# RELIGIOUS SITUATION IN KAZAKHSTAN: POTENTIAL CONFLICTS AND RISK FACTORS

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## *Introduction*

The Soviet Union and the communist ideology collapsed leaving a spiritual void in their place to be filled with new public, political, and cultural realities that boosted national awareness and brought about new spiritual values. Post-Soviet society turned to religious values and traditions.

Kazakhstan, as part of the post-Soviet world, has had its share of these developments: today, the local people's increased religious self-awareness amazes no one. Part of Kazakhstani society not only identifies itself by its religious affiliation, it is adjusting its way of life according to religious norms and values.

The religious situation in the republic, however, cannot be described as simple: there are both positive and negative results of the people's increased religiosity, active involvement of foreign missionaries preaching religions previously absent in the region, as well as the liberal nature of republican legislation. To identify all possible negative developments in the republic's religious spheres, we should trace the origins of the present situation and look into possible repercussions. This alone will allow us to describe the nature of the present potential of religious conflicts in Kazakhstan.

Here I have set myself the task of identifying the potential of religious conflicts in our republic and probing into the risk factors in the development of the religious situation in Kazakhstan.

## The Current State

The many centuries of coexistence between Islam and Orthodox Christianity in Kazakhstan created a balance between the two: each occupies a niche of its own and is involved in a dialog with the other through social cooperation. Hence, stability and religious tolerance were the main outstanding features of the republic's religious context.

There were other numerous factors of historical, cultural, social, and political nature at play: history and similar mentalities created the ethnic and cultural community of the Turks and Slavs who populated the vast forest and steppe zone of Eurasia. Through a comparatively long span of their history, the two groups were involved in close and fairly active cultural contacts. The Muslims and Orthodox Christians shared ideas about the place and role of religion in the life of a state. At that time, there were no conflicts over a secular state coexisting with religion, there was no confrontation between the traditional clergy and power. In fact, at that time, neither the religious teachings of the Hanafi madhab in the Islamic legal system nor Christian Orthodoxy clashed with the state, partly due to their "conciliatory" religious nature. Both are moderately conservative, both know how to reach a compromise with the state. For this reason their followers are always prepared to accept the present-day secular state. As distinct from all sorts of fundamentalist Islamic and Christian trends brought in from the outside and several exotic Oriental faiths, traditional Islam and Orthodox Christianity do not threaten one another, they present no threat to other religions or to the state either.

This explains why religious revival and religious self-awareness, processes which began in the early 1990s, went on without much tension and confrontation. The revived interest in religion was accepted as part of a wider and much more complicated process of ethnic and cultural self-identification, when people turned to the religious sources of their nations, ethnic specifics, culture, and traditions.

It looks as if the situation may change: radical religious communities have arrived on the scene together with non-traditional religious ones; foreign missionaries, and organizations that represent all sorts of confessions and denominations have been allowed to work on a larger scale. The process has passed its peak, but has retained some of its potential.

# Development Dynamics of the Religious Situation and the Nation's Religious Structure

Recently development dynamics have demonstrated a trend toward large-scale structural changes caused by the following factors.

- *First*, the foreign factor (the sum-total of methods and types of foreign interference in the religious situation and the population's religious structure).
- *Second*, loss of control over the developments in the religious sphere when the state stopped paying enough attention to this side of the country's life.

As a result, today there are three times as many religious organizations in Kazakhstan as in 1991; there are twice as many religious confessions there; the entire confessional structure changed beyond recognition in one decade. According to official information, there are 46 confessions in Kazakhstan representing an entire religious spectrum and 3,259 religious associations.[1]

It should be said that despite the fairly threatening shifts in the religious situation and the religious population structure, the situation on the whole remains stable. Today, the negative trends are contained by the stability of confessional relations and the still dominant position of Islam and Orthodox Christianity. This brings people closer together and positively affects religious balance in the republic.

The situation might change for the worse if the state continues ignoring the situation.

On the whole, we have the following religious situation in the republic. The largest confessions are Sunni Islam (Hanafi madhab) and Christianity (Orthodoxy). Over 90 percent of the total population follow these two religions, the share being 70 and 30 percent, respectively. There are two large religious centers—the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan and three eparchies of the Russian Orthodox Church—to administer the two religious communities.

Today there are 1,766 Muslim religious associations in Kazakhstan and 1,643 mosques,[2] and the number is expected to double. It should be said that the SAMK is aware of and works with the mosques registered with the Ministry of Justice, while there is any number of mosques, especially in the countryside, that never want to be registered and prefer to remain known locally. Normally they serve small ethnic groups living in compact groups in small settlements: the Uighur and Dungan mosques in the Almaty Region; and the Uzbek mosques in the Sayram District, South-Kazakhstan Region. There is the opinion that there are twice as many unregistered mosques.

Today, several religious communities and organizations that the SAMK regard as pseudo-Muslim are actively operating in the republic. They all contradict the Hanafi madhab, the official madhab of the Kazakhstani Muslims. The Spiritual Administration describes the following religious organizations as pseudo-Muslim: Ahmadia, Bahai, the teaching of Ismatulla, Mahdia, Salafi (Wahhabi), Taqfir, the Sufi Qurban-ali trend, and Shi'a.[3]

Russian Orthodoxy is the second largest confession in Kazakhstan. According to official information, there are 221 parishes and 8 monasteries of the ROC in the republic. In 1991, the Holy Synod of the ROC distributed them among three eparchies: Almaty and Semipalatinsk, Shymkent, and the Urals. In 1999, the Almaty and Semipalatinsk eparchy was transformed into the Astana and

[1] See: G. Mukhanbetzhanova, "Religia v kazakhstankom obshchestve," *Kazinform,* 20 May, 2005.
[2] See: Zh. Amerbekova, "Bor'ba za umy," *Megapolis,* 9 January, 2006.
[3] See: Ibidem.

Almaty Eparchy, which acquired the Christian Orthodox structures of Astana. For a long time the desire of the local Orthodox Christians and the republic's authorities to unite all Orthodox churches into one Kazakhstani structure was not supported by Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II, who visited Kazakhstan in 1995. In May 2003, however, the Synod passed a decision, under which a single Metropolitan territorial structure was set up with Metropolitan Methodius as its head.[4] Today, the position of the ROC in the republic is strong, while its influence is spreading across the republic.

The Roman Catholic Church also strengthened its position: there are over 70 structures of all sorts in the republic, including one Greco-Catholic parish, all of them guided by four Apostolic Administrations. On the whole, there are over 90 Catholic communities and 160 Catholic visiting groups in Kazakhstan, as well as about 15 monastic congregations, including one of the Opus Dei, the fundamentalist Catholic order banned in several countries. There is about one percent of Catholics in Kazakhstan.[5]

Active Western missionaries brought new Protestant churches to Kazakhstan; they broadened their influence and strengthened their position. There are about 1,000 Protestant communities and over 500 Protestant churches in Kazakhstan.[6]

The largest of them, serving over 70 percent of the followers, are found in large cities (Almaty, Karaganda, Shymkent, and others) together with their main republican and regional administrative structures, coordination centers, inter-confessional missions, etc. The Evangelical Christian Baptists, for example, are united into 269 communities and 124 groups according to information supplied by their center.[7] There is information that there is at least one Baptist and one Adventist church in each city; communities of Pentecostals and Evangelical Christians of the Spirit of the Apostles are also widely spread.[8]

The Missouri Synod, a Lutheran association, is busy spreading its influence by rendering wide-scale spiritual and material help to the Lutheran communities and distributing religious books in German, English, and Russian. Since 1991, German missionaries have been actively promoting the New Apostolic Church; there are about 40 communities with about 2,500 members in the country.[9]

There are also small communities of Methodists that owe their existence to foreign, mainly Korean, missionaries. So far they unite about 300 members of various nationalities.

Judaism represented mainly by the Hasidic Habada movement has strengthened it position: there are Judaic communities in all regional centers; there are 24 of them compared with four before 1998 (two in Almaty, one in Shymkent, and one in Kzyl-Orda). The country has 10 synagogues. In December 1999, the Jews set up the Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan, which sees its aim in preserving and promoting Jewish national traditions and customs, as well as the cultural and religious heritage of the local Jews. It has elaborated a program of synagogue building in Astana, Pavlodar, Aktiubinsk, Kustanai, Petropavlovsk, and Ust-Kamenogorsk and is putting it into practice.[10]

The non-traditional Protestant confessions, otherwise known as charismatic, are represented by a large number of organizations: Grace, the Living Vine, Agape, the New Sky, Good News, New Life, and others. New Life, a comparatively recent newcomer to the scene, is the largest; it has already established a New Life Biblical College. Today, there are about 40 communities of about

[4] See: Ia. Trofimov, "Geopoliticheskie aspekty dinamiki izmenenia religioznoy situatsii v Respublike Kazakhstan," 22 September, 2003. Spravochno-informatsionny portal "Religiia SMI," available at [http://www.religare.ru/article6503].

[5] See: Ibidem.

[6] See: A. Mukhashov, "Religioznaia palitra sovremennogo Kazakhstana (obzor konfessiy," *Kazakhstanskaia prvada,* 1 July, 2003.

[7] See: Ia. Trofimov, op. cit.

[8] See: S. Peyrouse, "Christian Proselytism in Kazakhstan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analysis*, 25 January, 2006, p. 8.

[9] See: Ia. Trofimov, op. cit.

[10] Ibidem.

3,500 members in Kazakhstan. The Grace Church in Karaganda runs over 50 branches in all parts of the republic, including its capital, as well as Petropavlovsk, Abay, Sarani, etc., with 7,000 followers, the largest groups found in Almaty and Karaganda. The Grace Church has achieved flexible administration by dividing its flock into cells headed by a leader and comprising from 6 to 10 families each. The cells hold their regular meetings in private flats used for services, Bible reading, and informal talks.[11]

The republic's ethnic Korean population prefers the Pentecostals (the Sun Bok Ym Church), as well as the Union of Christians of the Evangelical Faith, which has communities nearly in all regions. The Divine Church has been active in the republic's north (in the Kustanai, Karaganda, and Kokchetau regions). There are over 20 Presbyterian structures, the most prominent among them being Aksai, Tsentr, the Almaty Regional Presbyterian Church,[12] as well as Grace-Blagodat, Gol'bori, Onsezan, Korë, Mir, Nadezhda, Zion, the First Presbyterian Church, and the Assembly of Presbyterian Churches. They are especially popular with the Korean ethnic minority, which accounts for 80 to 90 percent of the flock. The Grace-Blagodat structure unites 10,000 people. There are several Presbyterian seminaries: the Spiritual Presbyterian Academy in Almaty and the Kazakhstani Evangelical Christian Seminary. The Methodist Church is running its own parishes with fairly large flocks; the Novoapostol'skaia (New Apostolic) Church, a structure independent of the Presbyterians and Methodists, has accumulated a large number of communities (there are about 50 communities with the total membership of about 3,000).[13]

On the whole, the charismatic movements are operating under all sorts of names, such as Agape, New Life, New Sky, Iliya, the Good News, the Charismatic Church of Jesus Christ etc., the New Life, with over 40 communities and 5,000 followers, being the strongest of them. It shows a lot of missionary drive: there are ethnic Kazakh and Uighur communities; and today it is working among the Jews. A large number of Mormon communities are operating in Astana, the country's capital.[14]

The Jehovah's Witnesses, with parishes in nearly every city and town and over a hundred registered communities, are the most successful among other organizations. It is especially strong in the south (Shymkent, Turkestan, Kentau, Lenger, Sary-Agash, Zhetysai and other densely populated areas where Kazakhs and Uzbeks predominate).[15]

The republic's southern part is developing into a seat of non-traditional cults, such as the Bogorodnicheskii Tsentr, White Brotherhood, Sai Baba Awatar, Ivanovites, the tantric cult, the Universal and Jubilant Church, Christadelphians, Mormons, the Church of the Last Testament, the Church of Scientology (Dianetics), Sri Chinmoy, and others.[16]

## Challenge Factors

The Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan describes it as a secular state that guarantees its citizens freedom of speech and self-expression. The Constitution does not describe any confession as privileged; it proclaims each one's equality and religious tolerance. In fact, state policy in the religious sphere is fairly liberal: the state guarantees freedom of conscience, equality, religious tolerance, and pluralism. The 1992 Law on the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, which fully

[11] See: Ia. Trofimov, op. cit.
[12] Ibidem.
[13] See: S. Peyrouse, op. cit.
[14] Ibidem.
[15] See: A. Aubakirov, "Missia vypolnima?" *Megapolis,* 9 January, 2006.
[16] See: Ia. Trofimov, op. cit.

corresponds to international standards, is the cornerstone of religious policy in Kazakhstan. To cover the areas not encompassed by the 1992 law, the republic adopted the Law on Amendments and Addenda to Certain Legal Acts of the RK on Freedom of Conscience. The state made several mistakes in the sphere of education: it removed religious studies from school curricula and disbanded the Committee for Religious Affairs.

The open borders and liberal legislation in the religious sphere have already attracted foreign missionaries and emissaries of all sorts of religious and pseudo-religious organizations. They flock in great numbers to promote, legally or illegally, their faiths and convert the greatest possible numbers to beliefs that have nothing in common with the local culture and mentality.

The poorer, less educated groups are naturally attracted by the financial support and jobs foreign missionaries offer them and their relatives; in fact, the newcomers have already mastered a mechanism for widening their social basis—the number of newly converted is growing steadily. The new confessions prefer local people as community heads: most of the new religious groups (Grace-Blagodat, Agape, New Life, Bahai, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and others) are no longer headed by foreigners living in the country or working from abroad. They are all headed by local people.

We all know that religious proselytism, a fast-moving process underway in the republic, is lavishly funded from abroad; the anti-systemic teachings banned in the West present the greatest danger.

## Main Factors of Religious Conflicts

It was in the latter half of the 1990s that the first signs of religious complications appeared in Kazakhstan, and in other CIS countries for that matter. It became obvious that mounting religious extremism and proselytism are the main destabilization factors. Religious extremism of Muslim fanatics, banned by law and closely monitored by the law-enforcement bodies, is less dangerous than the foreign missionaries who represent all sorts of non-traditional religious institutions, sects, and movements of Christian and Oriental types.

Both groups are undermining the confessional balance in the republic and making it harder to achieve cultural and historical consolidation and challenge the principles of tolerance and confessional harmony. The foreign missionaries, however, are operating within the law across the republic, which makes it easier for them to achieve their aims. There are a few secret organizations, mainly close-knitted sects such as the Satanists, involvement in which is a criminal offence, that preferred not to register with the Ministry of Justice.

All highly varied religious and pseudo-religious organizations and movements, the activities of which challenge confessional relations in Kazakhstan, can be divided into two groups of potential threats.

The *first group* includes the radical Muslim organizations hostile to the secular state (Hizb ut-Tahrir and Tablighi Jamaat being two examples), which rely on religious ideology to justify their anti-constitutional activities designed to replace the secular state with an Islamic theocratic one. They are convinced that in Kazakhstan, and elsewhere in Central Asia, secular governance has become outdated and that society steeped in amoral behavior should be saved, while the state steeped in corruption and lawlessness replaced with an Islamic Caliphate through peaceful and non-violent means. To achieve this they are prepared to change the local Muslims' world outlook through preaching and discussions. In this way, they differ radically from the militarized Muslim organizations active in the neighboring Central Asian countries prepared to use force to achieve their aims (the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and its branch in Kyrgyzstan is one such structure).

Each and every one of these organizations has its own ideas about tactics and strategy, but they agree that society and the state should be adjusted to the canons and values of an ideal Islamic society. Nearly all of them are funded from abroad, the money coming through educational and humanitarian foundations and public organizations working from the territory of certain Arabic countries. On many occasions, however, Western countries were found to be involved in such activities to a certain extent: many of the nongovernmental Islamic structures and headquarters of Muslim movements and organizations that form an opposition to the governments of some of the Arab countries operate from their territories. Foreign special services are obviously involved in such activities. Recently, the national security service of Kazakhstan arrested an agent of one such service who was gathering information about the local special services' anti-separatist and anti-criminal activities.[17]

The local people tend to trust the Muslim organizations more than other religious structures—this allows them to openly promote their radical ideas and rely on fairly vast social support. In fact, they try to wipe away the local people's ethnic and civil identity by subjecting national values and traditions to scathing criticism and planting the idea of opposition to power and civil disobedience in their minds.

At the same time, their activities in Kazakhstan are to a great extent influenced by what is going on in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, two neighboring countries, in which the ideological and political disagreement with the authorities reached the point of armed clashes. It is hard to say whether we are dealing with ideology or with a power struggle dressed in ideological garb.

Neither the media nor the expert community can provide a complete picture, since the latter remains convinced that religious extremism in Central Asia is rooted in social and economic conditions. This makes it even harder to formulate an objective opinion of the processes underway in the republic. In Kazakhstan's case, this opinion does not hold water: the conflict between the government and the radical Islamic organizations has nothing to do either with social or with economic factors.

It should be said that recently some experts have finally objected to the commonly accepted idea and voiced the opinion that the conflict was caused by religious and political factors present in the region.[18] In other words, radicalism in Central Asia is mounting not so much because of social and economic difficulties and the repressive policies of the local authorities, it is bred by the conflict potential in the relations among various forces created by religious, ideological, and political contradictions.

Here I have attempted to trace sources of religious extremism other than the common people's social and economic plight: the expert community and the media have already done enough to make this opinion known.

Here are several key versions of the conflict based on the available information.

- *First*. The conflict is rooted in deep-cutting ideological confrontation between those who support the idea of a secular state and those who want to replace it with a theocratic government. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, where the authorities failed to reach a compromise with the fundamentalist clergy and its supporters, the conflict developed into a rigid confrontation and clashes. This echoed in Kazakhstan where the local fundamentalists stepped up their activities.
- *Second*. The conflict stems from the split in the ruling groups in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan and a power struggle under the Islamic banner among the regional clans. This version

[17] A. Djaldinov, "KNB upolnomochen zaiavit," *Liter,* 10 October, 2006.

[18] For more detail, see: Sh. Akiner, Violence in Andijon, 13 May, 2005: An Independent Analysis, available at [www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/publications/0507Akiner.pdf].

looks the most plausible in view of the Soviet legacy of monopolized and extremely centralized nomenklatura power. This makes the very banal power struggle among elites the cause of the trouble; the echo reaches Kazakhstan where each of the conflicting sides is trying to pull the public onto its side.

- *Third*. Geopolitical games of outside forces in the economically most vulnerable and, therefore, most volatile Central Asian counties. Those who side with the idea that foreign countries are pursuing their interests in the region and act as the "outside factor" prefer this version. Foreign counties are testing various methods of destabilization, the religious factor included, to consolidate their strategic presence in the newly independent states. This sends waves of destabilization toward Kazakhstan.

There are several versions to choose from. One thing is clear: the role of the religious factor in the mounting religious radicalism is overstated. The subject itself is being deliberately fanned by the sides resolved to profit from a conflict between the state and religion.

The *second group of challenges* is created not so much by the people's increased religious awareness and freedom of conscience under conditions of ideological pluralism. It is formed by the active spiritual expansion being carried out by numerous foreign missionary movements and pseudo-religious organizations intent on balancing the highly inordinate nature of their faiths with the latest applied research and strange practices. Many of them are trying to detach their followers from the family, society, and the nation's cultural and social life; they reject or ignore historical traditions, lifestyle, and customs and cripple the physical and psychological health of our citizens. This not only undermines the traditional religions, it also shatters the pillars of state order.

In most cases, foreign missionaries are represented by Protestant Christian trends funded from abroad.

There is another complication: these missionary movements and organizations not only refuse to accept the historical legitimacy of Islam and Christian Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan. They also reject any compromise with the laws. This is the case of most foreign missions of Protestant persuasion, in particular the Presbyterian churches and Jehovah's Witnesses, whose numbers and missionary potentialities are greatly strengthened by external financial support.[19] Their numerous communities consider mission as consubstantial with their existence and with the very principle of Christianity.[20] Their aim is a simple one—all Kazakhstani Muslims and Orthodox Christians should become Protestants.

This group of challenges is common throughout the world as a whole; each country is familiar with it. Foreign missionaries preach all sorts of confessions and religious teachings; this destabilizes the religious situation in the country and endangers the state and its people.

We are confronted with the problem of Christian proselytism, that is, a preaching drive designed to covert the local Muslim and Orthodox population en masse to all sorts of Christian, mainly Protestant, faiths.

It should be said that the mounting wave of Christian proselytism in the republic has already had a negative effect in the minds of the newly converted. Here I have in mind social, legal, and psychological effects: the newly converted are developing within the community's pinching limits unable to arm themselves with ideas of civil duty and patriotism. The missionaries breed absolute indifference to political issues and instruct the flock to keep a distance between themselves and the family. They are taught, instead, to completely submit to the will of their spiritual leaders, the guru (the leader or the founder of the church believed to possess superhuman abilities).

[19] See: S. Peyrouse, op. cit., p. 8.
[20] See: Ibid., p. 9.

The closed sects, many of which are banned in the West (the Jehovah's Witnesses is one of them), have been especially successful in their activities. In fact, the religious prescriptions of the Jehovah's Witnesses cripple people physically and psychologically and deprive them of their national and civil identity. The members "reject any government on earth and everything connected with it: military service, civil service, oath of allegiance, state holidays, and even birthdays."[21] This sect, one of the most aggressive and totalitarian, rejects all other opinions: it is based on the personality cult of its leaders and complete obedience to them.

On the whole, Christian proselytism in Kazakhstan is pursuing all sorts of aims and is constantly readjusting its strategy to the changing realities. French researcher Sebastien Peyrouse has identified the priorities of Christian missionary activity in Kazakhstan in the following way.

- *First*, the missionaries aim at proselytism in their narrow circle, that is, those who have been converted yet need more profound religious education.
- *Second*, those who describe themselves as atheists or claim indifference to religious issues.
- *Third*, Christians of other denominations: Orthodox Christians and, to a lesser extent, Catholics as well as followers of Protestant trends on the decline (Lutherans and Mennonites).
- *Fourth*, the entire Muslim population of Kazakhstan: Kazakhs, Uighurs, Uzbeks, Tartars, and other Muslims are the long-term objectives of the Christian presence in Kazakhstan. The missionaries are convinced that each conversion campaign should increase the number of communities made up of converted Muslims.[22]

To sum up: Christian proselytism in Kazakhstan aims at converting all Christians and all Muslims to Protestant faiths, which is arousing a negative reaction from most Kazakhstanis. The Muslims' reaction to efforts to convert their fellow believers is especially painful. Muslim families are normally very critical of their converted members—people are convinced that by converting, people subject their lives to numerous risks.

The Christian Orthodox population of Kazakhstan is likewise displeased with the foreign missionaries and their activities partly because of the centuries-old rivalry between the Russian Orthodox Church and the West. The Christian missionaries refuse to take these negative responses into account—they simply go on with what they came to do while the movement itself is gaining momentum.

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An analysis of the current trends in Kazakhstan supplies us with a temporary assessment of the existing and potential threats that challenge confessional harmony and tolerance in society and the most common features of the unfolding religious conflicts.

Today, the main destabilizing factors responsible for the conflict-prone situation in the country are religious radicalism, the weakened traditional religious structure, the greater influence of non-traditional faiths and sects, which potentially may lead to religious conflicts, religious and ideological extremism of a-systemic religious and pseudo-religious faiths, and active Christian proselytism which undermines the traditional religious structure and worsens the religious situation.

*Religious radicalism is on the increase among believers*. This all started in the 1990s when society tried to fill in the spiritual and moral void, while all sorts of religious communities, some of them

[21] A. Aubakirov, op. cit.
[22] See: S. Peyrouse, op. cit., pp. 8-9.

in conflict with others, stepped up their activities. The younger had no adequate religious knowledge, mainly because the state ignored the need for religious education. Religious studies were removed from the curricula of educational institutions, while the Committee for Religious Affairs was disbanded late in the 1990s. The state obviously failed to cope with the religious situation and the need to control it.

*Weakened traditional religious structure and increased influence of non-traditional faiths and sects*. Despite the fact that the country's overwhelming majority (90 percent of the total population) are Sunni Muslims or Orthodox Christians, non-traditional faiths, religious communities and organizations have extended their influence. They have rallied about 5 percent of the believers and are becoming more popular. The process is still unpredictable, but in the future the mounting wave might change the republic's confessional picture and produce religious conflicts.

*Mounting possibility of religious conflicts*. Slowly but surely the republic is moving toward religious xenophobia; the level of conflict potential in relations among the followers of traditional religions and non-traditional missionary communities and organizations is mounting. Members of such religious communities exhibit inordinate activity when it comes to religious propaganda among the local people in public places: they distribute printed materials, speak on the radio, and appear in TV programs. This has already caused numerous conflicts between the activists and their "objects" testified by sociological studies conducted in the republic at different times.

*Religious and ideological extremism of a-systemic religious and pseudo-religious faiths*. The Jehovah's Witnesses, the Satanists, and other similar totalitarian sects with a wide network of cells are the most dangerous among other non-traditional faiths. The Sun Bok Ym teaching, Agape, New Life, and others also belong to the same group. They are dangerous because they reject different opinions and rule their communities in an authoritarian way. They concentrate on the autochthonous, mostly Muslim, population and undoubtedly threaten confessional harmony in the republic.

On the one hand, the country obviously needs a legal ban of a-systemic religious institutions (sects and pseudo-religious communities that are banned elsewhere) and, on the other, stricter control over the branches and centers of foreign sects operating in Kazakhstan. The state should use the media to regularly explain to people the dangers of joining such sects.

*Active Christian proselytism undermines the foundations of the traditional religious structure and worsens the religious situation in the republic*. Recently the Christian communities working to convert the Muslim and Christian Orthodox population to Protestant faiths previously absent in the republic have been strengthening their position across the country. They are seriously undermining the religious balance: the very active involvement of foreign missionary charities that fund Christian proselytism inside the country may change the religious situation and the religious structure of the population in a very radical way, creating a potentially conflict-prone situation.

The above is the result of the political and economic interest large powers are exhibiting in Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors; they all have become targets of the expansion of Western values and religions. The widely popularized and the well-oiled mechanism of missionary activities is designed to gradually change the religious situation and the population's religious structure to force the country follow the road in the long-term interests of Western strategists.

Much is being done to detach Kazakhstan, and Central Asia as a whole, from their Muslim neighbors and to decrease the influence religion exerts on the local countries' domestic and foreign policy. The long-term goal, however, is to change the region's entire religious makeup. Kazakhstan, the population of which desires to be Westernized, is the most obvious target: many of the Western states would like to see it a Christian country. Christian missionaries are striving to isolate the Russian-speaking population from neighboring Russia, a predominantly Orthodox Christian country. So far their shared religion is the main obstacle.

On the whole, it should be said that Kazakhstan, like many Western and Oriental countries, is aware of the problem of shadow faiths, but the mentality of the local population diminishes it. In Kazakhstan, the religious factor does not affect public opinion and state policy.

The majority see their religious affiliation as their personal affair and part of cultural life completely detached from the country's political course. The state intends to separate religion from politics, but religion does influence society. The country's leaders are pursuing a balanced, well-substantiated and pragmatic policy in the religious sphere: today any seemingly innocent remark or comment about culture or religion might cause mass protests and violence. This explains why the missionaries of non-traditional faiths and confessions are unable to radically change the social situation in the country. The local governments, however, should pay more attention to such activities, which contradict divine as well as human principles.