or individual social groups and is part and parcel of their value system.”

Traditional society, therefore, is described as a society “in which institutions and ideas of the past assume the role of the main form of reproduction of the given social system.”

Traditional society rests on an ideology created by the preserved social order, traditional institutions, and values that evolved throughout history. According to American sociologist Edward Shils, “traditionalism is deliberate and persistent confirmation of traditional norms, while being fully aware of their traditional nature and fully convinced that their value stems from the traditional transfer from a certain holy source.” For this reason we distinguish between reactionary traditions that slow down sociocultural development and progressive traditions that bring law and order to evolutionary processes.

Traditional societies depend on historically developed institutions in order to function: these institutions maintain public order and contacts between generations; for this reason the traditionalists treat the impact of industrial culture as potentially dangerous. On the one hand, modernization removes certain cultural distinctions, while on the other, changes in public order and scientific achievements may cast doubt on some aspects of tradition and set destructive social processes in motion. M. Barbashin has the following to say on this score: “If any of the cultural pillars crumbles and the spiritual sphere proves unable to compensate for this, the economic and social structures suffer.”

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Islam is a traditionalist ideology because it rests on the holy tradition represented by the Quran and the Sunnah. The earliest Muslim societies, however, caught in the whirlpool of economic, political, and social changes, cannot be called traditionalist in the full sense of the word. In fact, during the first three centuries of Islam social thought was developing along the principles of ijtihad, independent investigation of the holy tradition in search of adequate answers to the ever emerging questions related to all aspects of social life.

In the mid-9th century, however, Muslim socio-religious thought was bogged down in taqlid, “uncritical imitation.” At the early stages the Shari’a sciences were institutionalized through the development of the theological, legal, and ideological legacy of the founders of the madhhabs and their closest followers in the form of fundamental works on Islamic principles and law, later shortened and simplified to serve the wide masses of the faithful. At this stage the ijtihad supporters proved unable to check the inertia of the madhhabs that were rapidly building up their influence. Over time the contradictions among the madhhabs developed into fanatical rejection of any ideas that did not fit the frameworks of any of them. The relations among the followers can be aptly described as mutual enmity and hatred. According to a biography of Qadi Muhammad ibn Musa al-Bilasaguni (d. in 506 H.), one of the Hanafi theologians, he used to say: “Had I the power I would have taxed the Shafi’ites with jizia” (the duty paid by non-Muslims).6

Taqlid was one of the reasons why Islamic socio-religious thought was fossilized. Ibn Haldun wrote in his Prolegomena: “You should know that among the factors that prevent people from seeking knowledge and achieving their aims there are too many works, as well as too many different terms and teaching methods. The students and pupils have to memorize them to become teachers in turn. The pupil must learn all the texts, or nearly all of them, by heart and follow these methods. Meanwhile, human life, even if completely dedicated to the study of everything written about one discipline, is too short.”7

Interference of the rulers and the nobility in university and madrasah affairs was another factor behind the crisis of Islamic thought. As-Sayyid Sabiq wrote: “One of the reasons why the spirit of backwardness spread everywhere was the building of madrasahs by rulers and the rich at which only one or several selected madhhabs were taught. The ulema, who preferred to continue drawing their salaries, made this possible by abandoning ijtihad. Abu Zur’a asked his teacher al-Balqini: ‘Why did sheikh Taqi ad-Din as-Subki ignore ijtihad while having perfect command of all the instruments?’ Al-Balkini kept silent while Abu Zur’a continued: ‘I think he abandoned ijtihad for the post that could be filled only by a lawyer of one of the four madhhabs (he refers to the four most popular theological and legal schools—the madhhabs of Abu Hanifah, Malik ibn Anas, Muhammad as-Shafii and Ahmad ibn Hanbal.—E.K.). A person who went beyond these limits could not hope to get the post and lost his right to work as a qadi while people would reject his fetwahs and call him a heretic.’ Al-Balkini smiled and agreed with him.”8

The zeal with which the theological-legal schools tried to preserve their principles cemented the traditionalist approaches. The traditionalists rejected ijtihad, which helped adjust the Shari’a to different historical, national, cultural, and other conditions.9 Those Islamic scholars who tried to revive the early tradition of independent study of the Quran and the Sunnah were persecuted by the traditionalists and rulers who succumbed to their influence. This happened to many of the theologians, including Taqi ad-Din Ibn Taymiyya, Shams ad-Din Ibn al-Kayyim, and Jamal ad-Din al-Kasimi.

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7 Ibn Haldun, Tarih, Bayt al-afqar ad-dauliya, Amman-Ar Riyadh, p. 287.
B. Erasov, one of the students of traditionalism, has pointed out that in the Middle Ages there was the wrong impression that the world had finally been cognized: “Hence the mounting deadening formalism in religious conscience; frequently the earlier level of religious rationality was simply abandoned. Thinking is channeled not toward seeking new but toward organizing and improving already existing knowledge, its interpretation and adjustment to the new circumstances.”

This means that as early as in the Middle Ages traditionalism in most regions of the Islamic world was reduced to the dogmatic adjustment of social life and even scholarly thought to the theological-legal texts of the madhhabs and ideological attitudes of speculative theology (kalam). It refused to adapt the main sources of faith and law (the Quran and the Sunnah) to the changing realities but interpreted them according to the traditions of the theological schools.

These specifics of Islamic traditionalism can still be observed everywhere, Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus being no exception. I. Dobaev has pointed out in this respect: “According to the traditionalists, Islamic heritage cannot become an object of scholarly historical studies. They insist that the speculative approaches to the sacral texts that took shape in the Middle Ages should be strictly followed together with the traditions of the past and the indisputability of the religious wisemen. This is what taglid is about. More likely than not they are critical of rationalist analysis of the religious dogmas.”

In all cases the official clergy can be safely counted among the supporters of traditional Islam in the Caucasus, along with most Muslims who, being completely satisfied with observing some of the traditions, never bother about the meaning of their religion and religious practices. The clergy, which claims that their interpretation of religion is the only correct one and fears to lose their grip, has chosen confrontation with any groups of Muslims potentially able to undermine their ideological underpinning and narrow down their social basis.

Clergy members who take all calls for change in religious life as the enemy’s attempts to undermine the unity of the Muslim ummah have chosen the role of “custodians of the traditional way of life and religious ideals that popular consciousness identifies with social justice.”

This did not help the official clergy to preserve its popularity: according to expert opinion, in Azerbaijan the Administration of the Muslims of the Caucasus (AMC) is not popular either among the faithful or among the public at large. The public opinion poll conducted by the FAR Center revealed that merely 13.5 percent of the polled trusted any of the religious leaders while the AMC Chairman had only 4 percent on his side.

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14 See: S.E. Cornell, The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2006, pp. 63-64. According to the result obtained by the Institute of Peace and Democracy in 2003, the AMC chairman had the support of 27 percent of the polled (34 percent against and 39 percent neutral or undecided) (see: A.S. Iunusov, Islam in Azerbaijan, Zaman Publishers, Baku, 2004, p. 305).
This is also true of Daghestan. According to the poll conducted by the Center of Information and Analysis at the Ministry of Education, Science and Youth Policies of Daghestan, an approximately equal number of people approve of and criticize the involvement of religious organizations in the republic’s political life (42 and 44 percent, respectively).\textsuperscript{15}

The low level of popular trust in the traditionalists does not reflect the attitude toward Islam as a whole. The already mentioned poll conducted by the Institute of Peace and Democracy in 2003 revealed that in Azerbaijan 97 percent of people born into Muslim families spoke of themselves as faithful.\textsuperscript{16} It seems that mistrust is limited to the religious leaders and to the predominant tradition which is irrational and complicated.

Here is how Uzbek academic Bayram Balji described one of the Shi’a rites he observed in March 2004 and February 2005 in the Nardaran settlement outside Baku: “In the small hours pilgrims filled the main streets of the town; they all went to the Rahime-Hanim tomb. Some of them had spent the night at the holy place. After venerating the shrine the crowd filled the vast esplanade between the tomb and the still unfinished mosque. The public address system was blaring out ayahs as well as wails for Hussein. The mullah, whose accent betrayed an Iranian Azeri, delivered a sermon that contained no anti-government salvos. In the center the faithful aligned themselves into two rows that formed two groups in which the main scenes of Ashura took place. In one of the groups made up of children and teenagers between 12 and 16, the men rhythmically beat themselves with chains to the accompaniment of singing and shouts from the crowd. From time to time the participants went into a frenzy—their shouts showed their despondency caused by the thought that they had been unable to support Hussein during his execution and contained condemnations of his murderers.”\textsuperscript{17}

The Sufi traditions of the Northern Caucasus are no less complicated and just as hard to explain. Witness what J. Spencer Trimingham had to say about the procedure of secret prayer (\textit{dhikr khafi}) practiced in Naqshbandiya: “He must keep the tongue pressed against the roof of his mouth, his lips and teeth firmly shut, and hold his breath. Then starting with the word \textit{la}, he makes it ascend from the navel to the brain. When it has arrived at the brain he says \textit{ilaha} to the right shoulder and \textit{illa’llah}, to the left side, driving it forcefully into the pineal heart through which it circulates to all the rest of the body. The phrase \textit{Muhammad rasul Allah} is made to incline from the left to the right side, and then one says, ‘My God, Thou art my goal and satisfying Thee is my aim.’” Trimingham’s comment: this is the simplest of all practiced forms of the rite.\textsuperscript{18}

These and similar customs and rites with no justification in the Quran and the Sunnah make tradition open to criticism. For this reason the clergy prefers to avoid an open dialog and any steps toward either the right (radical groups) or the left (reformers and modernists).

The cult of the saints rooted in ancient pagan cultures is one of the elements of Islamic traditionalism in the Caucasus that draws criticism from all sorts of Islamic schools and non-Muslim students of Islam. It has been accepted for a fact that fire-worshipping and paganism left a deep imprint on the traditions and ways of the Azeri Muslims.\textsuperscript{19} Indeed, many of the holy places are closely associated with totemic and animistic religious ideas—their Muslim associations date to much later times: respected Muslims were often buried close to the pirs while their tombstones carried epitaphs in the Arabic alphabet.\textsuperscript{20}

Prominent Hungarian Orientalist Ignác Goldziher wrote in his time that the holy tree is associated with Muhammad or a wali might be buried under it. While the pagan form of tree cult might live

\textsuperscript{17} B. Balji, “Sud’by shiizma v postsovetskom Azerbaidzhane,” available at [http://www.islamica.ru/?pageID=217].
on in a desert outside Muslim traditions, in Muslim towns this cult depends on an association with a saint for its further existence in Islam.”

The revivalists (modernists, reformers, and traditionalists) reject traditional Islam because of its inflexible conservatism and remnants of paganism. They all look at the traditional clergy as “priests” who do not merely obstruct the development of Islamic thought but also of society as a whole. The three groups, however, cannot agree among themselves on many religious and sociopolitical issues.

The modernists are convinced that the future of Muslim societies hinges on their emulation of the European lifestyle and acceptance of Western values. Far from rejecting the ideological experience and organization of the West they are “out to adjust Islam to the borrowed forms of social development and to the Europeanized and Americanized lifestyles.” Those who think like this are normally critical of the religious theories and practice that stand between their ideas and the faithful.

The traditionalists insist that religion should be purified of novelties: they blame the present decline of the Muslim societies on their abandonment of the ideological heritage and practices of early Islam. This is the most active and the least cohesive group with no shared ideas about the world and way of action. V. Naumkin of Russia agrees with the authors of the report supplied by the International Crisis Group: he describes them as “Islamic activists” and divides them into the supporters of political, missionary, and jihad Islam.

Both forms of traditionalism rely on the middle class and poor sections in cities and the countryside, which adds heat to the contradictions raging in Islam. While in Azerbaijan they have not developed into an open confrontation between those who support the clergy and the “activists” (mainly because both groups are too small), in the Northern Caucasus the conflict is developing along different lines. In his fundamental work E. Kisriev has written: “The religious split between the Wahhabis and the tariqi-ists has finally left the narrow circles of Islamic intellectuals to engulf the larger part of the republic’s faithful, and not only it… Families in which children went against their fathers or brothers became enemies are not rare. This means that the split into the Wahhabis and tariqatists was a profoundly societal phenomenon with serious sociopolitical repercussions.”

In its fight against the “activists” traditional Islam demonstrated inordinate flexibility: on the one hand, unlike their opponents, the traditionalists pushed their former contradictions aside to close ranks. On the other, all of them (with the exception of the Chechen tariqatists during the first Chechen war of 1994-1996) demonstrated their loyalty to secular powers, which ensured them support of the power-related structures. This is a no mean political achievement of the Caucasian tariqats since in the past Muridism was regarded as an ideology of resistance to Russian power in the Caucasus.

Reformism in the Caucasus: Revival after a Century of Silence

The Muslim reformist movement, the third group that challenged traditional Islam, took shape in the latter half of the 19th century when the anti-imperialist movement was at its height.

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21 I. Goldziher, *Kult sviatykh v islame*, Moscow, 1938, p. 82.
The reformers who looked at social history in the light of contemporary theories fit Islamic values into the social context; they worked on the religion’s rationalist content and urged to revive the ijtihad tradition.

In the Russian Empire this took the form of Jadidism which in the early 20th century reached the Caucasus. Jadidism, which called for a reassessment of the Islamic tradition and criticized taqlid, found its way to the Muslim schools in the form of new teaching methods. The Russian reformists poured their efforts into the educational system.  

Galina Yemelianova has written that in Russia the Islamic reformers insisted on ijtihad as a creative approach to Islam: “They rejected Islamic scholasticism and the dogmatic and factional differences between Sunni and Shi’a Islams and, in particular, within Sunni and Shi’a Islams. Instead they emphasized the cultural and ethical dimensions of the Islamic faith, viewing it first and foremost as a source of moral judgment and self-control for the individual. They suggested a modified interpretation of iman (faith), namaz (prayer), zakat (alms) and other basics of Islam, which reflected Russian geographic and cultural realities.”

Today, just like 100 years ago reformism strives for the reform of Islamic religious education. The Muslim reformers in Azerbaijan and the Northern Caucasus do not discard the positive experience of the West in the conviction that rationalism in Islam will make it easier to adapt it to the never ending changes.

The altered political and sociocultural realities notwithstanding, the reformers still rely on what Muhammad Iqbal said some 80 years ago. He described the incredible speed with which the world of Islam was moving toward the West as the most striking feature of his time. There was nothing negative in this movement, said he, because intellectually European culture was nothing more than the evolution of some of most important stages in the history of Islamic culture. He voiced his apprehension, however, that the brilliant external side of European culture might slow down the movement and would not allow Muslims to reach its genuine inner spirituality.

The reformers frequently appeal to reason; they turn to the holy tradition in an effort to deal with the problems created by scientific and technical progress and the socioeconomic changes. The ijtihad, however, practices and the quest for new solutions inevitably breed errors, which gives the traditionalists and other opponents a chance to criticize the reformists and lure away the larger part of their supporters.

The traditional clergy, which uses the same weapons to fight both “Islamic activists” and reformers, is partly responsible for the Muslim reformers’ narrow social basis. Neither in Azerbaijan nor in the Northern Caucasus do the reformers have financial and administrative resources at their disposal; their ideas are rejected. “The reformers lose to their opponents,” writes Alexei Malashenko, “because they offer ideas that are outside the grasp of the average Muslim. They appeal to reason rather than to feelings and faith. They have been removed from their posts in mosques. Finally, there are few of them. More than that: they can be easily accused of aping the West and of betraying Islamic tradition, which makes the already hard task of promoting their ideas even harder.”

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29 A similar situation could be observed in the Russian Empire in the latter half of the 19th-early 20th centuries: the traditionalists (qadimites) accused the jadides of heresy and tapped the administrative resource to remove the latter from all posts in madrasahs and mosques.
Some experts describe the Wahhabi (Salafi) movement as reformist for the simple reason that they call on the faithful to purify Islam “of the layers accumulated throughout the centuries in theology and religious practices and sanctifying the institutions typical of the feudal retrogressive society.”

On some points the difference between the traditionalists and reformers is vague because all Islamic trends appeal to the two main sources—the Quran and the Sunnah—when it comes to theological and practical issues. The holy tradition also contained the idea of reform (tajdid) based on the hadith of the Prophet Muhammad: “A Mujadid will appear at the end of every century.”

Nevertheless, Alexey Malashenko has pointed out that the generally accepted classification of Islamic thought does not relate the Salafites to the reformers. “Islamic reformism,” writes he, “is something connected with the modernization of Islamic interpretations, a synthesis of Islamic tradition and external novelties—first of all, those which the Islamic ummah borrows from the West. If we recognize that the reform of Islam can take place only when the religion is purified of wrong ideas, which include the pre-Islamic archaisms, then we can agree, to a certain extent, that reformism and Salafism are correlated.”

The West first formulated the idea of secularism and the need to keep religion apart from public and state institutions during the Enlightenment. Modernism, which dominated in the 20th century, completely undermined the position of religion in the mass consciousness by supplanting it with faith in science’s unlimited potential. Today, in the clutches of doubt and uncertainty, post-modernist society is pushing Western man toward religion, occultism, and irrational methods of maintaining psychological equilibrium. The academic community has already registered the mounting interest in the West in magic practices and folk beliefs. “The shaking of confidence in rational thinking, which was promoted by modernity, induces the reappearance of many kinds of non-rational practices, which affords the opportunity for popular religion to regain the popularity and legitimacy which modernity intended to eradicate.”

This has not stopped secularization in the West: today religion is pushed aside not by developing scientific conscience but by global processes that are becoming increasingly hard to control. In contemporary society the boundary between the secular and the religious is highly fluid—the repercussions of which cannot so far be assessed. “The secularization thesis explains why and how religion as an arena of human endeavor faces peculiar challenges in contemporary global society; it cannot, however, predict how the observable responses in the religious domain will fare, simply because at that macrosocial level there are far too many variables at play.”

Despite the fact that most contemporary societies are described as secular there is no unified idea of secularism: its essence and practice change from country to country. In France, where the

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32 The hadith was related by Abu Davud, al-Hakim and al-Bayhaki in Ma’rif as reported by Abu Hurayry. Al’Albani described it as authentic (see: Sahih al-jami’ as-sagir [1874]).
bourgeois revolution of the late 18th century established inflexible principles of secularism not found elsewhere in Europe, the state has distanced itself from the Catholic Church while all sorts of religious rites are banned in the state educational establishments. In Germany, on the other hand, religion is taught among other subjects in the state schools while the followers of the Catholic and Evangelic churches pay church taxes. In Norway, the state supports confessions and even funds religious communities. The institute of state religion is present in the U.K., Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Greece, and other countries.

From the very first days of independence the post-Soviet Caucasian states had to identify the limits of secularism. Until recently, however, the relations between the state and religious institutions remained more or less vague. This happened at the time when religion in the West was regaining its lost ground: “In the stable democratic societies the political methods of regulating social relations are gradually retreating to be replaced with moral and religious norms. The religious factor is playing an increasingly greater role in the political process itself.”

In the Russian Federation religious policies are expected to promote “harmony rather than opposition between the secular and the religious.” At the same time, the state is consolidating the role of the Russian Orthodox Church in public life. The “dual standards” leave the religious minorities vexed: they insist on complete equality of all religions before the law and the state.

The Muslim clergy of the Russian Federation, the Council of Muftis of Russia in particular, defend the principle of secularism and call on the government to keep all confessions at an equal distance from itself. The Muslim clerics regard the legal relations regulated by international and federal laws as identical to the concept of contract in Islam.

Traditionally the Armenian Apostolic Church not only enjoys certain privileges but also greatly influences state policy. The constitutional amendment adopted by the 2005 referendum legalized the Armenian Apostolic Church’s special role: “The state recognizes the exclusive historical mission of the Armenian Apostolic Holy Church as a national church in spiritual life, in the development of national culture, and in the preservation of the national identity of the people of Armenia.” Earlier the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations recognized the Armenian Apostolic Church as the national church, although technically it was equal to the other religious organizations.

In Georgia, the church plays a much lesser role in social and political developments. Nevertheless, in 2003 the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state entered a Constitutional agreement that recognized the special role of Orthodoxy in shaping the Georgian nation and culture.

In Azerbaijan, with its predominantly Muslim population, neither the clergy nor the state has so far initiated a similar concordat despite the tangible Islamic influence on the masses. The relations between the state and religion should be clarified: today there are fears that the geopolitical reality and ideological expansion of the West might bring religious extremes in the form of fundamentalism and religious cosmopolitism.

The idea of a secular state in Azerbaijan is not opposed to religion, yet it presupposes that the religious factor should not be used “to alter the country’s strategic course, reorient religious ideas on a mass scale, or put psychological pressure on the broad popular masses through religious canons.”

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37 See: Kontseptsiya gosudarstvennoy religioznoy politiki RF, razrabotannaya kafedroy religiovedenia Rossiiskoy akademii gosudarstvennoy sluzhby pri Prezidente RF in 2003 g., available at [http://www.religare.ru/article927.htm].
This limits the role of Islam to a source of morality and “an element of what can instill compassion and solidarity.”

This means that the traditions of secularism in each of the Caucasian states are developing in the context of national, cultural, and religious specifics. In all of them the state is separated from the church, yet this principle is interpreted and applied in practice in full conformity with the objective (the ethnoconfessional picture, domestic policy, etc.) and subjective (interests of the political elite, activeness of the traditional religious institutions, etc.) factors.

Islam in the Caucasus: Standing up to Islamism

In the early post-Soviet period the Caucasus became the target of Sunni and Shi’a ideologies, which regarded the Shari’a state as the main objective of Islam. Today, religious and religious-political thought lumps them together under the blanket term Islamism (political Islam). At the same time, not all and every interference of Islam in politics can be dismissed as Islamism. Islam is not limited to the private lives of its followers; it is a comprehensive system that not only comprises the varied aspects of earthly life but also connects man with the Cosmos and his life on earth with eternity. The moral norms of Islam are applied both to spiritual life and to the relations between social structures. In other words, Islamic tradition demands that moral norms should be observed in politics as strictly as in economics, science, and other fields of human endeavor.

In the absence of a generally accepted conceptual apparatus the media and even the academic community are not alien to speculating about the concepts of Islamism and fundamentalism. Igor Dobaev, a leading Russian student of Islam and its problems in the Northern Caucasus, describes as Islamist all sorts of armed groups that he regards as either radical or as extremist or terrorist. K. Poliakov, on the other hand, sets apart Islamism, Islamic radicalism, Islamic extremism, and terrorism proper: to bundle them together, says he, renders opposition to the “negative phenomena in this sphere” unproductive.

Political Islam relies on the Islamic factor in its political struggle for the Shari’a state as its final aim. This sets strictly apart Islamism and the political activities of the Shi’a and Khawarij sects in the Caliphate, Islamism and 19th-century militant Muridism in the Caucasus, and Islamism and the political activities of parties that rely on Islamic morality yet are not seeking the Shari’a state (such is the Justice and Development Party in Turkey).

Interpreted in this way political Islam has nothing to do with the religious culture of the Caucasian peoples—it was elaborated by Muslim thinkers and public figures after 1924 when the Caliphate disappeared. Political experience of the Muslims of the Caucasus between the 1st Congress of the Muslims of Russia of 1905 and the establishment of Soviet power cannot be described as Islamism either because it stemmed, first and foremost, from defense of the Muslim peoples’ political, civil, and religious rights.

41 Ibid., p. 579.
42 For more detailed criticism of these religious-political trends, see: al-Madhali Rabi’ Hadi, Mudrost’ i logika prizyva prorokov k Allahu, Transl. from the Arabic by E. Kuliev, Badr Publishers, Moscow, 2000, pp. 106-120.
It was mainly Iranian missionaries who brought political Islam to Azerbaijan, while the Northern Caucasus got its share of it from the Gulf countries. The Islamists, however, failed to gain wider social strata: the pro-Iranian Islamic Party of Azerbaijan remained on the stage for less than three years: its official registration was annulled as early as in 1995. The Islamic Democratic Party of Azerbaijan born in 2002 has not yet obtained official registration. The Islamist ideas have gained no popularity in the country; those who side with the Shi’a leaders promoting political Islam are few and do not carry much weight with the public.

In the Northern Caucasus, the pro-Islamic parties and movements that appeared in 1989 and 1990 very soon fell apart into regional structures for want of inner unity, ramified ideology, political experience, and skilful management. Domestic instability in Daghestan and the war in Chechnia pushed the Islamist jamaats to radicalism; political methods of struggle were forgotten. This explains why in 1994 the leaders of the Islamic parties preferred not to apply for official registration. 45

What happened later in Chechnia and Daghestan strongly affected the religious and political preferences of the Muslims across the post-Soviet expanse. In the latter half of the 1990s radical Sunni ideas reached Azerbaijan from the Northern Caucasus. Later, however, in 1999-2000, when the Caucasian jamaats were defeated and the open armed conflict went underground, the influence of the Islamic radicals on the region subsided.

Why and how political Islam in the Northern Caucasus developed into a jihad is a separate subject. 46 Here I shall limit myself to saying that neither political Islam nor religiously motivated extremism became the key factors of religious development in the Caucasus. K. Gajiev has rightly pointed out: “The budding interest in Islam obvious among large groups in the Caucasus cannot be interpreted as a firm intention to adjust the lifestyle to the Islamic norms. In this context Islam cannot be regarded as a systemic factor of statehood and political strategies.”47 Alexey Malashenko confirms this by saying that Islam as a political instrument not only failed to bring together the Caucasian peoples—it split local society. 48

The negative effects of Islamic politicization and radicalization can be described as the highest stumbling block on the Muslim ummah’s road toward spiritual, economic, and cultural consolidation. Previous experience49 and the current political and socioeconomic situation in the Caucasus suggest that neither administrative methods nor force will produce the desired results unless genuine Islam based on spirituality, morality, tolerance, and the holy tradition adjusted to the current sociocultural conditions moves to the fore.

Those who think that Islam can be separated from the Shari’a are wrong.50 Russian expert on Islam Leonid Sjukijainen is convinced that the attempts to divorce Islam from the Shari’a will push...
this powerful political and ideological tool into the hands of Islamic radicals. "As a rule, Muslim laws are much more effective than civil legislation when it comes to pushing aside the adats found outside any legal system. This means that the Shari‘a is not merely a legal instrument proper but is also a powerful socio-psychological factor. We all know that Muslim laws are effective because they are especially close to the Muslims’ legal awareness and world outlook. They perceive the laws as closely connected with their national and cultural roots and faith. Muslim legislation is an instrument that makes the current laws legitimate." 51

It seems that a stronger position for the moderate Muslims actively involved in public life and state development is the only answer to the challenge of Islamism. To achieve this the legal principles and mechanisms of interaction between the state and the Islamic religious institutions should be improved; the most respected and knowledgeable religious leaders should be supported; if the state sides with those religious figures who have no support among the faithful it loses the chance of tapping the moral and intellectual potential of Islam needed to strengthen the state and civil society. In fact, in this situation society falls apart into jamaats. 52

C o n c l u s i o n

The above has demonstrated that the nature of Islam in the Caucasus largely depends on which of the interpretations of Islamic tradition triumphs in the near future and to what extent Islam will affect the sociocultural processes. So far, the passivity of official Islam and its inflexibility in the face of the revivalist ideas have limited Islam as a social regulator. The still pending political, social, and economic problems, along with the outside factors, create fertile ground for religious radicalism.

Under these conditions a special type of religiosity that brings together Islamic tradition and the readiness to critically revise it is badly needed. It should be free from extremism, radicalism, and isolationism; it should facilitate instead integration into society and involvement in social and political processes. So far, Muslim religious thinking in the Caucasus has been changing at a slow pace. The reformers who have some of the faithful on their side have neither an active religious position nor administrative, financial, and other support.

When deciding on the limits of secularism in Azerbaijan and the North Caucasian republics, the government is not taking full account of the potential of reformist Islam. The dialog with the Muslim communities is mostly one-sided; it can be described as an attempt to change the religious situation from above. The last three centuries, however, have demonstrated that force and administrative measures cannot produce long-term results. Today, these measures are even less effective than in the past because Islam is on the demographic and ideological offensive while the role of the Islamic world in global politics and economics is mounting.

ON THE FORMATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF RELIGIOUS THINKING IN PRESENT-DAY AZERBAIJAN

**Abstract**

This article looks at three areas in the formation and development of religious thinking in present-day Azerbaijan: religious thinking in the East-West context, the influence of globalization on religious thinking, and religious enlightenment. Keeping in mind the recent processes in Azerbaijan’s sociocultural sphere, the author raises several issues that reveal the cause-effect relation between religious thinking and the social life of the Azerbaijani people, particularly young people.

**Introduction**

The scientific research studies and journalistic articles written over the past 10-15 years often present various information and commentaries about how the Azerbaijani people are becoming alienated from their religion. If we take a look at recent events, we will see that the attempts of Christianity and various religious sects to draw people into their fold are intensifying and even surpassing the calls to embrace Islam, whereby the number of followers in the first instances is increasing with each passing day. This gives rise to certain questions. If this is the case, what faith have the Azerbaijani people been alienating themselves from over so many years and what religion do they wish to study at present? What effect will the import of Islam from such countries as Turkey, Iran, and Saudi Arabia have on the morality of the Azerbaijani people? Is Azerbaijan not faced with the danger of being blinded again after it emerges from the darkness into the light, but this time by the light, and not by the darkness it was in for such a long time?

Before answering these questions, we must clarify that by religious thinking we mean thinking formed on the basis of correct ideas about religion which people have a spiritual need for and which they preach, as well as on the basis of their striving for freedom, purity, and perfection. When talking about correct ideas, we mean an understanding of the fact that, first, Allah created man free, perfect, and with an understanding of the unity between the spiritual and corporeal origins, and, second, that man is a social being and a member of the society in which he lives. Here it is worth emphasizing several important points that play an important role in forming the religious outlook of today’s Azerbaijani and in determining its development in the future.

- **First**: Azerbaijan is geographically located at the crossroads between the East and the West. The people of Azerbaijan, who are of an indigenous Eastern nationality, are becoming orient-
ed today toward the West, and this disconnection from their roots is apparent not only in social life, but also in the formation of religious thinking.

- **Second:** the present-day Azerbaijani state is cooperating and exchanging scientific, political, and economic experience with the world’s leading countries (to be more precise, it is assimilating and incorporating their experience), that is, it is participating in globalization. This process, which is unfolding quite dynamically, has also had an effect on spirituality and religious thinking.

- **Finally, third,** religious enlightenment in Azerbaijan is at a very low level, and in some cases is absent altogether. Consequently, unenlightened Azerbaijanis, whose faith is at the level of superstition, easily fall under the influence of foreign missionaries and are used as potential “raw material” by various religious groups.

Taking into account the pertinence and, most important, the important role of these logically interrelated circumstances in the formation and development of the religious outlook of today’s Azerbaijanis, we should take a look at each of them separately.

**Religious Thinking in Azerbaijan in the East-West Context**

If we take a look at the history of philosophy, we can conclude that the territorial division of human thinking largely began in recent times and has intensified today. It is interesting that in antiquity and the Middle Ages, knowledge was not related to countries, when the talk turned to its being acquired in far-off regions. The Prophet Muhammad, who recommended going even as far as China in the quest for knowledge, was talking about true knowledge that cannot belong to one country in particular. Europeans studied the philosophy of Avicenna and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali not as Eastern thinking or an Eastern interpretation of Western science, but as wisdom leading to the truth. Z. Kulizade, who studied the laws governing the development of Eastern and Western philosophy in the Middle Ages, writes: “The specifics seen in the countries of the East and West can in no way hinder scientific attempts to comprehend the history of mankind, despite all of its diversity, as something integrated, or attempts to identify common laws governing this single process…”1 The researcher adds that these governing laws can be related not only to the economic, but also to the cultural development of the world.

Today it is an undeniable fact that there are indeed some differences in the way Eastern and Western philosophers express their thoughts and even in what they choose to think about. For example, as S. Khalilov notes, “in the East, man’s attitude toward the world is largely axiological in nature, outside events are assessed through the prism of individual morality, man forms a good or bad attitude toward them, after which this attitude is expressed either poetically (by means of eulogy or derision), or even less systemically and more impulsively at the level of ordinary consciousness.”2

This means that a person who lives in the East prefers to merely observe all that goes on around him and from such a great distance that he does not even notice how the East is trying to wrap itself up in Western clothing that is too tight for it, while the West, having deprived it of its spirit, forces it to deny itself.

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What about the situation in the West? As Wilfred J. Smith notes, one of the three things that amazed Muhammad Iqbal in the West was the disdain for humanity, de-humanization. When analyzing the thoughts of present-day Western philosophers, A. Ozturk writes: “Western materialist and liberal thinking, which promised to resolve the problems of mankind and ensure it economic and social prosperity, fulfilled its promise, on the one hand, and led to the appearance of greedy, purposeless, and insatiable types of people, on the other.”

People from both worlds are rapidly moving away from each other toward opposite poles: in the East, toward super individualism, and in the West, toward super liberalism, post-modernism, and other “isms.” In the East, each person wants to begin his own path from scratch, without taking heed of the fact that the West is already rich in such “brilliant,” but incomplete paths. There is no way people can become alienated from their inner world in order to become social beings, and they do not see the need to engage in material problems. Whereas Western people have become so social that they forget about the interconnection between the body and the soul and about the truth that defines their essence. But the saddest thing is that many see the consensus in these questions as “Westernization” or “Europeanization.”

But what is the situation in Azerbaijan? With its ancient history and culture, Azerbaijan has played an important role in the development and prosperity of culture throughout the East, especially the Muslim. Many of its philosophers and thinkers have made a contribution to the flourishing of Eastern philosophical thought, which became a source of ideas for the West. Nevertheless, all that has been said has long become history and is part of the past. Today the East, which has become a symbol of backwardness and ignorance, is becoming increasingly like the name it has been given with each passing day. The solution or path to development in everything, beginning with everyday issues and ending with academic problems, is being sought in “Westernization”: in borrowing Western culture, socialization, family ... thinking. The first three are already being introduced in various ways and in some sense have already achieved success in music, films, and architecture. Even traditional family standards are being increasingly replaced with “free” principles. The latter, that is, Western thinking, really does form the basis of the previous transformations and is a decisive factor, but will we be able to form this type of thinking? Let us direct our attention to an important fact: no matter how often we wear Western clothes and speak in Western languages, we will nevertheless remain Eastern people in the eyes of the West, who, to boot, are ashamed of belonging to the East and are blindly enraptured by their opponent.

Let us turn to Islam. The fact that the Quran contains ayats relating to several scientific discoveries has been repeatedly confirmed. We are far from believing that the Quran is a scientific work. Nevertheless, the above-mentioned fact shows that the Islamic religion is not only on the same level as scientific development, but also emphasizes its necessity. And so the attempt to accuse Islam of having a hostile attitude toward science can only be described as plain ignorance.

According to the Quran, Allah taught man all the names (sciences) that no one knew of apart from Him, and made him a caliph in the earth (Quran, 2:30). People share such qualities as justice, charity, and reason with Allah, and they are the only creation empowered by Allah to retain these qualities: “Surely We offered the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to be unfaithful to it and feared from it, and man has turned unfaithful to it; surely he is unjust,

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4 From the World of Mevlana’s Reflections, Compiled by N. Shimshekler, Konya, 2005, p. 227 (in Turkish).
5 Nor can the spirit of collectivism in the East be denied, although it is temporary: during prayers, rituals, and protection from enemies, it can in some cases even be raised to a high level. But in lengthier processes, like the development of science and culture, unification of the creative force of the nation, etc., this spirit is unfortunately manifested very weakly. Even in religion, when the matter concerns universal issues, each prefers to keep to his own path and convictions.
ignorant” (Quran, 33:72). Only man has been given the ability to think, reach perfection based on his own thinking, and help his people and society. Allah reminds people of this in almost every ayat: “Do you not think?” In other words, the Quran calls on every person to think and find his own development path, study his religion, and live in harmony with it: “why should not then a company from every party from among them go forth that they may apply themselves to obtain understanding in religion, and that they may warn their people when they come back to them that they may be cautious?” (Quran, 9:122).

Another issue I wish to address is the West’s negative attitude toward Islam. In many cases, the supporters of Westernization in Azerbaijan have a negative attitude toward Islam, juxtaposing the latter against the West. But if we take a closer look at Western thinking, we find an interesting contradiction. On the one hand, the West, which to some extent is going through a period of stagnation, is turning to the East again, particularly to the Muslim East. Western researchers are trying to carry out a more in-depth study of and understand the teaching of the Muslim philosophers, especially Sufism, which embraces the principles of love and perfection in Islam.6 On the other hand, the West is indeed very disdainful of Islam and the Prophet Muhammad. When analyzing the international events of recent years (political, military, economic, and cultural), as well as the attitude toward Islam in the Muslim countries, the conclusion can be drawn that the more the West studies Islam and discovers its supremacy and advantages, the more the Muslim is criticized for having an injudicious attitude toward his religion and the inability to make use of the perfect means he possesses. Indians come unwittingly to mind who, as the only landlords of the American continent, were happy to exchange gold and precious stones for the trinkets (matches, buttons, watches, etc.) brought in by Europeans, and today they are likened to “museum exhibits.”

Religious Thinking in Azerbaijan and Globalization

One of the important factors of Europeanization is involvement in the globalization process, and Azerbaijan is one of the countries to face this process. For the purpose of our article, two questions arise (in fact, there are scores of them): what is globalization and how does this process influence religious thinking in Azerbaijan?

The conclusions drawn on the basis of encyclopedic dictionaries and several fundamental research studies show that the spheres of impact of globalization and universalization, which encompass different spheres of human life (politics, economics, culture), are expanding. As S. Khalilov writes: “Globalization is trying to have an impact not only on universal human values—science and technology—but also on cultural and spiritual factors that define national uniqueness.”7 This means that globalization is influencing not only the external aspects of human life, but is also “encroaching” on man’s inner world, which plays an important role in forming the individual and even claims the right to govern him. But this process has its shortcoming: globalization, which proceeds from the material, social, and political position of man, influences his morality, that is, the material factor is taking the upper hand once more.

Today the world is turning into a vast market, and man, in the direct and indirect sense, is becoming the object of buy-sell transactions. Hegemonic countries, which rely on economic and mate-

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6 Despite the fact that such statements are frequently exotic in nature, the number of philosophical and scientific studies is constantly increasing.
rial prosperity, are forgetting about moral values and suppressing weak states, forcing them to “vol-
untarily” humiliate themselves and lose their human dignity.

It cannot be denied that globalization and universalization are irreversible processes, and we do
not intend to fight this or discuss only the negative aspects. But I would like to remind you of one
forgotten but important fact: society has not only material and social aspects, MAN created it and
participates in it. This means that he should be drawn wholly, that is, both spiritually and materially,
into the globalization process. Universal ideals of mankind and morality must be found, and man him-
self should stand at the peak of the globalization process.

How does globalization influence morality and religious thinking in Azerbaijan?

■ First, as was noted above, today we are assimilating the experience of other countries under
the guise of exchanging experience. As a result of this, nationalism and a national mentality
are presented as negative characteristics. In the states of the Far East (China, Japan, and Ma-
laysia), national roots are not the reason for backwardness but, on the contrary, act as the
main factor in preserving a nation’s specific characteristics and uniqueness. In other words,
these nations are developing without dissolving into others.

■ Second, in keeping with the requirements of globalization, Azerbaijan was forced to look at
its citizens’ problems not from the inside, but from the outside, turning a blind eye to the local
specifics of any problems. This means that the number of people behind each factor that is not
within the field of vision is not taken into consideration: they have to subordinate themselves
to demands they do not fully understand, which leads to perturbation in their inner world and
to blind imitation. As a result, the number of post-modernists, nihilists, and cosmopolitans
who have no understanding of national history and philosophy, but categorically reject them,
is increasing. This means that the citizens of Azerbaijan, which recently acquired its inde-
pendence, are trying to resolve the problems of states with a high level of development, by
explicating them onto their own country, instead of resolving their own problems. As a re-
result, young Azeris are unconsciously beginning to follow ideas and ideals which Europe is
consciously trying to deny.

These conditions, which are taken as an indicator of high development, are also having a
strong influence on the formation of religious outlook. Along with these actions, religion itself
cannot remain on the sidelines of globalization, and the inter-religious dialog is an example of
this. But an important fact should be emphasized here: a productive dialog can only take place
between equal sides. Otherwise, this will lead once more to one side dissolving into the other.
When we talk about equal, we do not mean the superiority of a religion or the country that rep-
resents it, but its representation, since in this respect Islam is inferior to the other religions, at
least in Azerbaijan.

Religious Enlightenment
in Azerbaijan

As we mentioned above, enlightenment is the first prerequisite of the correct formation and
development of religious outlook. In Azerbaijan, which has an ancient history and recently acquired
its independence, certain work is being carried out and planned in this area. Our analysis encompasses
a few contradictory questions relating to the present day and near future.

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8 We do not have any information about foreign states using Azerbaijan’s experience.
In order to understand the religious and enlightenment work being carried out in Azerbaijan at present, let us divide it into three areas:

(1) the activity of non-Islamic organizations;
(2) the activity of Islamic, mainly nontraditional, organizations;
(3) public awareness about Islam at the academic level.

Before analyzing each of them separately, it should be noted that religious enlightenment is being carried out in different forms and at different levels and can be classified as follows:

(a) open religious enlightenment, including at the academic level;
(b) organized missionary activity under the guise of other legal activity;
(c) unorganized individual activity (in reality, it is possible that a system might exist behind the individuals carrying it out);
(d) illegal activity.

Now we will turn to a more in-depth discussion of each of the three above-mentioned areas.

- The first area consists of non-Islamic organizations. In Azerbaijan, the activity of non-Islamic groups, both legal and illegal, is well known and often at the center of society’s attention. The spread of nontraditional religious ideas in a state that guarantees freedom of conscience and confession is a normal phenomenon. In this article, we are not aiming to analyze the positive and negative aspects of the activity of missionary organizations, we are only trying to describe its influence on religious consciousness.

As noted above, at present non-Islamic organizations are becoming more widespread and developing at a faster rate in Azerbaijan than in Muslim communities. These structures sometimes act illegally, but more often are registered with the state as religious communities or operate under the cover of other types of activity. Their influence on public consciousness can be divided into several stages.

— At the first stage, various kinds of social projects are carried out which ensure sectarian organizations the support of the masses and expand their social base. As a rule, the ranks of their adepts are filled with poor people or young people from wealthy families who have not found their place in society.

— At the second stage, religious and enlightenment work is carried out: the dissemination of printed, audio, and video material, the showing of feature and documentary films, mass meetings, and individual talks. An important aspect of missionary activity is to get the audience to understand the exclusivity of their teaching and the importance of their organization. As spiritual ties stimulated by additional factors (material aid, job assistance, and so on) are established, the organization leaders carry out screening among the local followers in order to further expand and intensify their activity.

— The third stage is carried out clandestinely and involves adepts who have the necessary psychic traits and intellectual abilities and have been able to demonstrate these abilities and prove their loyalty to the organization’s ideals. They are taught the organization’s fundamentals and methods of activity and are set specific goals and tasks. This type of missionary activity is usually not aimed at forming a rational attitude toward religion, but at indoctrinating fanatic-minded religious masses to be used as a political tool.

- The second area of religious enlightenment is the activity of Islamic trends, primarily of radical Shi’ites, Wahhabis, Nur followers, and various Sufi Tariqahs. Learning the tradition-
al forms of Islam is not systemic due to the low enlightenment activity of the clergy and the state’s lack of interest in this issue. The methods used by nontraditional Islamic groups have a lot in common with those of non-Islamic organizations, although they also have certain specific traits of their own. The central and most important of them is propaganda of the system-forming postulate of Islam—worshipping Allah alone. In addition, the end political goal of some Islamic organizations, particularly those financed from abroad, is to gain political power, build an Islamic state, and establish Shari’a laws.

When comparing the political aspect of the activity of Islamic and non-Islamic groups, it can be concluded that the first are focused on spreading religious and political ideas among the broad masses, while the second are satisfied with lobbying their own interests in political and economic circles and supporting the politicians loyal to them. Religion is used for political aims in the first and second cases, and in this respect the activity of Islamic groups is of no less threat to the spiritual and cultural uniqueness of Azerbaijan’s people than the missionary activity of non-Islamic organizations. We will show several aspects of the negative influence of nontraditional Islamic organizations.

— *First*, they restrict the universal values of Islam to certain temporary, historical, or ethnocultural frameworks, subordinating the universal mission of this religion to the interests of individual groups. In the final analysis, this leads to the distortion of Islam and its transformation into a tool used for political, military, and other purposes. It stands to reason that the enlightenment activity of most nontraditional Islamic groups concentrates on explaining religious rituals and the importance of the religious institutions that have developed within a specific trend, and not on the spiritual or moral-ethical aspect of religion.

— *Second*, the information they spread about Islam is biased. While asserting the exclusivity of their own interpretation of religious ideas, practice, and social teaching, the spiritual leaders of these trends categorically deny all other possible interpretations. In so doing, they hinder the development of religious thought and provoke opposition among the different Islamic trends.

— *Third*, such organizations are fomenting a split within the Islamic world and hindering political, economic, cultural, and spiritual rapprochement among Muslim people in the provinces. The sectarian nature of their activity is aggravating the weakness of Muslim communities and making them more vulnerable in the face of economic, cultural, and other types of foreign expansion. It is obvious that precisely this understanding is the reason why many Azeris are less tolerant of nontraditional Islamic groups than the followers of other faiths.

— *Fourth*, the idea of exclusivity that is promulgated by nontraditional trends prompts their followers to reject the world around them and show aggression toward everything “alien.” Consequently, the religious environment becomes fertile ground for spreading extremist ideologies. The Assassins are a good example of this type of Islam in history. This organization was created “in the name of Allah” and later became a threat to the religion itself. Although religious terrorism did not become widespread in Azerbaijan, certain of the country’s citizens became involved in terrorist activity.

So neither the Islamic nor the non-Islamic missionary organizations have the aim of developing religious consciousness or promoting any deep and conscientious assimilation by the masses of universal human ideals, but are bent on promulgating religious views that are limited to specific political or economic (material) interests.
The third area of religious enlightenment in Azerbaijan covers programs carried out at the academic level (scientific research, dissertations, monographs, and periodicals). We will note that the enlightenment activity of both non-Islamic and Islamic organizations at this level is gradually intensifying and is already yielding its first fruits. Since systemic knowledge about religion as a whole and Islam in particular is not given due attention at secondary and higher educational institutions, and the education level at Baku State University, which has the only theological department in the country, is not high, scientific research in religion is limited and carried out with great difficulty. The main shortcoming in this area is the shortage of qualified specialists and the absence of a systemic approach to the study and teaching of religion.

Conclusion

So religious consciousness in Azerbaijan has mainly been developing over the past two decades under the influence of nontraditional ideas that are not in harmony with the Azerbaijani mentality and the centuries-long spiritual-cultural traditions of the country’s people. Systemizing and establishing “gentle” control over this issue is impossible without an efficient system of religious enlightenment, including at the academic level. In our opinion, the following recommendations should be taken into account to solve this task:

— cultural-religious enlightenment must begin at a young age using cartoons, children’s books, and other educational means that instill in the young generation a spirit of respect for national spiritual values and universal human ideals;

— textbooks for secondary and higher educational institutions must be prepared keeping in mind the historical and cultural features of the spread of religions, particularly Islam, in Azerbaijan. This goal can only be reached if specialists are involved who are capable not only of selecting learning material that meets didactic requirements, but who also keep in mind the specifics of the religious sphere. Books written in other countries can be used to prepare these textbooks, but they should not define the content of the curriculum and general trends of the learning process;

— several valuable sources on Quran studies, Hadith studies, and Islamic jurisprudence, as well as the works of outstanding Muslim thinkers, should be translated into Azeri. The value of such translations is growing as the Islamic library in Azeri becomes replenished with fundamental religious works that have a nontraditional ideological nature and can be distributed using the resources of foreign funds;

— research work in religious studies and theology should be expanded, the writing of dissertations and monographs on pertinent topics encouraged, the prestige of Azerbaijan’s theological and religious studies school raised, and jobs for religious study experts and theologians found.
RUSSIA: PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE COOPTATION OF GRADUATES OF ISLAMIC HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS INTO THE OFFICIAL MUSLIM CLERGY (DAGHESTAN CASE-STUDY)

Abstract

This article looks at the problems relating to the integration of graduates of Islamic higher educational institutions into the structure of the traditional Muslim clergy as a special case of interaction between Muslim traditionalists and the followers of renovated Islam in Russia. In his analysis of the personnel potential of the Muslim clergy in Dagestan, the author emphasizes the need to develop an integrated Islamic education system and use it to resolve the urgent problems of the country’s Muslim communities.

Introduction

Religious revival in present-day Russia, which has aroused an interest in religion, became a catalyst for the development of Russia’s confessional education system. Islam also became a part of this trend even though Muslims are a confessional minority in Russia. Today a multistage system of Islamic education is gradually developing in the country, primarily in the national republics where Muslims traditionally live. Sunday schools, which are similar to maktabs, primary religious schools, have opened at almost all mosques, and madrasahs, Islamic institutes, universities, and so on have appeared. Moreover, many Russian Muslims have been able to go abroad to obtain an Islamic education.

Daghestan’s Muslims
Do Not Have Enough Teachers:
How is This Problem Being Resolved?

At the beginning of the 1990s, foreign missionaries had an immense influence on the formation of the Muslim education system in Russia. Democratization of public life made it possible to restore
relations with people of the same faith living abroad. The official leaders of the spiritual administrations largely assisted this process. First, the muftis themselves thought it very natural that foreign missionaries be allowed to participate in the education of Russian Muslims at the very beginning of the 1990s and did not see anything reprehensible in this. Second, the fact that they had no teaching staff of their own left no other choice.

Foreign missionaries were primarily engaged in teaching Arabic, how to read the Quran, and the fundamentals of Islam (for example, the rules for performing religious rituals). At the madrasah level, foreign missionaries gave lessons in how to read the Quran (tajwid), the fundamentals of doctrine (aqida), Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), Arabic grammar, and so on. So they played a more important role in forming the new Muslim clergy that received its education in the restored madrasahs and Islamic higher educational institutions that opened.

Daghestan is primarily interesting as a republic with the most religious Muslim population. It should be noted that the Arab countries of the Middle East, particularly the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the neighboring monarchies of the Persian Gulf, have had a great influence on religious education in the Northeastern Caucasus. This influence took the form of support of the Salafite (fundamentalist) movement in the Eastern Caucasus. The first preachers of “pure Islam” were Abbas and Bagauddin Kebedov, who were involved in the underground teaching of their followers in Daghestan as early as Soviet times. Another, but moderate supporter of fundamentalism, was Akhmadkadi Akhtaev.

Bagauddin Kebedov set up the Kavkaz Islamic Center in Makhachkala, published the newspaper al-Halif, and opened a madrasah in Kiziliurt, which functioned from 1989 to 1997 and taught up to 700 students every year. The well-known Satlanda Publishing Center began to operate in the village of Pervomaiskoe in the Khasaviurt District of Daghestan. It circulated a large amount of fundamentalist literature that became widespread not only in the Northern Caucasus, but also in all the regions of Russia. It was Bagauddin Kebedov who managed to establish relations with the “charity” foundations of Arab countries that financed the activity of fundamentalists, which subsequently led to a split among the Salafites.

Relatively moderate Akhmadkadi Akhtaev “missed the boat” and was unable to implement any educational measures, in contrast to more radical Bagauddin Kebedov.\(^1\)

Other missionaries from abroad were also active in the Northern Caucasus, in particular, Egyptian Servakh Abid Saad, who came to Daghestan in 1992 and headed the Russian branch of the Ikra Society, coordinating activity with representatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia authorities and the Saudi special services. In addition to this, Servakh helped young Daghestanis to go abroad and study at the well-known Egyptian university of Al-Azhar.\(^2\)

The events in Chechnia played a great role in radicalizing the Islamic movement in Daghestan. On its territory, which was “floating free” (after the Khasaviurt agreements), an infrastructure began to be formed for training new fighters under the guise of studying the foundations of Islam. Using money supplied by extremist organizations in Chechnia, a network of camps—“madrasahs”—unfolded. Under Khattab’s supervision, a “learning center” consisting of five camps was created in the village of Serzheniurt, where “students” studied Arabic, the Shar’a, and military science (partisan war tactics, subversive activity, and so on). At the end of 1997, above-mentioned Bagauddin Kebedov moved from Daghestan to the town of Urus-Martan, where a large Wahhabi center was formed which coordinated the actions of the radicals in Daghestan.\(^3\)

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After all the events relating to the encroachment of militants into Daghestan, and due to the fact that the authorities began paying keener attention to this problem, the open activity of fundamentalists was halted. Today, the basic Muslim education system is traditional in nature. It educates professionals for the Islamic clergy.

The current system of higher Muslim education that has developed in Russia (in particular, in Daghestan) is extremely amorphous in nature. This is due to the absence of universal teaching standards, the very unorganized implementation of school curriculums (and often their complete absence), and insufficient secularism, which has an effect on the quality of higher Islamic education in Russia. So there is no great difference among Islamic madrasahs, institutes, and universities.

Students and graduates from these higher education institutions have chosen religion not only as a world outlook, but also as a sphere of their future professional activity. So it is natural that they wish to be coopted into the Muslim clergy and realize their potential as specialists in this field. Any graduate of an Islamic higher educational establishment strives to become the imam of a mosque (find a job in a muftiate [Islamic High Council]), a teacher of the fundamentals of Islam in a Sunday school, and so on.

In order to gain a better understanding of this problem, some statistics are worthy of our attention. For example, according to the official data there are a total of 1,786 religious facilities (mosques) in Daghestan, and 2,400 clergymen, but if we add unregistered mosques, their number will most likely top 2,000.

As for the clergy, the official statistics probably do not reflect the real state of affairs either. As a rule, one imam, one muedzin (an imam’s assistant who announces the call to prayer), and one mudarris (Sunday school teacher) serve in a typical parish (a mosque jamaat). But this is also rather approximate data, since in remote rural jamaats, these positions might all be performed by the imam himself, who also teaches in the Sunday school. While the duties of the muedzin are performed on a voluntary basis by one of the most educated members of the community. In large city mosques, due to the large number of parishioners, the number of clergy could be higher.

So even the most superficial estimate of three clergy members per mosque provides a figure of more than 6,000 clergymen in Daghestan. Such diverging figures are explained by the fact that the official statistics only take into account clergymen appointed to their posts by the official structures of the spiritual administrations. This means that Sufi sheikhs, their followers, people performing religious activities on a voluntary basis, and others, are not included in the statistic reports.

However, even in the face of this inflated figure (6,000 people), the official data on higher Islamic educational institutions in Daghestan are extremely interesting: there are 14 Islamic educational institutions registered in the republic that claim the status of higher educational establishments, with a total number of about 5,200 students (at the end of 2005, 4,400 people were studying at madrasahs, and 4,000 at primary schools).

If we take into account that the average length of study at a higher educational institution is 5-6 years, the approximate number of graduates every year amounts to 1,000 people (that is, 1/6 of the total number of clergy members throughout Daghestan). People who have already obtained a profes-
sional religious education, self-taught people (who have inherited their religious knowledge from Sufi sheikhs), and those who have studied abroad and subsequently returned to their homeland should also be added to this figure.

Even if we remember that some of the students are girls, as well as the residents of other neighboring North Caucasian republics, the number of people every year wishing to find a job after graduating from an Islamic higher educational institution in official Muslim structures might appear to be lower. But we should also keep in mind people who have obtained their education abroad. In September 2006, Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan A. Abdulatipov estimated the number of people “from among the Dagestani nationalities” studying at theological educational institutions abroad to range between 1,500 and 2,500.6

So “oversaturation of the market,” to put it in economic terms, is obvious in such a unique sphere as Muslim religious services. Researchers note that at present all graduates of Islamic higher educational institutions functioning in Dagestan are facing difficulties with finding a job. Whereby this problem is also related to the fact that “diplomas from Islamic higher educational institutions are not recognized by secular state institutions, since their programs do not correspond to the state standards of the Russian Education Ministry,” which makes it impossible for their graduates to work in other spheres.7

But the official Muslim clergy is still talking about the shortage of qualified personnel. On the official site of the Islamic High Council of Dagestan in the section on the North Caucasian Islamic University, the following statement is given as one of the reasons for its activity: “There is still a shortage of literate and qualified imams and religious officials in the republic.”8

We can agree that the level of education of today’s clergy is a problem. It is primarily related to the low level of secular, and not religious, education, which makes it impossible to establish an efficient counterbalance to the extremist propaganda. According to the official data, 31.6% of the imams have a higher religious education, 22.9% have secondary, and 38.7% are self taught (here it is worth noting the sufficiently high level of religious education of the Sufi followers, “murshids,” who are most likely also included in this figure). Only 7.8% of the imams have a higher secular education, and 44.1% have a secondary education.9

The official clergy’s assertion that there are not enough qualified Islamic clergymen is most probably related to the vacancies existing in the provinces. In all likelihood, the graduates of Islamic higher educational institutions do not want to go and live in remote villages, since they feel that this is below their dignity. So their job-hunting problems are largely similar to those encountered by the graduates of secular higher educational institutions. Their number in Russia today has also exceeded all conceivable bounds along with the low quality of education obtained in all manner of newly-hatched “universities” and “academies.”

But this problem in North Caucasian conditions is acquiring a totally different hue. The inability of young people to be coopted into the official clergy and realize their potential in their field of professional specialization is forcing them to look for alternative ways of self-realization. In light of the ethnopolitical instability and the external influence of Islamic radicals on the North Caucasian region, this question is becoming extremely urgent.

9 See: Muslim Clergy of the Republic of Dagestan, Dagestan Government Committee for Religious Affairs.
The entire Muslim clergy of Russia can be divided provisionally into three groups: imams and muftis who headed the spiritual administrations of Muslims (SAM) during Soviet times and still retain their posts in the post-Soviet period; aged elders who traditionally head communities in the provinces; and clergymen who have obtained their education in the post-Soviet period, that is, during the religious revival.

Imams and muftis of the Soviet period. This is the smallest, but sufficiently influential element of the Muslim clergy in present-day Russia. The average age of these people is between 45 and 65. They are mainly imams and muftis in large cities who have a decent education (for the most part they are graduates of the Bukhara madrasah of Mir-Arab and the followers of well-known Sufi sheikhs). Many of them had the opportunity to continue their studies in foreign Muslim countries. They have a good command of Arabic, but due to lack of practice not many of them can actually communicate in it. They have maintained their position and authority due to their in-depth knowledge. Many have had rather difficult lives; they have had to deal with the unfriendly attitude toward them from an atheistic society and the party elite, whom they had to encounter during their work. Most of them are loyal to the local power structures, which very often makes it possible to use their resource during election campaigns, as well as rely on them when resolving particular conflict situations. The authorities appreciate their loyalty and respond in kind. They are often invited to various meetings, inaugurations, and so on.

Elders. These are old and elderly people. In terms of numbers, there are more of them than the imams and muftis of the Soviet period. They are mainly self-taught teachers who work in villages and small settlements. They learned the fundamentals of religion from their parents, and only a small number of them had any connection with the old system of religious education (maktabs and madrasahs), which continued to exist for some time after the events of 1917. Many of them adhere to various Sufi trends which they glean from the old literature, but they do not have clear ideas about Sunnite Islam and its dogma. But this assertion is not entirely true of Dagestan, where even under the conditions of Soviet atheism, underground religious schools that function around the well-known Sufi sheikhs were preserved, and where sufficiently in-depth religious knowledge was taught. The elders have preserved and maintained their authority largely due to their advanced age (respect for the elderly is still an important principle among Russian Muslims). They are often surrounded by a small number of companions, also elderly, who regularly attend church services and actively participate in the community’s life. This entourage also becomes the “council of elders,” on which they rely. Most elders are apolitical. Their main duty is to hold church services and perform religious rituals.

Imams of the renovated period. This is the most diverse and largest group of Russia’s Muslim clergy. They are mainly young people who obtained their religious education not long before the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and during the post-Soviet period. They have different levels of knowledge. Some studied in Islamic countries and obtained a prestigious religious education. But even those who studied at madrasahs and Islamic institutes in Russia are essentially not far behind their successful peers (for example, in the command of Arabic). Many of them had teachers who came from Muslim countries. So they are distinguished from the elders by their sufficiently in-depth understanding of Sunnite Islam. Many of them are rather pragmatic, and some have high ambitions. Most of them do not have enough life experience and secular education, so they often fall under the influence of radicals. With respect to the correlation between religion and politics, they uphold different views, from moderate to radical.
In order to make it easier to analyze the relations among these groups, the first will be called “muftis,” the second “elders,” and the third “imams,” but in real-life situations their actual title might be different.

Muftis have quite a lot of influence on the elders in remote areas, particularly if the mosque belongs to the Islamic High Council. Elders usually support their muftis and often refer to their authority when communicating with the local people. For their part, the former turn a blind eye to the incompetence of the latter (the large number of mistakes during services, the frequently elementary lack of knowledge of Islamic dogmas, etc.). This wounds the vanity of imams who would like to see themselves in their place. So the muftis often have to regulate relations between the elders and imams.

On the one hand, the shortage of people compels the muftis to include imams in the work at the mosques, but on the other, this work boils down to performing religious rituals. The muftis retain the prerogative of resolving management questions and working with officials of the local administration on specific issues. They enjoy immense support in the provinces from the elders and young imams, but their attitude toward the latter is very unequivocal, since they are rivals in the fight for leadership in the communities and Islamic High Councils. Nevertheless, the position of the muftis today is quite stable, since they usually enjoy the support of the local power structures.

The most inflexible relations are developing between the elders and young imams who feel they have superior knowledge of the rules of Islam and are trying to squeeze out the former. The muftis attempt to settle these conflicts, but they rely on the opinion of the community itself. In this event, the elders win, since they have the support of “council of elders” behind them. Young parishioners also recognize the superiority of the imams, so they often interfere in the situation, but even in these cases their opinion is not taken into account. So many young imams are left without a job in the active mosques. But most of them do not turn away from religious life (they continue to fast and attend Friday prayer meetings and holiday prayer services) and partially carry out religious activity (at the request of the believers they conduct memorial readings of the Quran, mejlises, perform marriage ceremonies, “niqiah,” and so on). On the whole, the parallel religious activity of the imams irritates the elders, but they are unable to do anything about it.

Another important role of the imams should be noted. It is precisely this element that is becoming the main teachers at maktabs and madrasahs. In the near future, these people will assume the role of the main enlighteners of the Muslim people of Russia. Most of them who obtained an education in Russian madrasahs will carry out teaching activity at mosque schools at the primary level. Those who studied abroad will mainly become teachers at madrasahs and Islamic institutes, that is, in areas of professional religious education. This process will largely be promoted by the following factors: first, by the clergy’s and government’s understanding of the undesirability of permitting foreign missionaries to participate in the education of Russian Muslims; second, most young imams will not be able to coopt into the official Muslim clergy and occupy positions of community leaders and heads of spiritual administrations of Muslims.

In their struggle for leadership, young imams very often find support among the leaders of nationalistic movements. As a rule, all kinds of “amirs” and the heads of so-called “youth jamaats” carrying out ideological and terrorist activity with the support of various foundations that have their
roots in Near and Middle Eastern countries appeared precisely during cooperation between the young imams of the renovation period and the leaders of nationalistic movements.

As a rule, when Islamist groups were first formed, militant “jamaats” were replenished with people without an education (mainly marginal elements) who easily submitted to “brainwashing” with the use of religious slogans. But as Daghestanian expert on Islam Kh.T. Kurbanov notes: “Since the second half of 2005, members of the Muslim intelligentsia have also been appearing in the extremist underground as active participants of terrorist groups.”

The killing of Yasin (Makhach) Rasulov and Abuzagir Mantaev in Daghestan as members of terrorist groups shows this type of trend. The former graduated from the Imam Shafii Islamic Institute and Department of Foreign Languages of Daghestan State University and was a postgraduate student at the Department of Religious Studies at Daghestan State University. According to initial data, Yasin Rasulov was killed as a member of a terrorist group on 24 October, 2005, but was later identified among the members of the Janet and Shari’a militant jamaats killed at the beginning of April 2006. On 9 October, 2005, A. Mantaev was killed as a member of the Shari’a militant jamaat. In 2002 he defended his dissertation for a Ph.D. degree in political science on the topic of Wahhabism and the Political Situation in Daghestan.

The names of both of these people feature in the letter entitled “Impious Theologians of Daghestan,” which focused on the “ignorance” of official representatives of the republic’s Muslim clergy. The criticism is based on fundamentalists’ standard accusations of the Sufis: “These so-called ‘alims’ have not published anything apart from books of mawlids13 for umpteen years,” and so on. In addition to theological differences (criticism of the tradition of mawlid, which is recognized by fundamentalists as bid’a—a sinful innovation), the clergy is also accused of greed: “With mean expressions of bigotry and stupidity, wearing clownish turbans and faqir robes, they confirm their khutbas, like broken records, in broken Russian from the minbar, repeating topics of ablation and other ritual subtleties for years on end, ending their sermons with requests for material aid… They take from Islam the part that is convenient and materially satisfying for them, openly and clandestinely cooperating with the enemies of Islam and Muslims and receiving handouts from them for this.” A propaganda play confirmed: “Isolated truly god-fearing academics like Abuzagir Mantaev (inshalla, shahid) and sheikh Yasin Rasulov have embraced jihad in order that Allah’s WORD stand above all else!”

Such accusations of the official clergy are also made by other representatives of youth Islamist movements of the Northern Caucasus. In Kabardino-Balkaria, graduates of Saudi Arabian institutes, Mussa Mukhozhev, Anzor Astemirov, and others, became the propagators of fundamentalist ideology. After organizing an attack on the building of the defense and security structures in Nalchik on 13-14 October, 2005, A. Astemirov gave an interview to a member of the Turkish Caucasus Foundation organization, which maintains close contacts with the separatist movements of the Northern Caucasus and mainly consists of representatives of the Caucasian communities in Turkey. The first thing he did was to thank his first teachers from Turkey, Jordan, and Syria. At the beginning of the 1990s, foreign missionaries taught in Kabardino-Balkaria and, according to A. Astemirov, aroused his interest in Islam. Later he studied for some time at a university in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia). When he returned to Kabardino-Balkaria, he and his companions created a “civilian association,” that is, a “jamaat,” the main purpose of which was to educate and train young people. He

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10 Kh.T. Kurbanov, op. cit., p. 114.
12 See: Kh. T. Kurbanov, op. cit., p. 115.
13 Mawlds are collections of songs that are sung during celebration of the month of the birth of the Prophet Muhammad according to the Muslim chronology of Hijri.
accuses the official clergy, which did not approve of the active participation of young Muslims, of all that happened. A. Astemirov accused them of greed, claimed that they charge a fee for performing funerals and marriage ceremonies, that is, “take money from the living, from the dead, and in general from everything.” Without taking the blame for organizing the bloody events, claiming that they were provoked and spontaneous in nature, A. Astemirov said: “We did not subordinate to those who have turned religion into a source of revenue, so we were attacked by the security services.”

Today, the low level of education among the traditional Muslim clergy makes it impossible to effectively rebuff the radical extremists. According to Chairman of the SAM of Kabardino-Balkaria A. Pshikhachev, “a home-bred rural mullah, who does not have a special education and whose work is limited to performing funeral services, cannot oppose the propagandists of extremism.”

The uncontrolled departure of Russian Muslims abroad in order to obtain a religious education usually leads to many of them falling under the influence of different nongovernmental fundamentalist groups. The agreements between SAMs and foreign educational centers provide financial support for study abroad, that is, travel and living expenses are paid, students receive stipends, and so on. Whereas if students travel abroad independently, they do not have the funds to live and study on. Various Islamic foundations assume responsibility for their problems, which have their own representative offices at some learning institutions. Many of them are associated with the Persian Gulf countries, since it is precisely these states that can provide generous financing. These “charity” foundations help students who arrive to solve their housing problems, provide them with stipends, and furnish them with the “appropriate” literature. It stands to reason that this “attention” has its consequences: students take special courses and attend the lectures of those sheikhs designated by their “sponsors.” All of this leads to many of the Russian Muslims who return home after studying abroad not only upholding radical views, but also continuing to maintain ties with Islamic “charity” organizations. Moreover, some of them use their ties to help new students travel abroad to study.

Renat Raev, rector of the Russian Islamic University in Ufa, gave the following reply in an interview when he was appointed as mufti of the Cheliabinsk and Kurgan regions to a question about students being sent abroad: “We send some of our best graduates to continue their studies at Al-Azhar University in Egypt, the largest Muslim higher educational institution in the world. But students obtain their basic religious education and knowledge about the fundamentals of dogma here. Abroad they mainly study Arabic. As practice has shown, those students who only obtain their religious education abroad return home with ideas that are alien to our Muslims. In most cases, they are more detrimental than beneficial to Muslim communities.”

It should be noted that T. Tajuddin, head of the Central Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia (CSAM), supported the idea of the need to enter intergovernmental agreements between Russia and some Arab countries, in accordance with which visas would only be issued to students with the consent of the Russian Islamic High Councils. He noted: “There was a time when not young people, but children aged 14-15, and even 13, traveled abroad. They were sent without any registration, without instructions from the spiritual administrations of Muslims.” According to him, many obtained an education that “in no way corresponded to our traditions.” The supreme mufti also directed attention to the staffing problem: “A large number of mosques are being built, but there are not

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enough people who can preach in compliance with the fundamentals of traditional Islam.” T. Tajuddin emphasized that only students who spend two years studying at preparatory educational institutions and four years at university are subsequently sent to Al-Azhar. It should also be noted that the CSAM does not send students to study in Saudi Arabia and is holding talks to negotiate sending some Russian Muslims to study in Morocco and Syria.18

The Muslim Administration of the Northern Caucasus is of the same opinion. In an interview, Chairman of the SAM of Daghestan Akhmad-Haji Abdullaev noted that during the two years of his work, approximately thirty people who had obtained a primary religious education at home were sent abroad through official channels. He said on this account: ‘I am not in favor of sending our children abroad, on the contrary, I say that there are qualified ulims in our republic and the fundamentals of Islam should be studied here.’19

But sending Russian Muslims abroad, despite the more cautious approach to this practice, is continuing. For example, at the beginning of 2006, the Council of Muftis of Russia and the Abu Nur Islamic Educational Center (Damascus) signed an agreement on cooperation in Muslim education according to which 120 Russian Muslims will have the opportunity to study at this Islamic higher educational institution. Three different types of courses can be taken: a complete study course lasting seven years, including study in a college, at an Islamic department, and at a department of Shari’a sciences (20 people); seven-month advanced training courses for imams, hatybs, kazis, and teachers of religion and theologians (50 people); and Arabic and Islamic science courses lasting one year (50 people).20

**Conclusion**

So today there is no clear development conception for the Muslim education system in Russia. The lack of standard curriculums, certification of graduates of higher educational institutions, study requirements, financial difficulties, and so on mean that the education level at most Islamic higher educational institutions in Russia does not correspond to the level of higher education and is not much different from the secondary, madrasah, level. So study at foreign centers is frequently considered more preferable.

The succession of generations in the Muslim clergy in present-day Russia will continue to be an important factor influencing the development of religion for a long time to come. The growing competition between the old and young generations of the Muslim clergy is largely being aggravated due to the rivalry among the SAMs, when their leaders often accuse each other or specific imams for absolutely no reason of adhering to Wahhabism.

Young people who have obtained their education in the post-Soviet period and in particular those who have studied abroad are more subject to radicalism. Unemployment and the impossibility of graduates of Islamic higher educational institutions to become coopted into the official clergy are some of the radicalizing factors, along with the economic crisis and the conflict potential of certain regions. This is giving rise to acute rivalry which is being expressed in opposition between traditionalists and Wahhabis (fundamentalists). This situation is largely caused not only by the differences in theological views (for example of the Sufis and fundamentalists in Daghestan and

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Chechnia), but also by the use of religious differences in the struggle for leadership and influence on the communities.

The increase in extremist and terrorist activity is largely occurring under conditions of permanently aggravated ethnopolitical relations against the background of corruption in the power structures, socioeconomic instability, and unemployment among young people. The quantitative increase in the number of Muslim clergymen unable to coopt into the official clergy and realize their potential within the framework of existing sociopolitical relations continues to promote the formation of an extremist underground. This situation is characteristic not only of Daghestan, but also of several other regions of Russia.

The killing of certain people with a high educational status during antiterrorist operations shows the tendency toward people with prestigious secular and religious education becoming involved in terrorist groups and claiming the role of “ideological workers.” It goes without saying that they fell under the influence of radical fundamentalist ideas. Moreover, their going underground shows that they were unable to realize their potential legally within the framework of current sociopolitical relations or be coopted into the official clergy.
During the second half of the first millennium B.C., three ethnically different states arose on the territory of the present-day Caucasus. At different times in their history, they tried with varying success to achieve political and ideological supremacy in the Caucasus, in so doing bringing the political and geographic boundaries into coincidence with each other. And foreign...
powers, whether they were hostile or friendly, were interested throughout the whole of ancient and medieval history in possessing or primarily maintaining a united Caucasus and not merely one individual country.

The perception of the Caucasus by foreign powers (“they”) as a single whole compelled the Caucasian countries, also as a consolidated front (“we”), to oppose the outside world. One of the manifestations of this unity was the almost simultaneous declaration in Armenia, Georgia, and Albania of Christianity as the state religion. The Caucasus set up a single ideological front in opposition to the assimilation policy of the great empires of the East. Its location at the crossroads of the Western and Eastern civilizations, its single religion, its close cultural-everyday contacts, and the powerful process of ethnocultural interpenetration, particularly in the border provinces, gave rise to a typologically new, so-called Caucasian civilization.

The adoption of a Greek-style alphabet (capital writing, page orientation from left to right, vocalization, alphabetic order, and so on) and translation of all the books of the Bible physically expressed this choice.

Unity of Opposites

But the strength and wealth of the Caucasus consisted not only of unity, but also (and to no lesser extent) of the political, ethnic, cultural, and ideological uniqueness of its components. Full ideological unification under the conditions of those times posed a certain danger to the national independence of the Caucasian countries. Christian Byzantium and Mazdean Iran strove for their unification in a way that served their own interests, since a single religion would have deprived the Caucasian countries of the possibility of balancing between the empires of the West and East. This was why all the attempts of the Caucasian countries to preserve a single Christian faith displayed rudiments of self-denial from the very beginning. A church schism was just crying to happen long before it actually did. The struggle for priority in the Caucasus and for national independence to boot, as well as the need to defend themselves from the influence of the Byzantine and Iranian empires, on the one hand, and from interregional mutual influence, on the other, led the Caucasian countries to choose different trends among the main branches in Christianity that arose in the heart of the Eastern church in the 5th century.

By recognizing Christianity as their state religion, the Armenians were not only setting themselves against Mazdean Iran, but, by choosing its Eastern version, Monophysitism (anti-Chalcedonianism) they were dissociating themselves from Byzantium as well, thus losing a strong ally-coreligionist. On the other hand, the Armenian church became totally national, being able to make up for its lost statehood and later also to unite the Armenian diaspora throughout the world. Due to the schism, Chalcedonian Byzantium was unable to put down roots in the Caucasus even under the banner of uniformity with Georgia, encountering in its path a barely insurmountable obstacle in the form of anti-Chalcedonian Armenia.

On the other hand, all of Iran’s attempts to use the so-called “Armenian faith” (Monophysitism) in order to carry out ideological diversion in the Caucasus were futile, since Georgia opposed such attempts with its Chalcedonian (Dyophysite) faith.

The fact that Caucasian Albania was unable to find a third, sufficiently powerful, platform in Christianity that differed from Dyophysitism and Monophysitism in order to save itself from the strong cultural and ethnic influence of its neighbors, in particular Armenia, which was supported first by Iran and later by the Arab caliphate, proved tragic for it.

This is why it seems to me that, from the historical viewpoint, the church schism in the Caucasus was a justified and legitimate phenomenon, although had it been taken to fanatical irreconcilability,
the signs of which were obvious at the initial stage, it could have proven fatal. Fortunately, as soon as
the initial passions died down, forces were revived again that paid tribute to the vital importance of
the Caucasus’ unity. Only with the constant presence of such forces were the two mutually exclusive
but nevertheless equalizing trends able to play a positive role in the history of the Caucasus: the striv-
ing for unification and the striving to preserve independence.

During the 5th-8th centuries, the churches of the South Caucasian countries ultimately formu-
lated a dogmatic position which proved to be very closely associated with their international and
cultural orientation. In turn, the differences in theology and ecclesiastical practice largely promot-
ed the establishment of special features of their written language and artistic thinking. The conse-
quences of the church schism at the beginning of the 7th century in the Caucasus had their repercus-
sions for a long time to come, throughout the whole of the Middle Ages and recent history. Al-
though greatly changed, they are still sometimes manifested to this day in contemporary historiog-
raphy.

So conditions were made ripe for the schism in the Caucasus throughout the 6th century. The
interest of later generations in the facts of the schism has kept it fresh in society’s memory and replen-
ished it with questions of the current day, at times compelling these generations to relive events bur-
ried far in the past as their own destiny.

### Historiography

in the Service of the National Churches

Every generation has its own historiography, which places the facts of the past at the service of
the present, particularly if the past is still important as a living process. Thus the reconstructed picture
of the past is subjective from the very beginning. Medieval writers evaluate the consequences of the
schism and the participants in its finale according to criteria elaborated by contemporary society
based on those presumed positions they would have historically occupied themselves had they been in
the place of the protagonists of the church schism.

Since the heirs of the schism in the Caucasus ultimately split into two camps—the Dyophysite
(the Georgian church) and the Monophysite (the Armenian and Albanian churches)—historians and
the representatives of the indicated camps formed two (Monophysite with two national branches)
different models of the establishment of the national churches in the Caucasus.

No matter how subjective the historian-polemists of the Middle Ages were about the topic being
studied, when reconstructing the past they nevertheless relied on primary sources. The sources used
by historians had already been in the hands of editors and copywriters, representatives of the interest-
ed sides of the previous generations. What is more, the historians themselves edited their data when
incorporating it into their works. In this way, historical sources were first worked over in keeping
with the reconstructed story and were then used themselves to construct the new model in compliance
with the interests of the society in question.¹

It goes without saying that the attempts of medieval Armenian historians to find among the
Armenians, and particularly among the representatives of the higher nobility to which they belonged
themselves, ecclesiastical figures who were already anti-Chalcedonian at the Fourth Ecumenical
Council, are evidence of a later trend that became widely introduced into the Monophysite church.
Tom Artšruni’s information (10th century) about the participation of the Artšruni brothers in the
Christological debates held in Constantinople immediately after the Council of Chalcedon is more
typical in this respect. The author tries to justify the absence of sources of corresponding documents

¹ See: Ukhtanes, History of the Separation of the Georgians from the Armenians, Armenian text with Georgian
translation and research was published by Zaza Aleksidze, Tbilisi, 1975, Preface, pp. 6-7 (in Georgian).
with a fabricated story about how Nestorian Bartsum arrived in Armenia and removed several pages from the work of historian Eghishe.  

It is worth noting the attempt of 10th-century Albanian historian Moses of Kalankat to convince his readers that during the church schism in the Caucasus at the beginning of the 7th century, “Albania did not separate from Orthodoxy (Monophysitism) and uniformity with the Armenians,” while contemporary documents say the direct opposite.  

The same disregard of historical facts is characteristic of the medieval Georgian orthodox writers. In Giorgi Mtsire’s work *The Life of George the Hagiorite*, George the Hagiorite declares in an argument with the Patriarch of Antioch: “We were enlightened by the holy apostles and, after recognizing one God, we have never deviated from Him, and our people have never inclined toward heresy. We anathematize and curse, on the basis of Orthodoxy, all those who deny [one God] and heretics, and we strictly adhere to the commandments and preaching of the holy apostles.”

**On a Common Platform**

After the Council of Chalcedon, the Caucasian churches collectively expressed for the first time their attitude toward the Christological arguments at the Ecumenical Synod of Dvin in 506. It is utterly clear that the Council adopted *Henoticon* (482) issued by Emperor Zeno (450-491) and supported the reconciliatory policy of the Byzantine emperors.  

The participants of the united council at Dvin, each in his own language (or to be more precise in its written form), sent the Christians in the countries subordinate to Iran messages explaining their dogmatic positions.  

From the Synod of Dvin in 506 until the mid-6th century it is impossible to find any direct evidence in the sources of the confession of the Caucasian churches. This fact could be seen as indirect evidence that the position of the Caucasian churches did not significantly change during this time or, which is more likely, any change in position, if there was one, was not collectively formulated.  

At the same time, Byzantium changed its ecclesiastical policy. The policy of Zeno and Anastasius (491-518) carried out by the Dyophysites and Monophysites gradually became pro-Monophysite, although not completely (after 508). But this situation did not last for long. Anastasius’ successor, Justin (518-527), again returned to the Chalcedonian confession and revived the anti-Monophysite policy.  

The religious policy of the Byzantine emperors was reflected, like an inverted image in the mirror, in the religious policy of the royal Iranian court, which began with helping the persecuted Nestorians and ended with protecting Monophysitism.

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4 See: Book of Messages, Armenian text with Georgian translation, research, and commentary was published by Zaza Aleksidze, Tbilisi, 1968, pp. 62, 120, 122.  
The need to maintain a constant balance between the two great empires made it difficult for the Caucasian countries to choose a faith and particularly make an official declaration of it. All the same, there are facts that can help to shed light on the development of the religious situation in the Caucasus in the second quarter of the 6th century.

The second message of Babgen, the Catholicos of All Armenians, to “The Orthodox Christians in Persia” shows the Armenian church’s inclination toward anti-Chalcedonism, while court historian of Byzantine emperor Justinian (527-565), Procopius of Caesarea, in his work called *De bello Persico* about events close in time to 525, writes that “the Georgians are the best Christians among those nations under the power of the Persians.” There is no doubt that the Chalcedonian historian meant the Dyophysites, with certain specifications, when he wrote “the best Christians.” We do not have any information in this respect about Albania, although there is every reason to believe that it did not move far from the reconciliatory position between the Dyophysites and Monophysites either.

**Split**

In the mid-6th century, Iran tried to create a single Monophysite camp in the Caucasus. At the Local Councils of 551-553, the Armenian church, with the participation of representatives of the Syrian church, officially declared Monophysitism as their ideological choice and established a liturgy that complied with the dogma. This is how the Chalcedonian historians assessed the significance of the second Synod of Dvin for the history of the Armenian church. According to Arseni of Saphara, the Armenians declared 551 “as the first day (resp. year) of their confession.”

As for the Monophysite historians, they tried to show that the Armenian church had not changed its confession since Gregory the Illuminator and that it rejected the Council of Chalcedon as soon as it was held. So the significance of this council as one of the turning points in the history of the Armenian church is sometimes overlooked in ancient Armenian historiography.

From this viewpoint, the compromise position of John of Odzun (718-729), a chronicler of the local Armenian councils and a prominent Monophysite official, which he expressed in the 720s, is of interest:

“The council was convened by hierarch Nerses against the Council of Chalcedon, since the dirty affliction of the confession of the Council of Chalcedon had become more frequent and the Dyophysite faith was gradually becoming stronger.”

The dogmatic-political position clearly expressed by the Armenian church naturally demanded that the other churches of the Caucasus express their attitude toward the step taken by the neighboring church. And indeed, the Armenian chronicles of the 16th century write: “Patriarch Nerses convened a Synod at Dvin on the order of the Persian czar in order to separate from the Greeks. At this council, the Georgians and the Fourth Armenia diverged from their unity with the Armenians. The Suniits and Albans also deviated, and then joined [the Armenian church] again.”

The chronicler’s point of view is clear: the common ideological camp (with a reconciliatory position) in the Caucasus was destroyed with the help of Iran and this took place at the beginning of the second half of the 6th century. The quotation presented above should belong to quite an old stratum, since it was used by Arseni of Saphara (c. 11th century) and his source *Narratio de rebus Armeniæ* (8th century).

It should be noted that Armenian historian Samuel of Ani (13th century) also says the same thing about the opposition of the Georgian church to the resolutions of the Synod of Dvin of 551-553,

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8 *Georgika*, 2, texts with Georgian translation were published and commented on by S. Kaukhchishvili, Tbilisi, 1965, p. 48.
who writes in his Chronicles dated 557: “Separation of the Georgians is written about here.” Admittedly, anachronisms can be found in Samuel’s work, but in this case his information deserves attention because he writes about the separation of the Georgians immediately after establishment of the national chronology of the Armenians and information about Gregory of Machechker and Izid-Bozid, which excludes any error in its dating. What is more, he does not confuse this separation with the church schism, which is dated to 607, and he also correctly indicates the participants.

In this way, the testimonies of some Armenian sources, along with the information of Procopius of Caesarea, bring us to the conclusion that the Caucasian churches had different understandings of the reconciliatory principles of the Synod of Dvin of 506: the Georgian and, in all likelihood, the Albanian church along with it saw rightwing Chalcedonism, while the Armenian saw rightwing Monophysitism. The following period in the history of these countries was a time of ever increasing definition of the confessional and political position. At the beginning of the second half of the 6th century, the Armenian church ended its searching, convened an ecclesiastical synod (or synods) in Dvin and accepted an extremely leftwing Monophysite faith known as Julianism. Georgia (Kartli) and Albania apparently did not convene such councils. In search of a navigating channel between Scylla and Charybdis (Byzantium and Iran), they evidently did not reject the Council of Chalcedon, but nor did they take the path of active anti-Monophysitism. This situation left the Iranian court with the hope that it would at some point be able to draw the Georgian and Albanian church out of Constantinople’s orbit with the help of the Armenian church.

Attempts to Restore a Single Ideological Space

At the beginning of the 570s, the Armenian church made another attempt to create a single Monophysite camp in the Caucasus. The messages of John IV of Jerusalem and Patriarch of Armenia John of Gabelen to Abas, the Catholicos of the Albans, and the treatises Narratio de rebus Armeniae and On the Division of Kartli (Georgia) and Armenia by Arseni of Saphara contain information on this issue. Although, according to the ancient Armenian historians, the Suniitsy and Albans were subordinated to the will of the Patriarch of Armenia at that time, the Book of Messages shows that if this were the case the testimonies of the Chalcedonian sources should have been more correct.

I offer the following solution to this dilemma. Abas, the Catholicos of the Albans (552-596), who was supported by the Greek patriarchs of Jerusalem, Macarius II (552, 556/4-575) and Eutyches (552-563/64), refused to communicate with the synods of Dvin of 551-554. Patriarch of Armenia John of Gabelen (557-574) demanded that Abas, the Catholicos of the Albans, adopt Monophysitism. Abas stuck to his moderate Chalcedonian position, but made a compromise with John and accepted the formula of Peter the Fuller (469-471, 475-476, 478-479, 485-489) “Thou who wast crucified for us.” According to The History of the Albans, Chalcedonian monks Foma, Elia, Biot, Ibas, and others spoke out against this innovation and were forced to leave the country. Moses of Kalankat emphasizes

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10 Collection from Books of Historians, Vagarshapat, 1893, p. 75 (in Armenian).
11 See: Arseni of Saphara, On the Division of Kartli and Armenia, text was critically formulated and supplied with research and commentary by Z. Aleksidze, pp. 48-56 (in Georgian).
12 See: Message of John, the Bishop of Jerusalem to Abas, the Catholicos of the Albans, Ararat, 1896, pp. 252-259 (in Armenian).
13 See: Book of Messages, Tiflis, 1901, pp. 81-84 (in Armenian).
that Abas “restored peace in the church fraternity with the grace of the Lord Almighty.” The Albanian academic monks, who did not obey Abas’ innovation, settled in the Albanian monasteries of Jerusalem, in the heart of Dyophysitism. Foma from the monastery of Panda informed Patriarch of Jerusalem John IV (574-595). In his message to Abas, John of Jerusalem demanded that he carry out a more aggressive anti-Monophysitic policy and refuse to include the formula of Peter the Fuller “Thou who wast crucified for us” (Armenian “khachetsar”) in the Trisagion. Evidently John of Jerusalem’s efforts were not in vain. The Book of Messages unambiguously shows that in 607-609, in the polemics with the Armenian hierarchs over the definitions of the Council of Chalcedon, the Albanian church officials were on the same platform as the Georgians. This is why at the end of the church schism that occurred in the Caucasus (604-609), Patriarch of Armenia Abraham of Abbatan (607-615) anathematizes Georgia and Albania in his encyclic message and permits his congregation to have only trade relations with these countries. This is why the Albanian texts turned up in the Georgian (Dyophysite) environment. Discovery of the Albanian texts in the Georgian environment confirms the existence of this unity, on the one hand, and precisely it, this unity, dates the lower stratum of the Georgian-Albanian Palimpsests.

At the very end of the 6th century, the Monophysites tried to take possession of the Georgian (Kartlian) church again. At this time Kartli was most likely ruled by pro-Iranian and Monophysite-oriented erismtavar Stephanos I. The ascent to the throne of Catholicos of Kartli Kyrion, according to the Catholicos of Armenia, was supposed to strengthen the position of the Georgian Monophysites. But the exact opposite happened.

**Church Schism**

Kyrion of Mtskheta began carrying out a national-religious policy, the aim of which was complete assimilation of the mixed provinces and ideological support of the unification of Kartli. This policy could only be successful if the Georgian church chose a faith that differed from the Monophysitism supported by Iran and, in addition, did not clearly turn from the reconciliatory path of the 506 synod. A church schism was inevitable.

By anathematizing the Albanian along with the Georgian church in his encyclic message, Catholicos of Armenia Abraham showed that the Albanian church remained true to the Chalcedonian (Dyophysite) faith and ideological unification with the Georgian church. It is worth noting that all the mentions in the Book of Messages of Albania and the Albans in the context of unification with Georgia and the Georgians, when defining the attitude toward Chalcedonism, have been removed from the works of Ukhtanes and Moses of Kalankat, since they were written or compiled after the Albanian church had long left this unification.

In 613 or 616, at the so-called Persian Council in Ctesiphon, the Chalcedonian leaders of the countries subordinated to Iran were asked to change their confession (adopt “the Armenian faith”) or leave their congregation and their homeland. Representatives of all the churches of the Middle Eastern countries (including Armenia and Albania) were present at the council and obeyed the order, apart from the Catholicos of Kartli. Catholicos of Kartli Kyrion was probably forced to leave

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15 M. Kalankatuatsi, op. cit., p. 74.
16 See: Message of John, the Bishop of Jerusalem, to Abas, the Catholicos of the Albans, p. 252.
17 See: Ibid., p. 255.
18 See: Book of Messages, pp. 11-123.
the throne and move to Phasis, the rank of metropolitan of which, according to Armenian historian John Draskhanakert (10th century), he occupied at the same time as the patriarchal throne of Mtskheta.22

**Monothelitism**

The biography of Catholicos of Kartli Kyrion can be easily tied to the biography of Cyrus of Phasis, hereafter (since 631) the patriarch of Alexandria and the ruler of Egypt (known as Al-Mukavkas). The identification between Kyrion of Mtskheta and Cyrus of Phasis explains the latter’s devoted following of the Monothelite doctrine, the aim of which was to reconcile the Chalcedonians and the Monophysites. The religious policy of the Catholicos of Kartli was supposed to be analogous. Over the span of two decades he changed his confession and religious entourage three times and as the Chalcedonian leader tried, as best he could, not to break ties not only with the Monophysites, but also with the Nestorians.23

At the end of the 620s, the Byzantine Empire triumphed in the war against the Persian Empire. The return of the eastern provinces, most of which were populated by “dissidents,” prompted Emperor Heraclius to restore the ecclesiastical world on the basis of a doctrine that maintained that Christ had two natures but only one will (Monothelitism).

The Caucasian countries were the first among those to join Constantinople. Restoration of Chalcedonism in Kartli, although with several concessions to Monophysitism, was carried out smoothly. Heraclius forced Patriarch of Armenia Ezra (631-641) and the congregation dissatisfied (on the whole) with him to communicate with Patriarch of Constantinople Sergius (died in 638).24

There is no information about the Albanian church, but it most likely also fell under the influence of the Byzantine Empire. However, Monothelitism, which did not satisfy either the Dyophysites or the Monophysites, suffered defeat, just like the earlier attempts to form a union (Zeno’s Henotikon). At the 6th Ecumenical Council in Constantinople (680-681), Monothelitism and its heretics, including Cyril of Alexandria (former metropolitan of Phasis), were anathematized.25

In this way, the Caucasian churches arrived at a period of relative theological stability. It became clear that Georgia (Kartli) had forever chosen the Chalcedonian (Dyophysite) confession as a bastion in a difficult domestic and foreign political situation. As for the Armenian church, it still faced the national synod convened by John of Odzun (717-728) in 726 at Manzikert, during which the Monophysite faith was ultimately restored in Armenia.26 Albania, which vacillated for a long time between Monophysitism and Dyophysitism, moved into the bosom of Monophysitism at approximately this time. As a result, the Albanian written language and Albanian ecclesiastical language gradually lost their national function, and Caucasian Albania, as a state, gradually disappeared from the political map of the Caucasus.

**Conclusion**

The geopolitical position of the Caucasian countries has always placed them before a choice between the great empires of the East and West, the Eastern and Western civilizations. After declaring

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23 See: *Book of Messages*, pp. 225-244.
26 See: Ibid., pp. 45-46.
Christianity its state religion, Albania, along with Georgia and Armenia, made a choice in favor of the West.

The Byzantine and Iranian empires, in counterbalance to each other, supported different trends in Christianity (Dyophysitism, Monophysitism, and Nestorianism). The following became important stages in this struggle, in which the Caucasian churches also became involved: the unifying Synod of Dvin in 506 held under the patronage of Byzantium; Iran’s attempt to create a single Monophysite camp in the Caucasus; the church schism that occurred at the beginning of the 7th century in the Caucasus, during which Georgia and Albania, in counterbalance to the Armenian church, occupied a pro-Chalcedonian position; the convocation by Iran that won the war with Byzantium of the so-called Persian Council in 614, at which on the order of Chosroes II, its participants were to accept the “Armenian faith” or leave their countries—the Albanian and Armenian churches obeyed the orders of the Iranian shah. Since the 630s, Byzantium emperor Heraclius again began to carry out a policy aimed at reconciling the Dyophysites and Monophysites under the aegis of Monothelitism. Georgia and Armenia supported the doctrine. We do not have any information about Albania, but there is no doubt that it would have supported Monothelitism too.

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PROTESTANTISM IN THE CAUCASUS

Abstract

This article takes a look at how Protestantism emerged and spread in the Central Caucasus, as well as at the problems this confession has when adapting to society’s expectations in order to be useful not only in the missionary-religious, but also in the social sphere. It analyzes the special features and difficulties of Protestantism’s development in Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan and its place in society’s social and cultural life.

Introduction

The Caucasian region can be viewed and assessed from different sides. National and religious self-consciousness is a sensitive and extremely relevant topic for numerically small nations that have
traveled a bumpy historical development road and retained their uniqueness. Religiosity is closely associated precisely with such self-consciousness, with belief in the fact that religion has played a key role in the preservation of each of the South Caucasian states. As a rule, the dominating confessions in these three countries form the basis of national self-consciousness and are closely associated with each of the nations. In other words, both Islam in Azerbaijan and Orthodoxy in Georgia, as well as the Apostolic Church in Armenia, are closely related to national self-identity. It is believed that Georgians should be Orthodox, Azeris should be Muslims, while Armenians should belong to the Armenian Apostolic Church. It is precisely this unofficial, but at the same time ingrained idea in society’s mind about religion that gives rise to certain tension in relations with people of other faiths. Nevertheless, democratic processes, European trends related to human rights and tolerance, and the activity of nongovernmental organizations that keep tabs on the violations of international agreements on tolerance toward religion are prompting the governments of the countries and society itself to be more tolerant toward religious minorities. Of course, even developed European countries encounter difficulties in the religious sphere: legislative shortcomings, xenophobia on the part of certain groups and associations, printed matter that espouses insults, etc. are all part and parcel of everyday life in Western society. When talking about the South Caucasian countries, we should note the special features in the attitude toward religious minorities. The thing is that Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan lived through the seventy years of the Communist era as part of a single country, the U.S.S.R., which could not help but have an impact not only on their economic and political development, but also on the state of religious-social affairs. The religious figures and priests repressed during the Soviet era experienced immense hardships: persecution, arrests, some of them even lost their lives for their faith. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, a wave of spiritual awakening swept through the region, showing just how spiritually starved the people of the former Soviet republics were. Since as early as the 1990s, the number of people attending churches, mosques, etc. has been growing. The political and economic instability and uncertainty in the future helped to strengthen people’s faith in God. By this time, the influence of traditional denominations had increased and hundreds of churches had been built. Along with the stronger position of the traditional religions, Protestant denominations, many of which had existed in these countries before, began experiencing new growth. Even though the unfavorable conditions as far back as czarist times, as well as during Soviet power, at times reduced the presence of some Protestant groups to naught, many of them managed to survive all the deprivations and, when the Soviet Union fell, they were able to revive their missionary activity. In turn, various foreign missionary associations also began to show an interest in the South Caucasian region. As a result, Protestant denominations developed and began to participate in public and cultural-scientific life. Some missions created or revived the activity of humanitarian organizations that already existed, which helped people to survive the very difficult times of change in the post-Soviet South Caucasian republics.

The stronger influence of the traditional confessions, on the one hand, and the increase in the Protestant denominations against the background of the still instable states with their own domestic and foreign problems, on the other, all provoked tension on religious grounds. Articles and TV programs warning about “dangerous sects” and about how the new religious trends were supposedly trying to bribe people by means of humanitarian aid and bent on damaging the country’s statehood began to appear with increasing frequency. The situation was also aggravated by the fact that totalitarian sects are really entering the international scene, causing quite a number of problems for the law-enforcement bodies, since some of them commit acts of terror on religious or semi-religious grounds, taking the lives of scores of people. Society was unable to recognize the difference between truly dangerous, extremist religious groups and harmless Christian Protestant denominations. So some reactionary forces were able to have an influence on public opinion with the aim of discrediting Protestantism in the eyes of ordinary people unversed in religion. Religious intolerance in different forms is manifested in all three countries to a greater or lesser extent. Despite the liberal legislation and toler-
ance, a negative attitude is felt all the same in society toward Protestant organizations, which are nevertheless called “sects.” In some cases this can be explained by the influence of the mass media and representatives of the traditional confessions, who do not always speak flatteringly about other denominations. However, despite this situation, the Protestant churches are continuing to evolve and are trying by means of their social and missionary service to show society the peace-loving nature of their activity.

Globalization is also having a certain effect on Protestantism in the Southern Caucasus. As already noted, the leading religion in each of the countries is a defining factor of the nation’s self-identity as a single society. Globalization, which began painting the world in the same global color, has made national consciousness, particularly in numerically small nations, a sensitive subject. This situation has given rise to a variety of emotions, the main one being an intensified feeling of affiliation with the traditional religion as a symbol of national uniqueness. In this respect, Protestantism is perceived as a tool of globalization coming from the West. To a certain extent, this is precisely how different interpretations of the “destructive influence of sects” are explained. For the same reason, hackneyed conceptions of democracy and tolerance irritate some representatives of the traditional religions.

By way of an example, it is sufficient to recall the attitude of the traditional religions toward sectarians during the Soviet era (and before it), when non-traditional religious trends were perceived as merely a deviation from the mainstream Christian views, and not as an out-and-out danger. The situation began to change in the 1990s. New religious organizations became a sign of the aggressive processes going on in the world. The danger supposedly lay in the fact that Protestant denominations might undermine the country’s religious-cultural identity, turning it into fertile soil for globalization, which naturally aroused a negative attitude toward them. In other words, the tension that arose in the 1990s on religious grounds is in reality nothing other than geocultural and geopolitical contradictions that have been formulated into corresponding terms.

**Religious Life in Georgia**

Multiconfessional and multiethnic Georgia has a wealth of historical experience in tolerant coexistence among different ethnic and religious groups. It would seem that this country should have no problems with tolerance toward religion, but the situation is far from that simple. Despite the fact that the state officially recognizes equality and freedom of conscience for minorities, the dominating religion has a very perceptible influence on public opinion and even on some members of parliament. Right up until 2003, there were frequent pogroms and calls to deport Protestants from the country. Insulting remarks about Protestants almost became a “confession of faith” for those trying to demonstrate their “patriotism and devotion to the Homeland.” Nevertheless, at the legislative level, every religious association has the right to be registered, freely perform its worship services, and freely spread its views. This provision is envisaged in the country’s Constitution. But real religious life presented a different picture: raids were carried out on Pentecostals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Krishnaites, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, and so on, their religious literature was burned, the police accused the victims of disturbing the peace, and they were fired from their jobs under the slightest pretext. The U.S. State Department frequently expressed concern about this in its reports on religious freedom.

The situation changed after the Rose Revolution. Many extremist groups were rendered harmless and some instigators of the pogroms (such as O.B. Mkalavishvili) arrested. The Council on Religion under the Georgian Ombudsman Office was expanded and began actively functioning, and the parliament simplified the registration process for religious associations. Objective information on the
history and activity of religious minorities was published for the first time and the question of religious education in state schools was put on the agenda in order not to infringe on the rights of non-Orthodox children. In its annual report on religious freedom, the U.S. State Department spent five pages describing the situation in Georgia as a step forward. But we should not forget that at the public and to a certain extent legislative level the problems have still not been resolved. Society still does not accept Protestants as full-fledged citizens and true patriots. Under the constitutional agreement entered in 2002 between the Georgian Orthodox Church and the state, the first acquired an extremely high constitutional status, which envisages, in addition to everything else, privileges on the production and sale of church merchandise and items which today only it enjoys. Protestants are also allowed to register their church or organization as a noncommercial, nonprofit legal entity of private law. For many denominations, this status is not acceptable, but since there is no other choice, at least 17 religious associations have already undergone registration. Others, however, such as the Armenian Apostolic Church, the Catholics, and the Baptists, are refusing to take this step and are waiting for a more acceptable status under which the church will be designated as a religious community and not as a nongovernmental organization. These and other frequently arising issues are topics of discussion both within the Council on Religion and beyond it. The question of some facilities that belong to the Catholic and Armenian church has still not been resolved. But compared with Protestantism, it can be said that Catholicism, Islam, and Judaism are already historically established religions in Georgia. As a rule, they are not called "dangerous and harmful" sects (although there is still a certain amount of disdain). However, Protestants are still associated with the word “sect,” which often leads to their ostracism and non-acceptance by society. Nevertheless, they are still trying to provide the people with true facts about themselves, their churches, and their multifaceted service and contribution to the country’s development. The Patriarchate of Georgia officially welcomes a tolerant environment in the country, where each person has the right to choose which denomination he wants to join. But the mass media does not always, or very reluctantly, give Protestants the opportunity to talk about themselves and refute the slanderous things written or said about them. Sometimes this is because members of the clergy or the powers that be wield immense influence over the editors and heads of various mass media organizations.

Difficulties and dilemmas in the context of globalization have arisen among the Protestants. They sense the negative attitude toward them due to the often alien nature of their religious traditions, which largely arose in Western culture. In light of the aforesaid, the question of contextualization of the missionary communities and enculturation of the local churches has become urgent. The innovations in this area have aroused resistance, and in some cases even a split within the communities themselves, thus creating so-called liberal trends, on the one hand, and conservative, on the other. This is not only seen in Georgia, but in Armenia and Azerbaijan as well.

Protestant Denominations in Georgia

Baptists

Protestants first appeared in Georgia in the mid-19th century. Martin Colweight was the first Baptist preacher to come to Tbilisi. Since that time, a community has formed here that survived all the hardships of the repressions to become a bone fide part of society. Today there are several Baptist

1 Religious rights violations used to take up dozens of pages.
trends in Georgia, some of which are part of a single union. Most of them are comprised of Georgians, although there are also quite a large number of Armenians, Russians, and Ossetians among them. Worship services are held in the languages of the local ethnic groups. Baptists live in almost every corner of Georgia, and there are approximately 10,000 of them. Evangelist Baptists are carrying out several charity projects; for example, the Beteli Charity Center maintains an old people’s home. They also participate actively in organizing summer camps for young people. The deaconesses of the order of St. Nino make house calls on elderly people in need of help. The Bible was translated into modern Georgian with the active participation of a Baptist bishop, M. Songulashvili. This church can serve as an example of maximum enculturation since the external and ritual part of the ecclesiastical elements is noticeably close to the local culture. Today it is the only church in Georgia that is a member of the World Council of Churches. The Baptists actively support the ecumenical movement, are favorably inclined toward all denominations, and are open to cooperation.

**Pentecostals**

The history of this denomination in Georgia also began at the end of the 19th century when the first Swedish mission appeared here. In 1901, Larkson and Hower (the spelling of their names might not be exact), missionaries from Sweden, settled in Tbilisi and began to preach among the local population. After this, missionaries mainly came from Russia. This denomination also experienced many hardships. 1917-1924 were difficult years for believers. Approximately 300 believers were exiled from Batumi in one day and subsequently never returned to their homes. By this time, respected Pentecostal churches already existed in such cities as Poti, Batumi, and Ozurgeti. In 1951, the entire church was arrested (approximately 45 people) and each of its members was sentenced to imprisonment for 8 to 25 years. Since the 1960s, the church has been headed by consecrated Georgian clergy. As of today, the Pentecostals have more than 115 churches and a total of about 10,000 members and are present in almost every region. The Protestant system of administration is largely congregational. Among the Pentecostals of Georgia are congregational unions that are under the patronage of older clergy members or bishops. Worship services are held in the national languages. The Russian-speaking church has a separate congregational union headed by a bishop. The Pentecostals, just like other Protestant denominations, were the targets of attacks from reactionary fundamentalists in the pre-revolutionary period (meaning before the Rose Revolution in 2003). Despite the fact that even after the Rose Revolution, several instances of law violations were registered, the situation is evaluated as more positive than in the recent past. But as far as public opinion, public awareness, and integration of religious minorities, particularly Protestants, is concerned, things still leave much to be desired. The Pentecostals, with their customary Protestant enthusiasm, are engaged in charity. They created several charity organizations such as Ganakhleba (Revival) and the Georgian-German Neemiya Society. With the help of these organizations, the Pentecostals, just like other Protestants, organize free cafeterias for the underprivileged and homeless and summer youth camps for disadvantaged children (invalids, children from shelters, and so on), help orphan children, provide them with box lunches, and also participate in projects against drug and alcohol addiction. Bishop O. Khubashvili is the head of the main Georgian-speaking wing. The Pentecostals are distinguished by friendly and ecumenical sentiments, are willing to cooperate, and have representatives in the Council on Religion under the Ombudsman Office.

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2 It should be noted that according to different sources the number of members fluctuates between 6,000 and 18,000 people.

3 It was noted earlier that such elements began to appear among the Protestants during the globalization era.

4 According to different sources, this figure fluctuates between 5,000 and 10,000.
Adventists appeared in Georgia in 1904 when Armenian missionary Vagram Pampanian came to Armenia and Georgia from the United States to preach. A few years later, preacher Albert Ozol came to help Pampanian, who had already been subjected to quite a lot of abuse by that time. The residents of German and Molocan settlements are considered the first Adventists. Over time, the communities set up in Sukhumi, Tbilisi, and Rustavi began to grow. The repressions of the 1930s forced the believers either to deny their faith or leave the country. For this reason the Adventist church often curtailed its activity, but later, thanks to the efforts of its regular members and missionaries, it was revived again. In 1977, a new stage in the history of the Seventh-Day Adventists in Georgia began. Pastors I.M. Dreling and P.I. Lagutov were able to essentially bring the scattered church together again. And since the 1990s, the Zaokskiy Spiritual Academy has been putting out a new generation of clergy members (including Georgian) who perform worship services in different regions of Georgia. Today the church of the Seventh-Day Adventists has 600 members in Kakhetia, Ajaria, Imeretia, and several other regions of Georgia. The head of the local mission is V.I. Gruby.

The Adventists are an exception in terms of their spiritual administrative structure. The church’s system is centralized and representative. The head administrators are elected for a certain term by representative delegates of the local associations and unions at congresses. Both administrative and financial activity is based on the same rules and regulations adopted by the church, which allows it to function efficiently at the same time throughout the entire world, as well as safeguards it from splits. The Adventists are known throughout the world for advocating a healthy way of life, as well as for their humanitarian and educational activity. There is a representative office of the Adventist Agency for Assistance and Development, a worldwide humanitarian organization, in Georgia that implements a large number of social projects. Despite the fact that the Church of the Seventh-Day Adventists does not agree with the ecumenical philosophy, it is open to an inter-confessional dialog and cooperation in the social sphere. The church is favorably inclined toward other denominations.

Lutherans

The Lutheran church is perhaps one of the very first among the Protestant denominations to appear in Georgia. The history of the Lutherans in Georgia dates back to the beginning of the 19th century when eschatological sentiments were observed among believers. Several thousand Lutherans moved to Georgia and set up entire settlements. By 1914, there were 21,000 Lutherans in the Transcaucasus, who were distinguished by decency, diligence, and honesty. Lutheran communities formed, but after they were accused of having relations with Germany during the war, the church began to be persecuted. Many members of the community were deported, and the churches and schools were closed. Only after perestroika were they allowed to open a prayer house in Tbilisi (and then in other regions of the country), where worship services are regularly held. Bishop I. Launhardt
is the head of the Lutherans and they boast a total of approximately 1,000 members. They, like other Protestants, take active part in public life, engage in charity, and so on.

**Other Evangelical Denominations**

It is impossible within the scope of one article to list and write even a brief history of the activity of many of the Protestant denominations, which are still less than one hundred years old, functioning in Georgia. The New Apostle Church, the Evangelist Church, the Word of Life Church, the Church of Christ, and various branches of charismatic churches are also widely represented in Georgia’s multi-confessional society. Most of these churches have been keeping a record of their activity since the 1990s. However, many clergymen and members of the abovementioned confessions come from denominations that have existed and been functioning for a long time. For example, some charismatic churches and the Word of Life Church were founded by members of the Pentecostal Church. It should be noted that these denominations have developed successfully, blended into society, and today carry out active charitable, preaching, and social work.

For example, the Salvation Army Church has provided immense support with its humanitarian activity to those who experienced great financial difficulties in the hardest years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 1995-1996, 42% of all the humanitarian aid that came to Georgia was supplied by the Salvation Army. The aid was often supplied against the background of unfair and undeserved accusations against the charity givers. In the Southern Caucasus, this organization so far only exists in Georgia and has up to 600 followers. Its regional leader is G. Salarishvili.

Such religious communities as Old Believers, Old Ritualists, Dukhobors, Molocans, and others also function in the country. Some of them are experiencing difficulties with recruiting members. Moreover, the church members are mainly elderly people, which has a noticeable effect on the development of the denomination in question. Suffice it to say that such non-traditional denominations arising at the local level proved to be less viable in the context of globalization than the Protestant trends that came from the West.

**Armenia’s Religious Life**

Religion for the Armenians, as well as for the representatives of other South Caucasian countries, forms the basis of national self-identity. Society is firmly based on the denominations of a single religion. Armenia has a population of approximately 3 million, although there are large Armenian diasporas throughout the world that preserve the national traditions and have a particularly solicitous attitude toward the traditional religion. The Armenian Apostolic Church predominates in this country, 90% of the population nominally considers itself to be a member. Despite the fact that the church is separate from the state, in 2001, on the basis of a concordat entered between the Armenian Apostolic Church and the state, “the national Church” (this is its official status) began enjoying certain privileges. The listed elements of Georgia’s religious life essentially largely coincide with the situation in Armenia and Azerbaijan, so, keeping in mind the scope of this article, only a few special features of religious life in Armenia and Azerbaijan will be mentioned, in particular facts relating to Protestants. Many nongovernmental organizations that keep an eye on the attitude toward Protestants see some discrimination, particularly on the part of lower- and medium-ranking government officials, as well as among most of society. The U.S. State Department report on religious freedom in Armenia for
2007 says that regardless of the provisions of the Constitution that guarantee freedom of conscience, the rights of members of religious minorities are still infringed upon. The Jehovah’s Witnesses who refused to do army service for religious reasons and were sentenced by the court to up to three years’ imprisonment are a case in point. The law on freedom of conscience prohibits carrying out proselytism, but it does not specify precisely what is implied by this. For example, in state schools, education is completely secular, but the Apostolic Church plays a very large part in drawing up and teaching the materials relating to religion.

Along with Catholics and Yezidi, who comprise a large percentage of the Armenian population, there are also several Protestant denominations in the country: evangelist and charismatic churches, Molocans, Baptists, Seventh-Day Adventists, Pentecostals, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and so on. Protestants are also quite active here, although relations with the traditional church have not always developed smoothly.

Protestants of Armenia

The Armenian Evangelical Church

The first Protestant mission among the Armenians began its activity in 1831 thanks to the efforts of believers from America. In 1846, the first Armenian Evangelical Church was set up. Later many of the Protestant missions became more active. In 2006, this church celebrated the 160th anniversary of its existence in Armenia. After World War II, it almost ceased to exist, but later appeared as the Evangelist Baptist Church (as already noted in the case of the Georgian Protestants, many churches that were subjected to immense hardships disappeared, but were revived again some time later). In 1990, Armenian foreign evangelical preachers began to come and support the church. It resumed its old name and is now called the Evangelical Church. There are more than 45 communities throughout Armenia, and today the total number of evangelists (and of several charismatic churches) is higher than 10,000. The head of the church is Rene Levonian. The Evangelical Church and Evangelical Union closely cooperate and also maintain ties with foreign organizations. After establishing its spiritual educational institution, this church has been carrying out successful activity, including charity, and implementing youth and social programs. Its openness and willingness to cooperate give it a good reputation.

The Armenian Baptist Church

It is very similar to the Evangelists, although there are some theological differences. It can be said that this church adheres to more conservative views on certain issues. Its history is closely related to A. Mikaelian, who preached in this region in 1948-1950. Many members of the Baptist communities were Evangelists, although today some members of the Baptist Church also perform worship services in other denominations. The Baptists suffered quite extensively during the repressions. The last case of the arrest of Protestant, including Baptist, clergymen (the Vefil church) was on 23 April, 1995, although all those arrested were soon released. Today about 3,000 Baptists live in Armenia, and their head is Ruben Pakhlebianian.
The history of the Adventists in Armenia begins in 1896 (see, Adventism in Georgia). Khatchurch and Bazarchai were the first villages in which Adventist communities appeared. After the conflicts with Turkey and Azerbaijan, the religious picture in Armenia changed. The Adventist church also experienced all the deprivations of the repressions. In 1937, all the men in the church were arrested, and only two of them returned from prison. Today, the Church of the Seventh-Day Adventists in Armenia is dynamically developing and has more than 1,200 members. Its head is V. Khachatrian. Adhering to a universal centralized system, the Adventists throughout the world are a single church and preach the same teaching. They are open to an interconfessional dialog and cooperation in the social sphere.

Other Evangelical Denominations

There are also many other Protestant denominations in Armenia. A complete list of them is beyond the scope of this article. Most of them formed after 1990. The Word of Life Church is one of the largest denominations in Armenia, participating largely in charity projects such as work with prison inmates and their families, patronage of orphan children, and so on. It is especially interesting that this church has its own television studio, “70 x 7”, and publishes a newspaper.

Other denominations such as the Pentecostals, Christians of the evangelist faith, the charismatic Rema, Alpha and Omega churches, etc. are also actively involved in preaching and charity service. Each of them tries to make as great contribution as possible to the development and preservation of moral and spiritual values of society, which naturally can only be welcomed.

The Brotherhood Church

Despite the fact that this brotherhood is part of the Armenian Apostolic Church, it cannot be overlooked. It is a very interesting precedent of the existence of a brotherhood that shares many principles of Protestantism within a traditional denomination. In essence, its representatives consider themselves adherents of the traditional Armenian religion, but they are often criticized by the Church itself. In all likelihood, this movement came into being at the end of the 19th century due to the fact that believers appeared who were not satisfied with merely the external and formal part of the church liturgy. Wishing to study the Holy Scriptures in greater depth and engage in lively and creative socialization, they, without separating from the main Church, created a brotherhood that today actively maintains relations and cooperates with Protestant denominations.

Azerbaijan’s Religious Life

In contrast to Georgia and Armenia, Azerbaijan is a Muslim country. However, Christianity has been present in it since time immemorial and played a significant role in its history. Today more than 90% of the population follows Islam: according to unofficial data, approximately 65% are Shi’ites and 35% Sunnis. Religion is also an element of the Azerbaijani people’s cultural and national self-
identity. However, it is also often a reason for misunderstandings in the religious sphere, when some talk about violations of human rights in the choice of confession, while others defend national and state interests that foreign missions are supposedly harming. Such a trend has already been noted both in Georgia and Armenia. It can be said that traditional confessions have more than a purely religious aspect, so conversion to another religion is perceived as an unacceptable and hostile phenomenon. The Soviet period had an effect on development in this country as well: many cult buildings were destroyed; anti-religious views were imposed, and so on. But it proved impossible to destroy that which had taken centuries to create.

Azerbaijan, like many post-Soviet republics, declares adherence to democratic values. The country’s constitution allows each person to choose and practice any religion without restrictions. But in practical life, instances have been registered of violations of the principles of freedom of conscience. These phenomena are being manifested during conversion from Islam to some non-traditional denomination (evangelical or other Christian trend). Protestant churches, such as Baptists, Lutherans, and Seventh-Day Adventists, have existed in this country for more than one hundred years. Although in the past few years other Protestants have appeared in Azerbaijan (Pentecostals, Evangelists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, etc.).

All religious issues are dealt with by the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations. According to the Law on Freedom of Confession, every religious community must be registered in order to function legally. Although the procedure is not simple, there are instances of evasion or attempts to make the registration process more difficult for some non-traditional religious groups under various pretexts. According to the available data, between May 2006 and June 2007, 48 religious groups were registered, but all of them confessed Islam. Christian Protestants are still encountering difficulties with registration. A case of discrimination took place on 20 May, 2007 when the police broke in upon a worship service in a Baptist community and arrested the pastor, Zaur Balaev, who was later accused of putting up resistance to representatives of the law-enforcement structures (supposedly he set his dog on their officials), but witnesses of the event could not confirm this fact. This community, which consisted mainly of Georgian-Ingiloits, has been trying to register for 15 years now.

Protestants of Azerbaijan

Lutherans

Lutherans are one of the earliest Protestant denominations in Azerbaijan, appearing in the mid-19th century. The German industrialists were of course attracted by oil, although there were also other good reasons for moving here. Against the background of the political and religious upheavals in Germany, eschatological views about the end of the world or the Last Judgment, which was to occur in the West, spread throughout church circles at the beginning of the 19th century. So many believers began to move to the Caucasus and form Protestant settlements. In 1819, there were already 209 German families living in Azerbaijan, and in 1899, a Kirche was built. During the repressions, the Lutherans experienced great adversity. In 1937, Lutheran priests along with the representatives of other denominations were exiled and shot. The Lutheran community in Baku did not resume its activity until 1994. As of today, it is the only Lutheran church in Azerbaijan with a total of up to 200 members. Bishop I. Launhardt is also the head of the church in Azerbaijan.

* A Lutheran prayer house.
They are also one of the first Protestant denominations in Azerbaijan. Baptists of different trends live in the republic, as in other countries, so it is difficult to talk about a single leader. They are all peace-loving Christians who respect the state’s laws. According to the data of the State Committee for Work with Religious Formations, today their total numbers are close to 3,000. Most of the Baptist trends have been registered, but there are communities that are still denied registration. The representatives of this religious trend are known for their charity activity and care of the suffering.

**Seventh-Day Adventists**

When talking about Protestant denominations in the Southern Caucasus, it should be remembered that the history of almost every one of them is directly related to the history of all three countries. After settling in Armenia and Georgia, the Adventists also appeared in Azerbaijan, in Baku, for example, in 1884. At that time there were eight of them. Some time later, these people were forced to leave due to persecution. After preacher A. Ozol held a few evangelist meetings in Baku, a group of believers formed again. During the years of repression, believers gathered in secret, worship services were often held in the open air and out in the countryside. In 1957, the first Baku community formed, which had its own prayer house. Today, there are approximately 1,000 Adventists in Azerbaijan and their head is I. Zavrichko.

There are also many other evangelist denominations in Azerbaijan, Christians of the evangelist faith (Pentecostals), the Assembly of God, the Assembly of Glory, the Word of Life Church, the Life-Giving Grace Church, and so on. Each of them is inclined toward cooperation and participation in the resolution of social problems. Some of the Protestant churches listed come from previously founded denominations (Pentecostals, Baptists, etc.). The characteristics and history of all these denominations is basically similar to the characteristics of their like-minded believers in Georgia and Armenia. All of these Protestant trends are distinguished by their peace-loving nature; they respect and adhere to the laws of the country where they live. Under more favorable conditions, they could be of immense benefit to society.

**Conclusion**

When talking about Protestantism in the Southern Caucasus, we should note the large number of similarities among the three countries. To sum up it can be said that despite the fact that Protestants have lived for more than a century in the South Caucasian countries, found refuge here and survived all the adversities of the times, the attitude toward them at present leaves much to be desired.

One of the important aspects in the problem of interconfessional relations is the “centrifugal” principle in the missionary activity of Protestants. In other words, what traditional confessions call

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9 To be more exact, the first Adventists of the Southern Caucasus appeared precisely in the rural regions of Azerbaijan.

10 In this case, it is a technical term that describes the missionary activity of the Protestant churches in which each rank-and-file member of the denomination takes active part in religious agitation outside the church. As a rule, the
proselytism is for Protestants ordinary missionary activity which is inseparable from the general principles of their teaching. This is where tension arises, since the traditional religions regard each of the South Caucasian countries as their “canonical territory,”\footnote{The representatives of the dominating confessions often appeal to this term, it sometimes also appears in written documents, although its substantiation (particularly legal) is doubtful.} on which the missionary activity of people of other faiths is considered to be proselytism. Missionaries are accused of bribing people, are called betrayers, traitors, and so on. What is more, most of society is incapable of distinguishing one denomination from another, which is the reason for the equally negative attitude toward all the organizations. This situation is becoming entrenched to a certain extent for the reason we already mentioned—lack of information (or to be more exact, lack of objective and unbiased information) about Protestants. There are also legislative problems, the resolution of which could play a great role in establishing an appropriate legal status for the Protestant denominations, regulating freedom of conscience, religious education in state schools, and questions relating to the property of religious organizations, and so on. These topics are extremely pertinent, although common approaches to resolving the problems have still not been found.

However, in spite of all the negative aspects, perceptible improvements are being seen, even though the entire social potential of Protestantism, which could have a positive influence on society in every respect, is unfortunately still not being tapped. This is possibly due to the insufficient development of these denominations or due to the still unfavorable climate created by the powers that be. Moreover, globalization has placed new tasks on the agenda to which solutions are being sought both outside and inside the Protestant world.
Today, Russian society, which has lost the unambiguous and clear ideological landmarks that kept the old system of moral values together, has come face to face with fairly urgent moral dilemmas. The ideological pluralism envisaged in the Constitution of the Russian Federation deprived all sorts of social institutions engaged, in one form or another, in raising and educating the younger generation of the philosophical foundations indispensable for shaping personalities and civil awareness. Today, personal socialization in Russia is proceeding under the impact of Western culture and liberal-democratic values which in many respects have little in common with the traditional culture of the peoples of Russia (which is doubly true of the Muslims of Russia). This is not all: amid the philosophical confusion that reigns in the Russian system of education and upbringing, all sorts of publications (fiction included) that glorify violence, individualism, egotism, and immorality have become an everyday feature. The media, TV in particular, add to the process. Today, television has become a powerful and never idling way to bring aggressive egotists and killers into the world. Young and still unformed minds that tend toward an emotional and romantic perception of the world are easily charmed by the image of strong and successful men who turn out to be hired guns, central figures in the American films shown daily and without restrictions on the Russian TV channels. It should be said that France, Germany, and some other countries have introduced strict quotas and high taxes on this type of American product. The situation in Russia has nothing to do with national and state interests.

The two largest confessions of Russia—the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) and Islam—have shown the greatest concern for the state of morality in the country. They expressed this in the program documents of the ROC and the Council of the Muftis of Russia1 which speak of the important role of religion in shaping the nation’s spirituality. The spiritual leaders and theologians feel obliged to ensure either the presence of clergy or at least religious programs in the state educational and penitentiary systems and in the army. Religious morality has just acquired a universal nature and is offered as the only educational option designed to create an integral personality. To some extent these ideas are now realized by at least some academics across Russia and in Daghestan.2 Today we can say that they have partly succeeded. In November 2002 the RF Ministry of Science and Education sent a draft program to the regions for a new subject in the school curriculum—the Fundamentals of Orthodox Culture. The initiative of the spiritual leaders of Russia who want to place moral education on a firm foundation of religious world outlook has caused and still causes stormy discussions between the religious leaders, on the one hand, and the government and intelligentsia, on the other.


Nobel Prize winners, joined in to sign, together with other Russian scientists and scholars, the Letter of the Eleven in which they objected to the church’s growing influence on the secular education system. The above brings up at least two questions:

1. Can religious morality serve as the cornerstone of morality in a society that has embraced pluralism of world outlooks and ideologies?

2. To what extent does the mass conscience of the Daghestanis accept the religiosity of man as a sine qua non of his morality? Is a rank-and-file Muslim inclined to support the strict norms of religious morality based on the main sacral texts? Will he, caught as he is in the stream of global migration, information, cultural, and other processes and changes, look for different methods of adaptation?

**Philosophy on the Nature of Morality**

Morality defined as morals in philosophy is a subject studied by ethics. “Morals is a concept reflecting the actual behavior of members of big or small social groups, as well as the models and standards of conduct people adhere to,” which means that ethics, as part of the science of philosophy, studies the customs, mores, and conduct of people in society. In other words, morals can be defined as the “sum-total of regulators of adequate conduct through which man manifests himself as a reasonable, self-conscious, and free creature.”

At all times ethics concerned itself with the nature and origins of morals; all ethical theories known so far relate morals to one of two types depending on its basic demands. First, there are theories that derive moral demands from the realities of human existence, the “nature of man,” people’s natural requirements and wishes, inborn feelings or facts of their lives taken as the obvious foundation of morals. The theories of the second type base morals on a certain unconditional and extra-historical principle, man’s existence in the outside world. The religious ideas of morals belong to this type.

There is another aspect to the problem: either moral exactions are based on the achievable good, or the very notion of good should be identified and justified through the idea of what should be. The former describes the approaches of consequential ethics, which simplify the moral problem: the motives behind any act and the demand to follow the general principle are of no consequence. Immanuel Kant, who supported the latter, the supremacy of categorical imperative, was convinced that the motive behind human acts and the act itself in the name of moral law are more important than the results of such acts, which do not always depend on man. Religious morals have come close to this position.

In view of the above it should be said that liberal democratic values based on the laws of market economy contradict, to a fairly great extent, the nature of what is morally correct and the German philosopher’s position. In the light of Adam Smith’s economic theory, the market economy preaches individualism, shrewdness, and the priority of the individual’s rights over those of the collective.

Immanuel Kant, on the other hand, as one of the most profound students of morals in the history of philosophy, believed that moral behavior could be described as following one’s duty rather than pursuing one’s own, frequently egoistic, aims. This means that commercial activities that pursue profit rather than public well-being cannot be described as moral even though they produce socially positive effects. The moral requirements placed on man do not imply pursuing private aims in specific situations but rather compliance with general norms and principles of conduct. The forms that express moral norms should not be taken as a rule of external expediency (to achieve something one should act in such and such a way)—they are imperative demands that man should obey in all situations.

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The Quran and the Sunnah undoubtedly contribute to man’s moral maturation. The same is true of all other religions—both world and national. Today, some of the Muslim leaders assert that Islam does not contradict democratic and liberal values. In fact, all confessions and states are duty bound to fight drugs, alcohol abuse, and extremism and help resolve the demographic problem; educating a law-abiding citizen and a good family man is one of their common tasks. The issues to which religions (Islam as one of them) contribute in an effort to formulate and preserve human values are numerous, which means that the state and society should tap religious potential.

At the same time, religious consciousness plays a one-sided role in shaping man’s spirituality; from this point of view, religious spirituality is something close to the sacral and the divine; more than that: it completely entrusts itself to them. An atheist is not deprived of spirituality, he is not free from remorse; he loves his neighbor, strives for the ideal, is impressed by beauty. He is an active creator of spiritual-cultural values. Morals as part of spirituality may rest not only on faith but also on a feeling of duty. Prominent Italian scholar and writer Umberto Eco offered this idea by asking: “How else can we explain the fact that atheists also have their share of remorse?”

This position serves one of the pillars of “autonomous ethics” that treats morals as a sphere of free choice in which man is an autonomous creature. It spreads to the sphere of man’s responsible judgments and actions, in which doing and not-doing belong solely to man, who alone is rewarded or condemned.

The principles of faith which man selects on his own free will are undoubtedly a sign of the autonomous nature of his morals, but religion cannot accept the idea of its autonomy as the possibility of remaining a moral creature outside religion. Man is a spiritual phenomenon only if he is connected to God. “The parable of those who reject faith is as if one were to shout like a goat-herd, to things that listen to nothing but calls and cries: Deaf, dumb, and blind, they are void of wisdom” (Surah 2, Ayah 171). It was not by chance that the Osnovnye polozhenia sotsial’noy programmy rossiiskikh musulman (The Basic Principles of the Social Program of the Muslims of Russia) quoted great Russian writer Dostoevsky: “If there is no God, everything is permitted.”

The nature of religious morality is much better understood within Max Weber’s idea of two conceptions of rational activities: rationality of traditional feudal society, which he called “value rationality,” and rationality of capitalist society, which he described as “instrumental rationality.” The former describes activity as applied to society and assesses the correlation between activity and the values society has accepted. In religion this is the correlation between activity and religious values, that is, moral behavior. In this case it is not the aim of every individual as a subject of activity that is important but the degree to which his activity corresponds to the values of time, socially important canons, and social status.

Capitalism created a new aspect of rational activity: To what extent can activity produce a result that coincides with the aim? And to what extent do the selected tools ensure effective realization of the aim, that is, to what extent is activity rational? In this case, human behavior is rational if it secures the aim. It is moral if it does not violate the law, does not infringe on the legal interests of others, and does not shirk duties. These are the morals of liberal-democratic society put in a nutshell. These two interpretations of rational behavior are not identical—they are even mutually contradictory. Value rationality rejects the individual nature of human rights. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II has pointed out that today, in the context of capitalist social relations, a “new generation of rights that goes against morals” has appeared, as well as “attempts to justify immoral deed by refer-

5 “Pro et Contra,” NG-Religii, 7 December, 2005.
6 Osnovnye polozhenia..., p. 18.
ences to human rights.”8 The Osnovnye polozhenia sotsial’noy programmy rossiiskikh musliman agrees with this. Today, in the absence of spirituality young men and teenagers borrow their abuse of drugs and alcohol and the desire to achieve physical pleasure through perversion from the wide-scale promotion of lifestyles “based on the philosophy of liberalism.”9

This is true: liberal-democratic values (or, rather, their Western and American variant) largely contradict the norms of religious morals, especially those preached by Islam. A superficial observer might think that religion and human rights are about the same things: spirituality, humanism, freedom, and well-being. This is true, but the interpretations of these principles are not always identical.

Religious humanism should not be understood as humanism in general. In fact both the interpretation of the principles of religious humanism as part of man’s moral makeup and their realization in everyday life are limited. The norm elevated to the principle can be regarded as the bedrock of morals only when it is reasonably justified and universalized. In other words, the norm, or principle, should promote those rules of conduct that can be tested by universality.

Religious humanism is limited to the faithful. The Quran tells the story of Noah, who was sent to his people with a mission. Some of the people (including Noah’s son) refused to follow him and were drowned in the Flood. “And Noah called upon his Lord, and said: ‘O my Lord, surely my son is of my family, and Your promise [to save my family] is true, and You are the justest of Judges!’” (Surah 11, Ayah 45). “He said: ‘O Noah, he is not of your family for his conduct unrighteous. So ask not of Me that of which you have no knowledge…” (Surah 11, Ayah 46).

The Salafi (fundamentalist) Islamic conscience is even more inclined toward the corporate nature of religious morals. For example, Wahhabism teaches humanity in relation to others: be kind, cautious, keep your promise, exercise patience, do not lie and help the blind. Wahhabis called on the faithful to take care of their servants and hired labor and in general preached egalitarianism.10 Their humanism, however, is of a limited nature: it is not even reserved for all Muslims but only for those who are Wahhabis. Their extremist wing thinks nothing of killing a Muslim non-Wahhabi and appropriating his possessions (this is treated as halal). On the other hand, members of traditional Islam in Daghestan do not apply their humanitarian principles to the Wahhabis. 11

In the philosophical context the difference between religious humanism and the humanist world outlook boils down to the following. In the broad sense the term describes a mode of thinking that proclaims the well-being of man to be the main aim of social and cultural development and insists on the primary value of man as an individual. Religion, on the other hand, appreciates man’s value depending on the extent to which his behavior corresponds to the norms of any given religious corporation. Man affirms himself by being as actively involved as possible in the social group of believers, in the order organized by God. In other words, religious humanism is theocentric while the humanity of humanism is an anthropocentric phenomenon. These two types are locked in a very complicated contradiction in the sphere of their relations associated with the role of religion in society. Indeed, humanism firmly rejects the claims of the church and the clergy to domination in society, that is, it is anti-clerical in its essence. This is one of the forms of negation of the universal and the binding nature of religious morality and religious humanism as its part.

These differences between the religious and secular understanding of the nature of morality should not be absolutized. This operation is applicable only within the task of identifying the philosophical differences and opposites of these two spiritual orientations. In social practice these two positions often peacefully exist side by side. This can be seen, first, in all sorts of Islamic reformist trends: Jadidism, or rather its enlightening activities, is one of the key elements of humanism.

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8 From a speech by Patriarch Alexy II at a PACE plenary session in Strasbourg in October 2007 (see: P. Krug, “Prava cheloveka po Aleksiu II,” Nezavisimaia gazeta, 4 October, 2007).
9 Osnovnye polozhenia... p. 18.
11 In one of his public speeches late Mufti of Daghestan Said Muhammad Abubakarov said: those killed by a Wahhabi will go to heaven, those who kill a Wahhabi will also go to heaven.”
case unyielding theocentrism and the providential nature of traditional Islam stand opposed to the enlightening conception of human nature. Second, I shall demonstrate below that mass religious consciousness frequently departs from the consistent religious position on issues of morality and on the problems of religious-legal regulation of social relations. This phenomenon can be taken as an aftermath of the random desacralization processes and, by inference, of the secular adaptation of religious consciousness. Unyielding Islamic theocentrism always regards this as immature Islamic conscience. For this reason the main contradictions of Islamic conscience and the changes in traditional culture are observed not in ordinary believers but in two other groups of bearers of Islamic conscience: (a) spiritual leaders and (b) some of the Salafi movements.

Quite often the cohesion of religion and morals is supported by Kant’s ethical ideas. Indeed, he wrote that it is morally binding to accept the existence of God\(^{12}\) and that everything, besides his mental disposition toward goodness, man presupposes to do to please God is merely a religious illusion and false service to God.\(^{13}\) It is wrong to think that he took morality for Divine reality. It is typical of Muslim religious ethics to establish, besides relations among humans (in Islam they are regulated by muamalat, a section of Muslim law), the norms of man’s relationship with God (ibadat), which interpret the ethical norms as divine commands of absolute value. Kant’s ethics are specific because he understands the place of “divine commands” in ethics in a special way. He asked: Should man be virtuous only because there is the next world? Or it is vice versa: are human deeds rewarded because they are good and virtuous by themselves? The philosopher went on: Indeed, since moral prescriptions are present in the human heart no machines operating from another world are needed to force man to act in this world according to his predestination.\(^{14}\)

These questions and statements of the German philosopher should not be taken to mean that he denied God a role in morality because this would have contradicted one of the statements quoted above: “it is morally binding to accept the existence of God.” Kant never denied God his role in morality but rather showed his special attitude to the divine and the moral illustrated by the following: the moral is moral not because God wishes it—God wishes it because it is moral. Faith in God creates a balance between moral virtues and bliss, but it should not be taken as the reason for but rather as the result of the moral train of thought.\(^{15}\)

**Dagestanis on the Sources of Morality**

The above questions prompted a sociological poll to be carried out in 14 populated centers (four towns and ten villages). The questionnaire concentrated on the role of the Shari’a in the public, state, and personal life of the Muslims. This and other aspects of the Shari’a figured prominently in the previous polls of 2000, 2002, 2004, and 2007.

In 2007 the question about the Shari’a was formulated more specifically: the respondent could select one of the spheres in which the Shari’a can be applied (the state, society, private life) or a combination of the personal and the public.

The 2007 poll was intended to identify the differences in the answers of two groups of respondents conventionally called “fundamentalists” and “modernists.” Those who agreed that “Islam should remain the same as it was under the Prophet Muhammad” were described as “fundamentalists.”


\(^{13}\) See: I. Kant, *Religia v predelakh tolk razuma* (Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone), St. Petersburg, 1908, p. 179.


“Modernists,” on the other hand, believe that “the Muslim religion should change in the course of time just like life itself.” Since 2000 the question about the possibility and advisability of modernizing Islam has been asked three times in all sorts of sociological polls. All of them revealed that “fundamentalists” comprised over half of the polled (51 percent on average) (the 2007 poll produced a figure of 52.1 percent). The share of “modernists” was 31.3 percent. Men turned out to be greater “fundamentalists” than women. Ethnic groups were distributed in the following way in the group of “fundamentalists”: Avars, Darghins, Lezghians, Lakhs, and Kumyks. The group of “modernists” consisted of five large ethnic groups headed by the Lakhs and closed by the Avars. The three polls suggest one conclusion: the positions of “modernists” and “fundamentalists” on various questions related to the attitude of Islam to the problems of our time are consistent. There are certain deviations in their verbal behavior: quite often they testify that the respondent might move away from the strictly confessional position.

Table 1 illustrates the attitude toward the Shari’a displayed by the respondents.

Table 1: Distribution of Answers to the Question about the Role of the Shari’a in the Life of Daghestanian Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polled groups (“fundamentalists” and “modernists”)</th>
<th>Answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam should remain the same as it was under the Prophet Muhammad</td>
<td>The Shari’a should replace the state laws in all spheres of public and state life of Daghestan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>42/17.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Shari’a should regulate personal relations among people (the sphere of morality) without the sphere of state activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>105/44.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Shari’a should regulate only family and everyday relations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39/16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The Shari’a should be excluded from all spheres of human activity as contradicting the spirit of the times</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17/7.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0/0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Undecided</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>31/13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Muslim religion should change along with life</td>
<td>5/3.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57/40.4</td>
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<td></td>
<td>21/14.9</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18/12.8</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0/0</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>38/27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>4/5.3</td>
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<td>5/6.7</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29/38.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>98/21.7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 contains several opinions: first, the two extreme positions relating to the role of the Shari’a were rejected by the majority of the republic’s population. One of them—the Shari’a should replace the state laws in all spheres of public and state life of Daghestan—was supported by
merely 11.3 percent of the polled. The Daghestanis (8.9 percent of the polled) are not prepared to completely exclude the Shari’a from all spheres of human activity either. A certain inconsistency in the “fundamentalist” and “modernist” positions on the role of the Shari’a notwithstanding and the degree to which the groups are dedicated to their views prove that the ideas were not formed at random.

Public opinion about the role of the Shari’a is reduced to the view that it should regulate personal relations: 40.8 percent in the sphere of morality and 17.3 percent in the family and everyday sphere.

The high share of those convinced that the Shari’a is morally charged (40.8 percent) suggests the following question: Are Islamic values today the only source of morality for rank-and-file Daghestanian believers? The 2004 poll asked the question point-blank: “Can man be moral outside religion?”

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polled groups</th>
<th>Anyone can be moral irrespective of his attitude to faith</th>
<th>Only religious people can be moral</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Fundamentalists”</td>
<td>65.8</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Modernists”</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>7.9</td>
<td>5.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>80.4</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>9.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>74.6</td>
<td>16.8</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is a seeming contradiction between the two tables: Table 1 asserts that the Shari’a is a predominantly moral factor while Table 2 demonstrates that faith plays a secondary role in man’s moral education. In fact, there is no contradiction at all: according to Table 2 the faithful do not deny the Shari’a its moral mission—they merely reject the idea of its universal nature and religion’s exclusive role as the source of ethical philosophy. This means that the ordinary believer finds himself beyond the limits of corporate morality, which can be described as the inconsistency of his religious ideas. Indeed, as a believer he should completely obey the Shari’a, which he fails to do. He is guilty as a believer, yet he cannot be described as immoral man.

This gave rise to a surmise related to two variants of moral choice: either the religious element in man, his faith, means that he should strictly obey God (Ibadat) and follow the demands of Iman (faith in Allah, his Angels and messengers) or the true believer is he who acts in a morally correct way rather than declare his faith and zealously perform religious rites. Far-fetched at first glance this approach is highly justified. On 23 August, 2007, speaking at a large international inter-religious forum in Gudermes (Chechnia), the Supreme Mufti of Iraq pointed out that the good deeds of any Muslim performed outside his religion are an important part of his faith and quoted from the Prophet who had said that he would rather spend a month helping his friend than sitting in a mosque. There were trends in Islam (the Harijids being one of them) that believed that good deeds were an inalienable part of faith rather than outward signs of one’s religious feelings. There is another side to the issue: people tend to be indignant with overzealous believers who insist on the strict performance of all rights and yet ignore the norms of decency.

To find out how society treated this situation the polled were asked to select one of five answers to the question: “Who can be described as a genuinely religious person?”
Table 3 demonstrates that one third of the polled believe that moral rather than sacral principles are important for true faith. Neither faithful performance of the demands of Islam (31 percent) nor of Iman (28.4 percent) is all-important for man’s moral makeup. At the same time the latter were on the whole firmly devoted to the idea of Islamic values in morality. The answers to this question, however, have demonstrated that the faithful were bold enough to transcend the limits of religious morality and demonstrated fairly high adaptability to pluralist approaches. In this respect women proved to be more flexible than men. Older age groups, likewise, proved to be more flexible than the others; educational level also affected adaptability. Desacralization of morality was accepted by ethnic groups in the following way: Lakhs, 51.2 percent; Kumyks, 38.2 percent; Lezghians, 36.8 percent; Darghins, 29.6 percent; and Avars, 16.5 percent. These results noticeably correlate to the answers of the “fundamentalists” ("Islam should remain the same as it was under the Prophet Muhammad") distributed among ethnic groups in the following way: Kumyks, 44.7 percent; Lakhs, 46.3 percent; Lezghians, 57.9 percent; Darghins, 65.3 percent; and Avars, 78.5 percent. There were no noticeable differences between urban and rural dwellers.

The next question was suggested by the following: orthodox Islam as a whole denies that the unfaithful can be described as entirely moral and self-sufficient; this is even more obvious among the fundamentalists. In the 1st century of Hegira (after 622) two types of believers appeared inside Islam, each with its own idea about the unity of faith and reason. They were “people of the book” (ahl al-hadith) who relied on the Quran and the Sunnah and the principle “I believe in order to understand”
and those who relied on reason when dealing with the sacral texts (ashab ar-ray) and the principle “I understand in order to believe.” This means that practically from the very beginning there were disagreements inside Islam related to the understanding of the unity of reason and faith. This should not be taken to mean that those who followed ashab ar-ray accepted the idea of the absolute autonomy of morals and the possibility of relying on non-sacral sources of morality. At the same time, this group, which has moved away from a literal understanding of the scriptures to promote the values of reason, is much more adaptable than the ahl al-hadith group.

This gave rise to a question about the role of reason and faith in man’s moral maturity designed to identify what believers thought about non-believers: Do they accept that their unbelieving neighbors can be moral or not? In this case reason and faith were related to different people: believers and non-believers. The aim was to find out how the believer adapts himself to the “un-believing” context or even to the conditions of “different faith” and “different morality.” Those who recognized that reason had a role to play in morality were obviously highly adaptable since they accepted, albeit partially, the autonomous nature of morality. This position confirmed the respondents’ position on the questions analyzed above.

Since the concepts of good and evil belong to ethics, the question was about the role of reason and faith in discerning between them. It was also taken into account that this question was deeply rooted in the history of religions, Islam in particular, which left its imprint on religious consciousness.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polled groups (“fundamentalists” and “modernists”)</th>
<th>Human reason is capable of distinguishing between good and evil irrespective of the faith in God</th>
<th>Faith rather than reason can show man the difference between good and evil</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Islam should remain the same as it was under the Prophet Muhammad</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>28.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim religion should change together with life</td>
<td>66.0</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undecided</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results of the poll (Table 4) confirm some of the previous surmises: the faithful believed that rational methods are most important for distinguishing between good and evil; it is very important that both “fundamentalists” and “modernists” agreed on this. In the general sample women turned out to be more rational than men (65.3 percent against 55.4 percent). This is hard to explain if we take into account that the latest polls in Daghestan demonstrated that there were more women than men among the faithful. We should not forget, however, that there are more “fundamentalists” among men than among women (58.9 percent against 44.8 percent) and that men are more consistent fundamentalists. This makes the result supplied by Table 4 not so surprising.
1. Despite the fact that mass consciousness mostly regards the Shari’a as a regulator of personal and family relations in the sphere of morality, its role is not absolutized. The believer refuses to recognize the universal nature of religious morality and religion’s exclusive right to forming a moral individual.

2. The Daghestanis believe that “morally correct deeds” are the main factor in the correlation between obeying the formal religious commands (Iman, Islam, Ibadat) and moral behavior. They have obviously moved away from the fundamentalist demand of following, unquestioningly and literally, the Quran and the Sunnah as preached by conservative Salafism.

3. The polled believed that reason was the determining factor in the relations between faith and reason when it came to cognizing the moral truths. This means that they accepted the right of non-believers, those who followed other faiths or moralities, to be described as moral.

4. On the whole, the Daghestanis’ mass consciousness is inclined to accept alien, non-Islamic ethical norms within their morality sphere. The morality of an ordinary Daghestani contains elements of autonomous ethics.

5. A relatively small part of the sample (from 10 to 30 percent depending on the question) remains consistent when it comes to the position of religion in morality.

The results of the sociological poll analyzed above could be taken as evidence of the considerable adaptation potential of Islamic consciousness among ordinary Daghestanis in the context of globalization and liberal-democratic changes. However, this would be wrong because this adaptation goes beyond the limits of Islamic consciousness and frequently contradicts it. The ordinary Daghestani is adapting to the current realia not because he is a Muslim and not because he reassesses the Islamic values to adjust them to the new spirit of the times. He merely disregards them and embraces, uncritically, the new conditions of life created by secular culture, which is growing increasingly rational. The Daghestani is actively adapting himself, however this cannot be described as Muslim adaptation: he might lose the traditional norms for regulating private and public life in the process. Whether this is good or bad remains to be seen. So far we can say that the best way to adapt would be through borrowing Western rationalism as the key method of adaptation to the contemporary world and grafting it to one’s own (Muslim) culture and history. This would produce Islam that assimilates contemporaneity. Though present in the Islamic world this trend has been unfolding slowly so far.

There is another type of adaptation that can be called self-assimilation, in the course of which Islam surrenders its values to the values of the West. This produces Islam assimilated by contemporaneity. Elements of this type of adaptation can be seen in Tatar neo-Jadidism (Euro-Islam). The Islamic umma as a whole is not prepared to accept this easy and effective method.

Another trend suggests that adaptation should be completely or partially rejected through self-isolation or active opposition to globalization, the road selected by conservative Salafism and radicalism. In Daghestan this phenomenon is described as Wahhabism.

The ordinary Daghestani’s verbal behavior in the sphere of morality has nothing to do either with “Islam that assimilated contemporaneity” or with “Islam assimilated by contemporaneity.”
Judaism in the Caucasus

Abstract

The author looks at the past and present of Judaism, one of the monotheist religions in the Caucasus dating back to the 5th century. Today over 200 thousand Jews live in Azerbaijan, Georgia, Daghestan, and some of the North Caucasian republics. This means that the author has to cover a wide range of questions from the origins and settlement of the Jews in the Caucasus to the specific features of their material and spiritual culture and their ramified contacts with the rest of the world.

Introduction

The vast body of academic and popular writing and regular scientific forums are a sure sign that Judaism in the Caucasus and the two main Jewish groups (the mountain and the Georgian Jews) have always attracted and continue to attract a lot of attention. The mountain Jews call themselves Juur; they speak the Juuri tongue and have preserved their traditional material and spiritual culture, Judaism as their religion, and their way of life. Their language is built on the vocabulary of mainly Iranian extraction, however religious terms are traditional, as well as first names and last names. The Georgian Jews have partly preserved their traditional material and spiritual culture, however they use Georgian and Russian and call


3 See: V.F. Miller, Materialy dlia izuchenia evreysko-tatskogo iazyka. Vvedenie. Tekсты. Slovar, St. Petersburg, 1892; idem, Ocherk fonetiki evreysko-tatskogo narechnia, Moscow, 1900; idem, Ocherk morfologii evreysko-tatskogo narechnia, Moscow, 1901; Ia.M. Agarunov, Tatsko (evreysko)-russkiy slovar, published by the Jewish University in Moscow, Moscow, 1997.

themselves in Georgia ebraeli, israeli and kartuli ebraeli. They have not only accepted the Georgian language but also Georgian dances, music, and last names. The European Jews call themselves Ashkenazim and Yiddish. They follow the main prescriptions of Judaism and speak Yiddish, a language based on German, and have preserved their traditional and spiritual culture, first names and last names.

The Jews in the Caucasus and the Judaism they brought into the region attracted the attention of historians, ethnographers, culturologists, linguists, and philologists some 130 years ago. Since the 19th century, when this part of the Jewry and its religion became an object of more or less systematic studies, there has been no shortage of hypotheses about the history, causes, stages, and roads of Jewish migration from the Promised Land to the Caucasus and the time when the ancestors of the mountain and Georgian Jews reached it. Nearly all the authors relied on either oral or the canonical tradition recorded in the Bible. There is an obvious shortage of information based on reliable historical sources: only bits and pieces have been discovered so far. This explains why at the very end of the 19th century I.Sh. Anisimov, the first scholar from among the mountain Jews, wrote that his people knew nothing of their true history and that they had no reliable information about their own past. The same can be said about the early history of the Georgian Jews. Today there is no agreement about it, which allowed W.J. Fishel to say that the history of how the Jews reached the territories to the east of the Tigris and Euphrates, and the Caucasus, still remains vague.

Historically, the Jewish communities identify themselves in the following way:

- **Ashkenazim**—today known as European Jews—are descendants of the Jews who came to live in Germany and had their own name, Ashkenaz, for the land along the Rein and later for the whole of Germany;
- **Sephardim**—today known as Eastern Jews, including the mountain and Georgian Jews—have Jews who lived in Spain, which they called Spharad, as their ancestors.

They use different languages and live in different places, their traditional material and spiritual culture has many different traits, however they are kept together by Judaism, the cornerstone of the traditional Jewish identity. This means that the blanket term Sephardim of the Caucasus can be applied to the mountain and Georgian Jews.

The Jewish (now Krasnaia) Sloboda (quarter) in the Azeri city of Quba has been and remains the largest Jewish community in the Caucasus; it is also known as Caucasian Jerusalem, the magnet that pulled Sephardim from all over the Caucasus. It should be said that the Caucasus knew neither anti-Semitism nor Jewish pogroms.

The Origins of the Caucasian Jews

There is no reliable information about the distant past of the Georgian Jews: “Legends date the arrival of the Jews to Kartli and Iberia, two of the most ancient Caucasian states, to the late 7th century B.C. when the First Temple was ruined and numerous prisoners were carried off from Israel and Judea into Babylonian Captivity.” The tradition associates this significant event in the history of the Jews and Judaism with Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II (605-562 B.C.). The second Jewish wave traditionally goes back to the date the Second Temple was destroyed by the Romans in the 1st century A.D.: “New exiles reached Mtskhet in the 1st century A.D. and joined those Jews who had already

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6 See: I.Sh. Anisimov, op. cit, pp. 11-12.
9 M. Karelashvili, op. cit., p. 40.
settled there.10 Some of those who later started the Jewish population of Georgia came from Byzantium, the Sassanian Empire, Caucasian Albania, and the Khazar Kaganate. According to some of the legends, the ancestors of the Juurs were taken prisoner in the 6th century B.C. by Cyrus II Achaemenid (559-530 B.C.) who conquered Babylon and Judea. The legend is usually supported by the Bible (The Book of Esther 2:5-6), which tells the story of a Benjamite "who had been taken into exile from Jerusalem" by "Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylonia." The captives first settled in Mesopotamia and Media, from where they later reached the Caucasus. It is generally believed, therefore, that the mountain Jews descended from the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. In other words, they are the descendants of those who lived in Judea, a kingdom in southern Palestine (928-587 B.C.) destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II who ruined the First Temple. Indirect information suggested that the forced demographic changes in the fate of the Jews were brought about by the Assyrian and Babylonian kings. The Bible tells the story: "In the ninth year of Hoshea,11 the king of Assyria captured Samaria and carried Israel away into exile to Assyria, and settled them in Halah and Habor, on the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes" (2 Kings, 17:6; 18:11). Among other things, the Jews abandoned their homeland when the First and the Second Temples, the centers of their national, cultic, and spiritual life, were destroyed. Deprived of these landmarks and a state of their own, which meant that they had no political life, the followers of Judaism formed a widespread diaspora outside their historical homeland.

During the Achaemenid Kingdom Cyrus II allowed the Jews of Benjamin’s and Judah’s tribes to return to Palestine, which he had captured by that time, and to help build the Second Temple. This is mentioned in the Book of Ezra (1:1-4; 8:15-17). They never accepted this invitation; this is indirectly confirmed by the Mishnah12 that mentioned Nahum ha-Modia (Media), a Jewish scholar of the 1st century. The Talmud,13 in turn, speaks of Rabbi Gamaliel (1st century) who ordered his scribe to send a letter to "our brother in Media," a shepherd of the Jews who lived in South Azerbaijan. This means that the Jews of the Achaemenid Empire missed the chance to go back to Palestine. In any case, not all of them returned to the Promised Land; a fairly large number preferred to remain in Media (South Azerbaijan)—this is indirectly confirmed by the fact that in the 1st century they formed a community with its own head.

In the mid-20th century Russian academic Iu. Solodukho offered a fairly well-justified opinion that the ancestors of the mountain Jews had been deported to the Caucasus by the rulers of the Sassanian Empire (224-651), who indeed had the larger part of the region under their power.14 This means that deportation took place in the 5th century (the Early Middle Ages) rather than in Antiquity as it was believed before.

In search of an acceptable solution one can side with those who speak about the several waves of Jewish eastward migration that reached the Caucasus. There is no disagreement, however, over the direction of Jewish migration; it went on for a long time and covered wide territories. Here I shall concentrate on one of the historical-chronological and spacial contexts: the Caucasian vector.

From the history of the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Achaemenid empires, all of them tagged “Great” in antiquity, we know that in the ethnopolitical sphere they preferred to mix and disunite tribes and deport them in pursuit of their own local or geopolitical aims that demanded ethnic and demographic changes.

- First, all parts of the vast imperial domains should have been more or less uniform when it came to trade and the economy.
- Second, the need for a developed local market that would add stability to the state was obvious.

10 M. Karlashvili, op. cit., p. 40.
11 Hoshea—King of Israel in 785-742 B.C.
12 The Mishnah—the earliest part of the Talmud.
13 The Talmud—a collection of Judaic dogmas, religious, ethical, and legal propositions in the form they took shape by the 4th century B.C.-5th century A.D.
Third, the empires sought a dignified place in the system of international relations and international trade.

Fourth, the conquered but not subjugated people had to be mutually neutralized.

Fifth, being strong enough, the “great powers” of antiquity followed the “divide and rule” principle which is as old as class society itself and which was very much in demand at all times in all polyethnic states: it fitted perfectly the aims and tasks of the ruling ethnic group.

Sixth, artificial separation of an ethnic group destroyed its “critical mass,” which presented a danger to foreign oppressors who not infrequently had their own gods and spoke a different language.

The above fully applied to the Sassanian Empire which in the 5th-6th centuries supported Zoroastrianism as its official religion and imposed it on its subjects who belonged to different religions. Those who refused were cruelly punished and deported without distinction. Ancestors of the mountain Jews, among others, fell victim to this treatment. The Sassanian epoch (the Early Middle Ages) marked the beginning of Sephardim’s migration; this was when the Jews now known as Juurs first reached the Caucasus.

It was under Shahenshah Yesdigerd II (439-487) that Jews were either deported from the Sassanian Empire or left by their own free will for the Caucasus because they could no longer observe the Sabbath and were persecuted in many other ways. Under Kavadh I (488-531) and especially Chosroes I Anushirva (531-579), who came after Yesdigerd II, the pressure became unbearable. This is one of the possible answers to the question about the origins of the mountain Jews. We know for sure that it was their ancestors who brought Judaism to the Caucasus and that this happened in the 6th century.

**Distribution of the Jews in the Caucasus**

According to the 2007 figures, there are about 16 million Jews in the world; about 6 million of them live in the United States, 5 million in Israel, and 1 million in Russia. Large Jewish communities of over 100 thousand are found in France, Ukraine, Canada, Great Britain, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, Australia, and Hungary. Organized Judaic communities function in about 80 countries.

According to the First General Population Census of the Russian Empire of 1897, there were 152 thousand mountain and Georgian Jews, or 1.3 percent of the local population. There were Jews in Azerbaijan, Daghestan, Georgia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Checheno-Ingushetia and in the cities of Baku, Tbilisi, Quba, Makhachkala, Derbent, Nalchik, Piatigorsk, Kislovodsk, Essentuki, Zheleznovodsk, and Mineralnye Vody. According to the All-Union Population Census of 1989 there were over 200 thousand Jews in the Caucasus (1.6 percent of the local population). Post-Soviet information cannot be called complete: it is limited to two figures: 18,795 Jews in the Northern Caucasus in 2002 and 38,170 Jews in the Republic of Azerbaijan.

There were several synagogues in the Jewish Sloboda of Quba, the home town of the largest compact Juur community. In the latter half of the 18th century, rulers of the Quba Khanate Guseynali-Khan (1722-1758) and Fatali-Khan (1758-1789) invited Juurs to move into their capital, the city of Quba. They first settled in a small quarter that later spread to become the Jewish Sloboda. According to information of the early 19th century, there were about 1,000 houses inhabited by about 5,000. The sloboda was divided into 9 quarters with a synagogue in each of them. Today, there are three syn-
agogues. The opening ceremony of the largest of them restored in 2001 was attended by the city authorities, the Israeli ambassador, and numerous guests. Their religion and its rigorous demands concerning the lifestyle, diet, customs, and endogamy set the Juurs apart, hence the sloboda and other strictly separate settlements.

There were synagogues in Derbent, Baku, Tbilisi, and Piatigorsk. In 1910 the central choral synagogue was built in Baku, which remained open until the 1930s. There were also Yeshibahs who taught the usual subjects—the Torah, the Talmud, and the Mishnah.

At the turn of the 19th century some of the Georgian Jews moved to Azerbaijan where they acquired another synagogue in Baku. Today there is a new synagogue in Baku built in 2002-2003, the best throughout the Caucasus and Central Asia. It is used by European and Georgian Jews. The opening ceremony was attended by top officials of Azerbaijan and guests from Russia, America, Israel, Kazakhstan, and Georgia.

In connection with the Jewry it should be said: “According to the Halacha (sum total of the laws collected in the Torah, Talmud, and rabbinic writings that regulate all sides of everyday life.—R.G.), each person born of a Jewish mother or practicing Judaism according to the religious law is considered to be a Jew.” It should be said that practically all those who practice Judaism are ethnic Jews, first, because of their tribal origins; second, because Judaism has no use for proselytism and missionary activities; third, because it is not easy to join the Judaic community (Giyur) even though it is permitted. Proselytes (Geres) become Jews through a corresponding ritual; nobody has the right to remind them of their non-Jewish origins. There are several marginal groups—Karaites and Samaritans, the Judaizers of Ethiopia, Zambia, Liberia, Myanmar, India, Japan, the U.S. and Russia—who are aware that they differ from the Jews.

Traditionally, only those born of Jewish mothers should be accepted as Jews. The history of Judaism, the Jewish religion, in the Caucasus among other places, testifies to the fact that it was the religion of both ethnic Jews and people of other ethnic origins. Such were the Khazars, a Turkic people who followed Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and pagan cults. The Geres are another Judaist branch present in the Caucasus.

The memories about the Benjamin and Judah ancestry and deportation to Mesopotamia are alive in the legends of mountain Jews, yet oral tradition knows nothing about when and how their ancestors reached the Caucasus. Back in 1940 Russian Orientalist Iu. Solodukho offered his version of how the Jews from Mesopotamia moved eastward. It is still accepted as the most correct one because it rests on specific historical facts. He wrote that in the late 5th-first third of the 6th century the Sassanian Empire was rocked by a powerful mass movement of Mazdakis who moved against the Persian nobles, top landowners, and Zoroastrian priests. Mazdak gathered land tillers, artisans, cattle-breeders, urban poor, tradesmen, and common members of the official clergy under his banner.

The Jews of Mesopotamia (then part of the Sassanian Empire) joined the Mazdakis in great numbers. In this context it can be surmised that this was the region where a large part, if not all, of the Jewish

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20 The Torah—ancient Hebrew name for the Pentateuch (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy).
21 See: M. Karelashvili, op. cit., p. 45.
23 Karaites—descendants of Turkic tribes that embraced Judaism in the Khazar Kaganate in the 7th century. They speak a Turkic language of the Kypchak group.
24 Samaritans—people living in the region of Samaria in Palestine and a religious community that detached itself in the 6th century B.C. from the Judaic community of Jerusalem.
population of the Sassanian Empire lived. This is confirmed by the Biblical texts quoted above: the toponyms mentioned there point to Mesopotamia and Media, which meant South Azerbaijan.

Mazdak, who created a religious and ethical teaching of his own that inspired a large number of those living in the Sassanian Empire and neighboring countries, preached that all people are equal therefore the immense wealth of some and the sheer poverty of others, as well as vast landed possessions and material boon, ignited enmity among the people. To achieve harmony it was suggested to take land and other property from the rich and distribute them among the poor. The Mazdaki movement that spread across the Sassanian Empire found fertile soil among the Jews of Mesopotamia. The Jewish Chronicle of the 9th century tells a story of what took place in 508-526 in the local Jewish community when the Mazdaki movement was at its height: it recounts that events connected with Mar Zutra II “from the House of David, King of Israel”27 who for 20 years served the Exilarch (head) of the Jewish community of the Sassanian Empire and Mesopotamia as its part. He joined Mazdak with a detachment of 400. According to the chronicle: “Mar Zutra conquered the state and collected poll tax for seven years.” This means that the Jewish rebels set up an independent state with their Exilarch at the head and the capital in the city of Pumbatida. The state survived for seven years to be routed by King Chosroes I Anushirva Sasanid who ascended the throne in 531. Mar Zur was taken prisoner, carried off to the city of Mahoze close to Ctesiphon, the Sassanian capital, and executed there. Pumbatida, the center of the Jewish community of Mesopotamia and Mar Zutra’s capital, was destroyed.28

By way of punishment the Juuri ancestors were deported further east until they finally reached the Caucasus where they came face to face with an unknown ethnic, religious, social, economic, cultural, and geographic environment. The migrants, in turn, brought their skills and gradually learned a lot from the locals. On the whole the Juurs blended with the new environment while preserving, unlike the Georgian Jews, their ethnic, cultural, religious, and other specifics and bonds as well as their language. Today they stand apart from other ethnic groups and yet remain part and parcel of the Jews as descendants of the Jews of antiquity pushed to the Caucasus. This is confirmed by their unquestionably Judaic culture and everyday life and ethnic self-identification.

Material and Spiritual Culture. Public Life

V. Kozlov, a prominent Russian ethnologist of the 20th century, has written: “Each nation has its own specifics displayed in material and spiritual culture; sometimes some of the cultural elements become symbols of ethnic affiliation.”29 The following confirms that the Jews (including the Sephardim of the Caucasus) belong to the Jewry:

- Ancestry that goes back to the tribes of Benjamin and Judah;
- Legends and myths;
- Judaism that they have been professing from the very beginning;
- Specifically Jewish diet;
- Traditional system of education of the recent past together with settlements, homes, and everyday lifestyle.

At the same time, in some respects the Caucasian Jewish community differs from Jewish communities in other regions. The Ashkenasim, who reached the Caucasus relatively recently, are all urban dwellers while the Juurs, ebraeli, and geres, who have been living in the Caucasus for many centuries, were initially village dwellers. Their settlements and houses comprised two groups: mountain and valley

27 Ibid., p. 133.
28 See: Ibid., p. 145.
villages. In the villages with mixed populations Jews invariably lived in compact groups in separate quarters; the pattern was repeated in towns and cities. Their quarters and houses were generally of the local (Caucasian) type adjusted to the Jewish traditions and everyday life. Relatives lived together in houses that faced inward, toward the landed plot, and were separated from the street by high solid fences. According to I. Cherny, there was a fireplace in the living room and shelves with dishes; one of the walls had mirrors on it with silk or wool shawls and weapons between them; clothes were kept in chests; there were niches for household items and bedding; a special room was reserved for guests (kunaks).

The Juurs and Ebraeli wore Caucasian clothes with certain specifics typical of Jewish dress. There were five types of traditional dishes: meat, starch, milk, vegetables, and fish; the Jews used strong seasoning together with onion, garlic, and herbs; they drank tea, ayran, wine, and vodka. In strict compliance with Judaic prescriptions they ate kosher meat and poultry slain by the shoiket. To this day they keep meat and milk dishes separate.

The local specifics left its deep imprint on the social life of the local Sephardim, however they have remained loyal to the Jewish traditions and holidays:

- **Passover (Pesah)**, the spring holiday that celebrated the Exodus from Egypt;
- **Purim**, the holiday that commemorates the deliverance of the Jewish people of the Achaemenid Empire from the plot to annihilate them;
- **Simhat Torah**, “rejoicing in the Torah”;
- **Sukkot**, feast of the Booths or Feast of Tabernacles during which the Jews are instructed to use temporary structures;
- **Rosh Hashanah**, Jewish New Year;
- **Shabuoth**, “honey,” the feast during which sweets are eaten;
- **Yom Kippur**, the Day of Atonement and Repentance, of fasting and intensive prayer;
- **Hanukkah**, the Day of the Maccabees, the Feast of Dedication.

At all times the synagogue remained the center of religious and social life. In the 19th century there were 43 synagogues and 48 rabbis; two of them were chief rabbis for supervising the Jewish communities of the Central Caucasus and the Northern Caucasus. The synagogues and utensils are of the Sephardic types. Irrespective of where they live the Jews follow the same rule of Shabbat: on Friday at sunset one of those who serves in the synagogue announces that Shabbat has come; a lamp is lighted to be left burning throughout Shabbat when no fire can be lighted; the food cooked in advance is eaten cold. In general, everything that can be described as “work” is banned. In the Caucasus all Jews go to synagogues; in the absence of two separate synagogues for the Sephardim and Ashkenasim they share one.

The Sephardic communities call their rabbis haham; he is also the khazzan (cantor), who reads prayers in a sing-song manner; the shoibet, who slays animals and poultry in the ritual way; melamed, the private teacher of the Jewish laws and director of the primary religious school for Jewish boys; he also acts as a mohel (circumciser), who performs circumcision (milah). Rabbis had an important role to play in marriage ceremonies and burial. They still enjoy the respect of the Jewish community as representatives of Judaism.

In the past so-called Omar’s Laws played an important part in the Jews’ religious life. They regulated the lifestyle and conduct of the ahl al-zimma (non-Muslims of the Covenant), meaning the “People of the Book” (Christians and Jews) living under the patronage of zimma (the Muslim state). They were regarded as subjects duty-bound to observe special laws that regulated their life and activ-

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ities. They had to live separately, in special parts of the cities, wear clothes that would set them apart from the Muslims, their churches and synagogues should not be higher than the mosques while their houses should be lower than the mosques and houses of the Muslims. They had to give way to Muslims and dismount at the sight of a Muslim. Omar’s Laws permitted forced conversion to Islam.

The life-cycle of the Sephardim of the Caucasus preserved its Judaic foundations, although it changed a lot in the Caucasian milieu. Until relatively recently social life was ruled by the adats—Caucasian customs; the local Sephardim are as hospitable as their Caucasian neighbors. Each house had a guest room in which not only Jews but also Christians and Muslims were equally welcome. The tradition of sworn brotherhood was a key one. In the 19th century, “each Muslim had his kunaks in Jewish villages and each Jew had kunaks in Muslim villages.” This went even further: “A Jew would defend even his personal enemy since he dealt with a non-Jew.”

All members of the Jewish community could count on neighbors in case of trouble; mutual assistance was extended to those who built new houses, procured kosher meat and dairy products, and baked bread, as well as in the event of natural disasters and catastrophes; orphans and the poor could count on monetary assistance, ill people could expect care, etc.

There were special Judaic burial rituals: during the first 10 days the relatives of the recently deceased visited the synagogue to read prayers for the dead; today, Hebrew is still used for epitaphs. Marriage rites are also still connected with Judaism: “confessional endogamy,” religious marriage involving a rabbi, the marriage feast begins on the eve of the Saturday when the bride takes a ritual bath; the marriage takes place under a special canopy in the yard next to the synagogue. Circumcision was performed on the eighth day after a boy’s birth; names were selected from the Tanakh.

Kehilla, the community, served as the cornerstone of social organization. In the Russian Empire it protected the Jews’ autonomy in religious and everyday life. In the Caucasus this was a closed structure of a certain non-official semi-administrative nature. The kehilla functioned under the chief gabbay; together with his deputies he was responsible for all aspects of communal life. It is generally believed that “the Jewish community of the Caucasus is one of the earliest communities of the Jewish diaspora.” Kehilla remained the backbone of the Jews’ social order until the early 20th century; the communal organization of life is still felt among the Jews: there are religious traditions, collective feelings, and care of neighbors.

The Caucasian Jews’ Relations with Israel and the Rest of the World

The contacts created by the territorial-geographic, social-economic, military-political, ethnic-confessional, and cultural circumstances are highly varied. 

Aliya, resettlement in the historical homeland, is an important link in this chain. By the end of the 20th century about 40 thousand Jews moved to Israel from the Caucasus. The process that began in
the 19th century is still going on. The first alia went on throughout the 19th century. In 1901 the first Zionist congress of the Jews of the Caucasus, which was convened in Tiflis, kindled an interest in the Holy Land. The second alia took place in 1907-1914. In 1917 Baku hosted the second Zionist congress of the Jews of the Caucasus; in 1919 it was followed by another congress in Baku. They launched another alia. It happened in the 1920s during Soviet power. In the 1950s, when the State of Israel was two years old, the alia continued and reached its peak in the 1970s.

Back in 1922 the world-wide Jewish Agency (Sokhnut) was set up to organize Jewish migration to the historical homeland. When the State of Israel was established, Sokhnut became an official structure with offices in all countries with compact Jewish groups; it pays for resettlement and organized preliminary trips to Israel.

The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, an independent non-governmental organization, is another important structure. Set up in America in 1914 it operates on voluntary donations from organizations and private persons with offices wherever there are Jews living in compact communities. All Jews can count on its material support while all Jewish communities, irrespective of their location, are patronized by the Joint Committee.

Judaimism in the Caucasus and its followers lived through several historical stages connected with territorial, political, statehood, and chronological factors. The above suggests that there is a fundamental difference between deportation of the Jews to the east during the Assyrian and Babylonian empires under Sargon II and Nebuchadnezzar II in the 8th-6th centuries B.C. and under the Sassanids in the 5th-6th centuries A.D. In the first case the “divide and rule” slogan was realized when Palestine was conquered and the Israeli and Judaic kingdoms were destroyed along with the First Temple. In the latter case the Jews rebelled against the state, the Sassanian Empire that deported them. Judaism and its followers appeared in the Caucasus because of several important military-political, socioeconomic, demographic, ethnoconfessional, and cultural events in the life of the Jews. These events proved instrumental in the historical, ethnographic, cultural, sociological, and demographic processes that led the Jews, stage by stage, to the Caucasus. They left their imprint on the life and activities of this historical and cultural community in the Caucasus, which has been and remains an inalienable part of Jewry and Judaism.

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