# RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE AND POLITICAL STABILITY (*A CASE STUDY OF KAZAKHSTAN AND RUSSIA*)

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## *Introduction*

Religious tolerance is a very sensitive sphere and a highly complicated social phenomenon, the limits of which are very hard to outline. It embraces moral and religious consciousness, hardly controlled by external means, and forms of behavior, including those

regulated by law. The subjects of these forms of consciousness and behavior belong to various social levels—individual (micro level), confessional groups (macro level), and the state (mega level).

In view of the highly complicated structures of the subjects of religious tolerance/intolerance, religious policy should take into account the difference between the *"external" (secular) and the "internal" (confessional)* interpretation of religious tolerance: each of them raises highly specific questions—related to internal tolerance (relations between religions) and external tolerance (state policy in the sphere of religion or the freedom of conscience).

In other words, the "internal" interpretation of religious tolerance is suggested by the dogmas, while the "external" interpretation by the state laws.

Tolerance of people of confessions other than one's own; attitude toward atheism, interpretation of the role and place of religion in the life of society and each of its members, assessment of the trends of secularism and sacralization and of religious fundamentalism, interpretation of the religion/science correlation, and acceptance of religious pluralism can be described as *indicators* of religious tolerance.

Pluralism of religious confessions, denominations, alliances, and organizations which can be described as the hallmark of our day and age has moved religious tolerance to the frontline of social and political stability and the emerging civil society.

# The Legal Aspects of the Relations between the State and Religious Associations in Kazakhstan and Russia

According to official figures, there were 4,173 religious associations functioning in Kazakhstan in September 2009 (there were 3,855 of them in 2007; 3,420 in 2006; and 3,259 in 2005); they belonged to 42 confessions and denominations, as well as all sorts of religious missions and movements.

According to the RF Ministry of Justice, as of 1 January, 2009, there were 23,078 religious organizations in Russia (21,963 in 2008; 22,956 in 2007; and 22,513 in 2006). They belonged to 70 religious confessions and denominations (by the early 1990s, 15-20 traditional confessions were present in Russia's religious sphere).

The above should not be taken as absolutely correct since the figures relate to officially registered religious communities well known to the state structures and covered by the media. There are several reasons for this state of affairs.

- First, the legal systems of both countries lack clear-cut definitions and criteria according to which groups of citizens can be treated as religious associations. Religious and quasi-religious trends and spiritual schools, which are new to our newly independent states, use the gap to function as educational, medical, commercial, and non-commercial organizations, etc. rather than as religious structures. This makes it hard to assess their impact on the general religious situation in the republics. It is believed that there are at least 1,000 unregistered but very active communities in Kazakhstan; there is a certain number of so-called closed religious groups, the ideology and cultic practice of which are limited to a very narrow circle

of adepts. Prof. Artemiev, for example, believes that there are over 50 confessions and denominations functioning in Kazakhstan.[1]

- Second, jurists believe that some of the functioning religious groups (with memberships of over 1,000) cannot register or re-register because of legal restrictions and biases imposed by the local administrations.

Ideological diversity is a sure sign of the religious tolerance of both states registered in their post-Soviet constitutions.

Under Art 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan and Art 14 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, they are secular states in which no religion can be treated as the state or obligatory one, while religious organizations are separate from the state and are equal under the law. The terminological differences notwithstanding, the corresponding articles of the Constitutions (Art 22 of the Constitution of Kazakhstan of 1995 and Art 28 of the Constitution of Russia of 1993) enforce the freedom of conscience and religion proclaimed by international law and guarantee the right to freedom of conscience. Both Constitutions correspond, to the necessary degree, to international standards.

The religious tolerance of both states is reflected in documents at the sub-constitutional level.

*In Russia, relations between society and the believers and the state and religious associations are enforced* in the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations of 1997 and other legal and regulatory acts, including decrees of the President of the Russian Federation and decisions of the RF Government.

Thirty RF constituencies have their own laws on freedom of conscience, which creates certain problems for the Ministry of Justice and the Government; according to A. Pchelintsev, one of Russia's best experts on religious legislation, "they are working toward bringing the laws of the constituencies of the Russian Federation and the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations closer together or removing everything that violates the Constitution. They are not always successful."[2]

The problems are probably bred by the contradictions between some of the articles of the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations and the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the generally recognized norms of international law (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the U.N. Declaration on Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief, the Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting of 1989, the Convention of the Commonwealth of Independent States on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms) which have been confirmed by legal examination of this Federal law.[3]

The preamble to the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations registers the state's confessional preferences: Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism are treated as an inalienable part of the country's historical heritage. This presupposes that the state may cooperate with the corresponding religious organizations to certain degrees. Orthodox Christianity is obviously preferred to the other listed religious confessions described as contributing to the country's spiritual development. The law limits, to a great extent, the possibility of setting up religious organizations and engaging in activities of "secondary" (foreign in particular) religious organizations, etc.

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[1] See: A.I. Artemiev, "Vliianie Rossii na religioznuiu situatsiu v Respublike Kazakhstan," in: *Svoboda sovesti v Rossii: istoricheskiy i sovremenny aspekty,* Moscow, 2007, p. 515.

[2] A.V. Pchelintsev, *Svoboda religii i prava veruiushchikh v sovremennoy Rossii,* ID Yurisprudentsia, Moscow, 2007, p. 89.

[3] See: Ibid., pp. 72-88.

The fact that the state extends its official recognition to some of the religious confessions in multi-confessional and multi-national states creates numerous difficulties.

- First, this violates civil rights and the inalienable human rights associated with the freedom of conscience principle.
- Second, this means that the state interferes in the religious sphere and that some religions are treated as "state religions" albeit in an indirect way.
- Third, this adds a political dimension to religion.
- Fourth, this aggravates the religious situation and turns religion from a stabilizing into a destabilizing factor. Indeed, special treatment of some of the religious organizations in a multi-confessional society might exacerbate national and religious relations.

Today, human rights activists, members of Protestant religious associations, and religious minorities of Russia criticize the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations, some of the provisions of which violate the principles of equality of religious associations and religious minorities. At the same time, the ROC, Muslims, Judaists, Buddhists (members of 15 confessions contributed to the law's final version), and some of the state structures are satisfied with the law. From time to time, some of them insist that its regulations should be tightened up in the face of the mounting threat of international terrorism and extremism. This led to two Conceptions of Relations between the State and Religious Associations, one produced by the Chair of Religious Studies at the Russian Academy of Civil Service under the President of the Russian Federation (it worked on the instructions issued by the Administration of the RF President) and another by the Institute of State-Confessional Relations and Law (under the aegis of the ROC Foreign Relations Department and the ROC Educational Committee) working in parallel. They spoke of a concerted partnership between the "traditional" confessions and the state which is, in fact, an anti-constitutional regulation. Several more drafts (On Traditional Religious Organizations in the Russian Federation, On Social Partnership between the State and Traditional Religious Organizations in the Russian Federation, and On Military Priests) reached the State Duma where they had both supporters and opponents.

This means that the Russian laws in the spheres of human rights and freedom of conscience are moving toward limitations in these spheres; by the same token, religion becomes an element of the public sphere.

*The Republic of Kazakhstan regulates the activity of religious organizations* in Art 109 of its Civil Code, the of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations of 15 January, 1992 (No. 1128-XII), and some other legal and regulatory acts, such as decrees of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, provisions of the RK Government, rules, letters, and by-laws. The 1992 law proceeded from the principle of equal rights and duties of all confessions and denominations working in the country without giving preference to any of them.

At first glance, freedom of conscience and the state's secular nature are the key principles of all the legal acts, however, according to R. Podoprigora, a leading expert on religious legislation of Kazakhstan, the picture of relations between Kazakhstan's society and the believers and the state and religious associations at the sub-constitutional level "is less optimistic"[4] than is presented by the RK Constitution. On the whole, however, international and Kazakh experts assessed the 1992 Law on Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations as one of the best in the post-Soviet expanse; the

[4] R.A. Podoprigora, "Gosudarstvo i religioznye organizatsii v Tsentral'noy Azii: konstitutsionny i administrativno-pravovoy analiz," in: *Tolerantnost, veroterpimost, svobodomyslie—osnova kultury mira: materaily mezhdunaronoy nauchno-prakticheskoy konferentsii,* TST-company, Almaty, 2006, p. 149.

involvement of religious figures of various confessions and denominations made it the most liberal and the most democratic legal act.

# Activities of the State Structures and Heads of the Traditional Confessions in Kazakhstan and Russia through the Prism of Religious Tolerance

Serious quantitative and qualitative changes in the religious situation in Kazakhstan and Russia which took place after both countries had acquired their laws on freedom of conscience revealed their serious flaws. Having analyzed the documents which regulate the relations between the state and the confessions, Kazakh experts R. Podoprigora and K. Aytkhojin concluded that the legal instruments had overlooked certain potential negative developments in this sphere and that, therefore, they should be revised. They made several public statements to this effect. Legal experts and human rights activists expect that revision will allow all religious confessions present in Kazakhstan to more fully realize their rights, while the so-called traditional confessions are expected to "de-legalize" the legal positions of other religious communities (the same fully applies to Russia). This was absolutely clear, however the ROC Metropolitan See, and the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) in particular, succeeded. Some of the provisions and articles of the RK Law on Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations were revised.

Top-ranking law enforcers sided with the clergy: they argued that the laws should be tightened to prevent the spread of political Islamism and religious extremism from Afghanistan, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and other countries to the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The powers that be are convinced that unregistered religious organizations threaten the country's security and social unity and should, therefore, be banned.

The expert community fails to agree on the "Islamic threat" or the threat of so-called Islamic extremism and terrorism in the republic. Some of its members believe that political Islam presents no threat to Kazakhstan because of the country's multi-confessional and multi-ethnic nature, its secular type of society, and Islam's purely symbolic role in everyday life (even though the interest in religion has increased). There is the opinion, on the other hand, that these factors are not enough to preserve stability and that the law should be revised.

This forced the RK Ministry of Culture, Information and Public Harmony to offer, several times in a row starting in March 1998, draft amendments to the Law on Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The public was very much concerned; some of the Majilis deputies (K. Burkhanov and S. Temirbulatov among them) spoke against the limitations on freedom of conscience.

State security should be protected, while all attempts at its violation should be cut short, although freedom of conscience should be preserved. Prevention of "religious extremism" is the task of the state and should be accomplished by measures employed by a law-based state. Prof. A. Artemiev has written on this score: "Bandits should be addressed in the language of the Criminal Code not of the Law on Freedom of Worship… It is probably the Criminal Code that should be amended; today it does not protect the full scope of our rights; it is not spearheaded against all manifestations of nationalism, national-radicalism, chauvinism, and religious extremism."[5]

[5] See: A.I. Artemiev, "Eshche raz k voprosu o svobode sovesti i veroterpimosti, ili S chem my vkhodim v XXI vek," *Saiasat-POLICY,* No. 3, 2001, p. 46.

It should be said that any anti-democratic measures which infringe on citizens' religious rights will create more problems. First, the believers or even the whole of society might object, which will complicate the religious situation in the country. Second, this might alter constitutional order in Kazakhstan; third, people, young people in particular, might emigrate. Fourth, a large share of society will begin opposing the state and the so-called traditional religions. Fifth, diplomatic representations of some of the countries populated by co-religionists of the groups discriminated against in Kazakhstan might treat this step as hostile; this will cause a deterioration in the relations with these countries. Sixth, the republic's democratic image will be flawed.

No wonder the amendments and addenda to the law put on the table one after another attracted the attention of religious associations, academics, members of the Almaty Helsinki Group (AHG), and OSCE experts. They agreed that the amendments contradicted the constitutional principle of equality of citizens and religious associations under the law and discriminated against confessional continuity.

The amendments enacted in July 2005 were justified by security concerns; they demanded obligatory registration of missionaries and religious associations. Those who enacted the amendments, which drew numerous objections, argued that registration would permit the religious groups to be involved in legal transactions. A noble pretext indeed! This did nothing to conceal the fact that the constitutional guarantees of freedom of conscience were infringed upon.

The following interconnected and mutually influencing factors are responsible for the anti-constitutional drafts of the Law on Religion:

- lack of scholarly basis;
- the desire to exploit religion for political purposes;
- economic interests of the so-called traditional confessions.

Today, the country needs scientifically substantiated and efficient mechanisms to be able to realize the declared constitutional right of freedom of conscience at the individual level. With this aim in view a group of academics (A. Artemiev, R. Podoprigora, and the present author) drafted a Conception of State Policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the Sphere of Religion and Activities of Religious Organizations,[6] presented by the Almaty Helsinki Group at the round table it held in Astana jointly with the OSCE Almaty Center. The document caused a lively discussion and drew an extremely negative response from the state.

Both Kazakhstan and Russia are pursuing a policy conducive to anti-constitutional processes—infringements on freedom of conscience; politicization of religion; and clericalization initiated by the government and the leaders of the so-called traditional religions. Today, their policies are marked by religious intolerance which echo across society.

In both countries, the local administrations interfere from time to time in the internal affairs of religious associations and refuse, without sound reasons, to register such religious organizations as the Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Scientology, the Unification Church, the Salvation Army, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Pentecostal religious brotherhoods, and the Evangelical Christian and Missionary Alliance. The U.S. Department of State regularly points to this in its reports on freedom of conscience in Kazakhstan and Russia.

Not infrequently, the officially registered religious associations fall out of favor with the official structures. The public actively responded to the destruction near Almaty (on 21 November, 2006 and

[6] See: A.I. Artemiev, R.A. Podoprigora, I.B. Tsepkova, "Kontseptsia gosudarstvennoy politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan v sfere religii i deiatelnosti religioznykh organizatsii," *Prava cheloveka v Kazakhstane: informatsionno-analiticheskiy biulleten,* No. 11, 2005 (special issue).

15 June, 2007) of 25 residential buildings owned by the registered International Society for Krishna Consciousness accused of violations of the laws on private ownership of land supplied by the heads of the Karasai District who had deprived the ISKC of its landed property. Some people say that the district officials were pursuing financial interests of their own. On 25 April, 2006, an akimat (local administration) representative said in a televised interview that the ISKS was a dangerous organization with an "unacceptable" religion.

On 15 September, 2006, the media quoted deputy head of staff of the Antiterrorist Center at the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan as saying that the NSC was drafting laws designed to outlaw so-called destructive sects and organizations (the Grace Church, the Church of Scientology, and the Jehovah's Witnesses). The Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Kazakhstan issued a pamphlet to help citizens "avoid the influence" of religious sects; people were warned against the Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Akhmadi, and Hizb ut-Tahrir.

It should be said in all justice that the latter is an Islamic political movement which does not condemn those who perform terrorist acts. This has outlawed it as an extremist organization, which means that everything done to limit the activities of Hizb ut-Tahrir and bring its members to court cannot be described as an infringement on freedom of conscience.

On the whole, the negative attitude toward "new religious movements" has acquired political hues; this is best illustrated by the fact that the governments of Kazakhstan and Russia limit their support to the "traditional" confessions. In Kazakhstan, top officials, including the President, regularly attend mosques and churches and rarely or never enter prayer houses of other confessions. The chief mufti and the Orthodox Metropolitan are invited to practically all official functions, a privilege not extended to the head of other confessions. 7 January (Orthodox Christmas) and Kurban bayram (according to the Islamic calendar) are days off in Kazakhstan.

Some Majilis deputies suggest that Islam and Orthodox Christianity should acquire the official legal status of "traditional religions," while the followers of all other confessions should be treated as "sect members." It is also suggested that the Islamic and Orthodox clergy should be paid by the state, which should also allocate money to build new mosques and churches. In fact, the local administrations are already involved in such practices: they fund construction of new mosques; two of the main mosques (in Astana and Almaty) function on budget money. This complicates relations between the "traditional" and "non-traditional" religions in Kazakhstan.

Islam enjoys a lot of attention: the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan is functioning in close association with the government. Islam is drawn into politics everywhere in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. So far, its involvement is limited to the suggestion that two confessions—Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity—should receive preferential treatment. This contradicts the secular nature of the state and the official Kazakhstan-2030 Program which says: "Naturally it is out of the question that some ethnic or religious groups be granted priorities over others. Our strategic objective is unity of large groups of the population and reasonable combination of personal and social fundamentals which add substantially to consensus and the hierarchical traditions of our society."[7] This means that religious organizations should be equal under the law and have equal responsibilities.

In Russia, likewise, the political elite strives to incorporate its personal religious values and symbols into the official ideology. Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev are very open about their religion, while President of Tatarstan Shaimiev helped to organize the First Kurultai of the Muslims of Tatarstan.

[7] [http://www.kazakhemb.org.il/?CategoryID=187&ArticleID=169].

In Russia, the interests of the ROC are obviously supported, which the Church itself is moving toward a state status: the ROC and the state structures have achieved complete understanding about religious education and spiritual guidance.

In Russia, too, 7 January is a day off (established by a decision of the Supreme Soviet of the R.S.F.S.R. of 27 December, 1990); more than that: the White House (residence of the government of the Russian Federation) was blessed by Orthodox priests; the appendix to the Basic Provisions of the State Protocol Practices of the Russian Federation (State Protocol of the Russian Federation) endorsed by the president on 27 July, 1992 ranked Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia 18th on the official list, the heads of all other religious associations being relegated to the last, 38th position. The state consistently fortifies, both politically and financially, the positions of the ROC hierarchs; it has already restored some of the ROC pre-revolutionary property (books and icons of the pre-Nikon period), while other confessions (the Old Believers, in particular) are deprived of state patronage. So far, many of them have failed to restore the property confiscated by Soviet power or to buy new property. According to the SOVA information and analytical center, Muslims and Protestants have the largest number of property-related problems; many of the religious associations find it hard to buy land for their religious buildings.

Prof. Artemiev has rightly written: "The process of de facto unification of the Church and the state in Russia has moved from the sphere of discussion to the sphere of politics: at the top level, the secular state has already been described as Orthodox Christian. The idea of constitutional changes is being insistently pushed forward. The leaders of the state and parties, up to Gennadi Ziuganov, the chief communist, invariably take part in Orthodox services, etc."[8]

The ROC hierarchs sometimes interfere in political life: in October 1998, the ROC, in search of a solution to the political and economic crisis, organized a dialog among representatives of political movements of various orientations in the Throne Hall of the Patriarch's residence at the St. Daniil Monastery.

The ROC leaders are very concerned about the spiritual crisis. In 2000, a new subject "The Basics of Orthodox Culture" was introduced in secondary schools in Russia on the strength of Information Letter of the RF Ministry of Education No. 14-52-281 of 4 June, 1999 on letting religious organizations teach religion as an extra-curriculum subject on the premises of state and municipal educational establishments and the Recommendation on the Procedure for Teaching Orthodoxy to the Pupils of State and Municipal Educational Establishments. On 9 December, 1999, the Moscow Patriarchate addressed circular letter No. 5925 to the eparchy clergy, who were instructed to organize teaching of the Orthodox faith in state (municipal) educational establishments. After analyzing the content of the course on Orthodox culture, A. Pchelintsev concluded: "It offers Scripture with elements of culture rather than the basics of Orthodox culture… The RF Ministry of Education has turned Russia into a clerical state, that is, pushed it back one hundred years."[9]

The human rights activists who protested against the new subject in the school curriculum were not alone. Members of the non-Orthodox confessions and denominations were likewise concerned. Speaking at a meeting on Ethnic and Religious Diversity as the Cornerstone of Stability and Development of Russian Society, Head of the Council of the Muftis of Russia Ravil Gainutdin was very firm about denouncing the new school subject: "We cannot but be concerned about the efforts to formulate new assessments of Russian history in order to exalt one nation at the expense of others. Today, 74 constituencies of the Russian Federation have already introduced the Basics of Orthodox Culture as one of the subjects taught in school in violation of our Constitution. This has reduced Muslims, Jews, and Buddhists to the status of younger brothers."[10]

[8] A.I. Artemiev, "Vliianie Rossii na religioznuiu situatsiu v Respublike Kazakhstan," p. 515.
[9] A.V. Pchelintsev, op. cit., p. 253.
[10] A. Latyshev, "Obshchestvennaia palata poteriala terpimost," *Izvestia*, 31 January, 2007, p. 4.

Kazakhstan followed suit at the higher educational level. Contrary to the secular nature of education in Kazakhstan, in 2007, the Al-Farabi National University of Kazakhstan opened a department of theology. Prof. Artemiev has offered the following comment: "Our educationalists are resolved to outsmart the Moscow Region… When asked what sort of theology they intend to offer, they answered 'Secular.' …Recently a highly placed official of the Ministry of Education said on TV that the possibility of teaching theology in schools and higher educational establishments was being discussed. That's just great!… Religious figures themselves are highly amused by these incompetent decisions."[11]

The allied relations between the state and Orthodoxy in Russia and between the state and, mainly, Islam in Kazakhstan provoke and fan disagreements among the confessions and inside them. After 1990, the internal development of many of the Russian churches became much more complicated; the ROC was torn apart by inner disagreements: the Ukrainian Orthodox Church wanted independence; a new wave of Renovationism swept the country. The organizational split in Islam resulted in several spiritual administrations of the Muslims. Disintegration affected the Adventists, Pentecostals, etc.

The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan enjoys the respect of the republic's Muslims, but some Islamic organizations (the Sufi and Akhmadia) refuse to accept the SAMK as the leading and controlling structure, which has already caused a latent conflict inside the confession. Other objective circumstances too contribute to the disagreements among the Muslims of the RK (a large number of mosques remain outside the SAMK's control; the same can be said about some of the Muslim funds; the Muslims are divided, albeit unofficially, among "national mosques," etc.). The SAMK is unhappy about the foreign missionaries in the republic and is outright opposed to the communities they treat as illegitimate: Islamic (Sufis and Akhmadia), as well as neo-Christian and Gnostic movements. The activities of the religious minorities are interpreted as neo-colonialist designs guided from abroad by strong religious organizations.

Recently, in Russia the Slavic Legal Center and leaders of the new religious associations have been saying that the government and the Orthodox Church exploit the media, public meetings, and conferences to stir up public rejection of the "non-traditional" religious groups.

The negative attitude of the leaders of the "main" confessions, mainly the ROC in Russia and the SAMK in Kazakhstan, toward religious minorities and the resultant violations of freedom of conscience contradict the documents issued by religious organizations in defense of tolerance of the state's secular nature and the principle of freedom of conscience: the document issued by the Assembly of Hierarchs of the ROC on Relations among the Church, the State, and Secular Society on the Canonical Territory of the Moscow Patriarchate (1994); a similar document of the Assembly of Hierarchs of the ROC on Cooperation with the State and Secular Society (1997), and the program documents entitled Principles of ROC's Social Conception (2000), Main Provisions of the Social Program of the Muslims of Russia (2001), the Principles of the Social Conception of Judaism in Russia (2002), the Declaration on Religious Freedom—Dignitatis Humanae and Pastoral Constitution: on the Church in the Modern World—Gaudium et Spes adopted by the Second Vatican Council, which guide the Catholic Church in Russia, etc.

These documents treat freedom of confession as a fundamental right of all religious associations which should be guaranteed by the state. The Principles of the ROC Social Conception, however, is very critical of the freedom of conscience principle; it, however, accepts that "the religious and philosophical neutrality of the state does not contradict the Christian idea of the mission of the Church in society."[12]

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[11] A.I. Artemiev, "Vliianie Rossii na religioznuiu situatsiu v Respublike Kazakhstan," p. 520.

[12] *Osnovy sotsialnoy kontseptsii Russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvi. Iubileyny Arkhiereyskiy Sobor Russkoy pravoslavnoy tserkvi, Moscow, 13-16 August 2000 goda,* Moscow, 2001, pp. 26-27.

On the whole, the programs of the other confessions and denominations not merely confirm the principle of separation of religion from the state: they call on their followers to demonstrate tolerance inside and outside their confessions. It should be said that these programs and conceptions drawn up abroad (in Russia and The Vatican) are of an obligatory nature for all their followers, including those in Kazakhstan.

It seems that because of the principles declared in the Russian Federation, albeit related to a small group of religious organizations present in Russia, the relations between confessions have somewhat improved. The Department of Church External Contacts of the Moscow Patriarchate initiated an Inter-religious Council of Russia. So far, only four religious organizations have joined it. In July 2006, the ROC organized a World Summit of Religious Leaders, which was attended by 200 heads of religious communities from 40 countries. The conference, which discussed political and social issues, also called for religious tolerance.

It should be said that the SAMK headed by Supreme Mufti Absattar hajji Derbisali spares no effort to unite the umma of Kazakhstan (it concentrates on the Hanafi madhab; attestation of the imams; better organizational efforts in all spheres, including education and teaching; optimization of the SAMK structure; better cooperation with the diplomatic missions; better organization of the hajj, etc.).

At the level of the heads of state, much is being done to ensure and strengthen religious tolerance and support religious confessions and denominations, even though the state is lobbying the so-called traditional confessions.

In February 2003, Kazakhstan convened the first International Conference on Peace and Harmony in Almaty, which was attended by the leaders of the largest religious confessions.

- The First Congress of the Leaders of World and National Traditional Religions held on 23-24 September, 2003 in Astana can be described as an important step toward stronger confessional understanding. It was attended by over 150 delegates (17 delegations) and honorary guests from 21 countries and covered by 80 foreign and 275 Kazakhstan journalists.
- On 12-14 September, 2006, Astana hosted the Second Congress in the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation attended by 43 delegations from 20 countries, as well as 450 journalists from Kazakhstan and abroad. It passed a document entitled The Principles of Inter-religious Dialog based on fairness, tolerance, mutual respect, and equality and decided to convene the third congress of the leaders of world and traditional religions in 2009 in Astana. This can be described as one of the important results. It was also decided to set up an International Center of Culture and Religion based in the Palace of Peace and Reconciliation.
- In July 2009, the Third Congress of the Leaders of World and National Traditional Religions was held in Astana; as distinct from the two previous forums, it was attended by 77 delegates from 35 countries, who represented all the world and traditional religions and confessions.

The first visit by Pope John Paul II, which took place in 2001, and the establishment of a Catholic eparchy in Kazakhstan were other important events. They confirmed the high status of the Catholic Church in Central Asia and encouraged inter- and inner-confessional conciliation in the republic. President Putin's visit to The Vatican, which took place on 13 March, 2007 and during which he discussed with Pope Benedict XVI the possibility of improving relations between the ROC and the Roman Catholic Church, somewhat defused the tension between the two Churches.

No Church can be completely isolated from politics, yet its political involvement should not contradict the state's laws and other rules. Practically all people reject a clerical state.

# Public Opinion in Kazakhstan and Russia on Relations among Confessions and Religious Tolerance

According to sociological studies supplied by the Religion in Contemporary Society Research Center (originally set up at Russia's Independent Institute of Social and National Problems and later transformed into an academic structure at the Institute of Integrated Social Studies, today the Institute of Sociology, RAS), both believers and non-believers reject the religious model of the state. Only 5 percent of Orthodox Russians support this model, while the "followers of other Christian confessions, other religions, as well as non-believers" reject the model outright.[13]

In 2006, the Center of Humanitarian Studies (CHS) at the Institute of Philosophy and Political Science of the RK Ministry of Science and Education carried out a sociological poll within a project called Interaction of Religions in the Republic of Kazakhstan as part of a UNESCO program. It revealed that the majority of the republic's population (63.4 percent of the Muslims, 66.9 percent of the Orthodox believers, and 56.6 percent of the followers of other faiths) prefers a democratic and secular future for their country in which religion will be separate from the state. At the same time, one out of five of the Muslim respondents and one out of four of the followers of other confessions would like religion to be involved in the process of state-building. The Islamic state model attracted 7.7 percent of the Muslims, 0.8 percent of the Orthodox believers, and 1.9 percent of the followers of other religions.[14] In 2003, according to a sociological poll conducted by the CHS, over 95 percent of the polled insisted that a secular state was the only correct state form for Kazakhstan; this is nearly 30 percent more than in 2006.[15]

People in Kazakhstan, including the followers of all confessions, are against religion having a stronger influence on politics; they are convinced that religion should play a much greater role in the cultural, social, spiritual, and moral spheres. The majority of the respondents (73.6 percent, that is, those who answered "disapprove" and "rather disapprove than approve") reject religion-based parties; the largest number of respondents who accepted this alternative are Muslims (15.4 percent, that is, those who answered "approve" and "rather approve than disapprove").[16]

Russia offers a more or less similar picture: 44.7 percent of those polled by the Religion in Modern Society Research Center wanted the Church and the religious organizations to have a definite role to play in public life and stay away from spheres beyond their competence. The question "What do you think about religious parties?" drew only 18.7 percent of the positive answers; 43.6 percent rejected this alternative; 37.8 percent were undecided. At the parliamentary elections in December 1995, the political religious associations (the Christian-Democratic Alliance—Christians of Russia; Nur—the All-Russia Muslim Movement, etc.) gathered less that 1 percent of the votes; and the public-political movement Union of Muslims of Russia failed to collect enough signatures to qualify it to run for parliament.[17]

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[13] See: M.P. Mchedlov, *Religiovedcheskie ocherki. Religia v dukhovnoy i obshchestvenno-politicheskoy zhizni sovremennoy Rossii*, Nauchnaia kniga, Moscow, 2005, p. 84.

[14] See: A.G. Kosichenko, V.D. Kurganskaia, A.N. Nysanbaev, N.K. Begaliev, *Vzaimodeystvie religiy v Respublike Kazakhstan*, Tsentr gumanitarnykh issledovaniy, Iskander Publishers, Almaty, 2006, pp. 83, 112.

[15] See: A.N. Nysanbaev, A.G. Kosichenko, V.A. Ivanov, V.A. Fidirko, *Mezhkonfessionalnye otnoshenia v Respublike Kazakhstan: otchet o NIR*, MOiN RK, Institute of Philosophy and Political Science, Almaty, 2004, p. 25.

[16] A.G. Kosichenko, V.D. Kurganskaia, A.N. Nysanbaev, N.K. Begaliev, op. cit., pp. 80, 109.

[17] See: M.P. Mchedlov, op. cit., pp. 112-113, 351.

On the whole, religious organizations have no obvious political ambitions; in fact, in the context of political pluralism, new political organizations and movements, as well as religious political parties, might appear. Today, Kazakhstan and Russia,

- first, legally ban parties built on the confessional basis;
- second, the ideas of foreign ideologists of Islamism failed to strike root among the local population.

This means that people do not want to live in a clerical society even though some of them identify themselves with the faithful.

So far official statistics have not measured the level and depth of religious feelings in Kazakhstan and Russia; we should bear in mind, however, that in the absence of objective information about the number of believers and their distribution by confession, the state's relations with the confessions may be distorted and upset the balance among the religions.

Conflicts might be bred by the clearly identifiable link between ethnic and confessional affiliation. About 20 percent of the Russian respondents identify themselves with the "main" religions; they look at them as cultural rather than religious systems ("a Russian, *therefore* an Orthodox believer," "a Tatar, *therefore* a Muslim," "a Kalmyk and a Buryat, *therefore* a Buddhist," etc.).[18] This shows that people in Russia tend to tie national and confessional affiliations together.

The Study of the Emergence of Civil Identity of the Ethnic Groups of Kazakhstan carried out in the summer of 2009 (with the support of the Republican State Enterprise "House of Friendship—Study Center of the Problems of Ethnic Relations") by a group of academics (of which the present author was a member) showed that 100 percent of the Chechens and Azeris, 95.2 percent of the Uighurs, 79.6 percent of the Uzbeks, and 96.9 percent of the Kazakhs preferred Islam. Among the Russians, 83.4 percent preferred Christianity (either Orthodoxy or Catholicism), and 7.2 percent preferred Islam.

The above shows that the threshold of ethnic and religious identification in the believers' minds is fairly high. The group of Slavic nationalities is mainly represented by Christianity; all the other nationalities tended toward Islam.

The Tatars (who tend toward Christian confessions of all sorts, including the Jehovah's Witnesses), Russians (Orthodoxy, Islam, Catholicism, and other Christian denominations), Germans (Orthodoxy, Catholicism, and Protestantism) are more multi-confessional than other ethnic groups. It seems that their ethnic and confessional tolerance is much more developed and they tend, to a lesser degree than the others, to combine ethnic and religious self-identification.

Still the corresponding state structures and the leaders of traditional confessions find it hard to identify the number of followers of any confession; they prefer to assess the number of followers by the numerical strength of the nationalities living in the country. To satisfy their political and ideological ambitions, which might cause social tension, they rely on stereotypes of ethnic and religious identity. Even though ethnic and confessional affiliations coincide, many of the citizens of Kazakhstan believe that religious and ethnic identity should not and cannot coincide in all cases. Free choice of religion is approved by 81.3 percent of the Muslim respondents, 69.7 percent of the Orthodox respondents, and 67.8 percent of the respondents of other confessions. One out of five Muslim and Orthodox respondents and one out of ten followers of other confessions disagree with this.[19] This suggests, first, that ethnic groups might crumble, a trend that is becoming more pronounced along with unfolding globalization; second, dedication to the democratic norm of freedom of conscience, which, we believe, will dampen conflict potential.

[18] Ibid., p. 80.
[19] See: A.G. Kosichenko, V.D. Kurganskaia, A.N. Nysanbaev, N.K. Begaliev, op. cit., pp. 79-80.

Some people think differently. Director of the Public Ethnopolitics and Humanitarian Studies Foundation Prof. Telebaev, for example, invited the public to pay attention: "At the same time, it is necessary to register the inadequate degree of religious tolerance among the Kazakhs and Uighurs. Over half of them believe that people should follow the religion of their ancestors and that freedom of conscience does not apply. The city authorities should be aware that nationalities in which over 90 percent of the members are Muslims demonstrate religious intolerance."[20]

The desire to revive traditional values and reestablish moral landmarks through religion should not be condemned, but we should not confuse ethnic and religious affiliations. This serves no useful purpose and merely disunites people devoted, from time immemorial, to different religions; in fact, any religion insists on its exclusiveness. Today, the idea of a nation's religious uniformity can hardly be coupled with the democratic principles of a multinational and multi-confessional state. This is ever truer today when people in Russia and Kazakhstan trust religion even more than before.

Public opinion polls demonstrate, year after year, that over 65 percent of the respondents in Russia (including non-believers, undecided and indifferent) accept the Church's authority in social and moral issues, accept the religious associations' peace potential, and are convinced that the Church can help establish good relations between people of different nationalities. The 2000 poll revealed that religious organizations came third after the President of the Russian Federation and the Army as far as popular trust was concerned. In April 2001, the Church was in third-fourth place, together with the government. The 2001 and 2003 polls demonstrated the same; this fully applies to Kazakhstan.

Members of religious communities tend to trust their own religious associations more than others. On the whole, the level of trust in other confessions and denominations is not very high, even though the followers of "new" denominations trust the so-called traditional religions more than the followers of the "traditional" confessions tend to trust the religious newcomers. This means that religion as a whole is trusted yet, despite real and declared tolerance, the level of trust in other confessions and denominations at the micro level remains low.

The situation is different at the level of personal interaction.

In 2009, the answers to the question "What is your attitude to the convictions of the followers of other religious trends?" asked in a sociological poll called Study of the Emergence of Civil Identity of the Ethnic Groups of Kazakhstan (summer 2009) testifies to a high degree of religious tolerance (see Diagram 1).

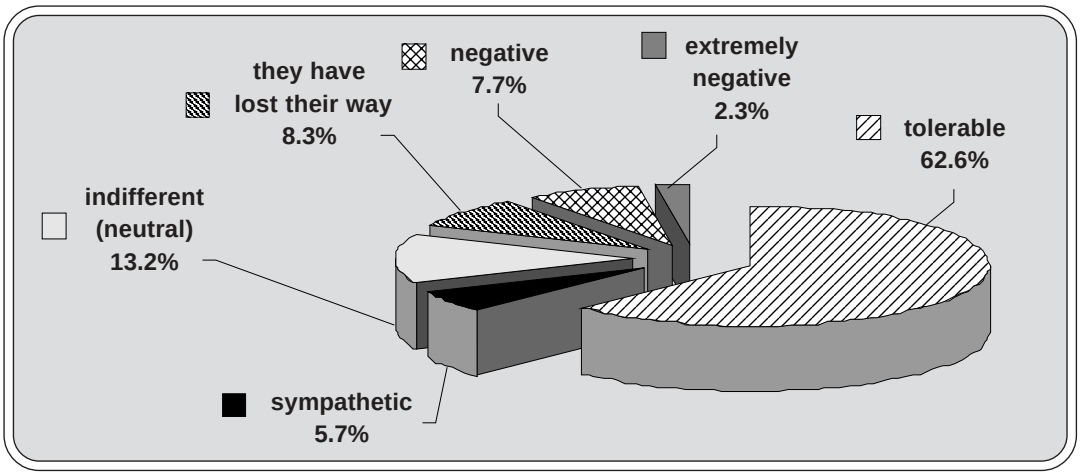
Ten percent of the respondents, however, are intolerant ("negative" and "extremely negative" answers): 14.2 percent of them are between 50 and 59 years old; the youngest group (between 15 and 20), or 7.7 percent, are the least xenophobic.

In the absence of systemic monitoring, no objective idea can be formed of the dynamics tolerance/intolerance. A similar poll carried out in 1996 by the Institute of the Development of Kazakhstan (IDK) produced the following results: the tolerant group ("friendly," "neutral," "tolerant") was 89.3 percent; 2.4 percent of the polled were intolerant ("negative" and "with grievances").[21] The above shows that in 13 years religious tolerance at the micro level dropped by 7.6 percent. As a rule, the Protestant, neo-Protestant, and new religious communities and groups are least favorably regarded by the citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan[22]; this applies, first and foremost, to the Krishna Consciousness, the Jehovah's Witnesses, and the Church of Scientology[23]; while 60.8 percent of the Protestants

[20] G.T. Telebaev, *Etnoreligioznaia identifikatsia naselenia g. Almaty: metodicheskoe posobie,* Almaty, 2006, p. 49.
[21] See: "Tak kto zhe my, kazakhstantsy?" in: *Pressa Kazakhstana o svobode sovesti*, ed. by N. Fokina, The Almaty Helsinki Committee, Almaty, 1999, p. 141.
[22] See: A.I. Artemiev, I.B. Tsepkova, *Issledovanie aspektov formirovania grazhdanskoy identichnosti etnosov Kazakhstana,* Almaty, 2009.
[23] See: I.B. Tsepkova, A.I. Artemiev, *Ierarkhia identichnoy struktury grazhdan Kazakhstana (etnicheskaia, religioznaia i grazhdanskaia),* Almaty, 2009.

*Diagram 1*

**What is Your Attitude to the Convictions of the Followers of Other Religious Trends?**




are comfortable among the followers of other religions.[24] However, it is the members of these religious groups who proved the most tolerant, 72.3 percent of whom said they were open-minded about the convictions of other confessions.[25]

On the surface, there is a relatively high level of tolerance in Kazakhstan toward members of other confessions. The ordinary people are more open and more tolerant; there was no official information about violence against members of religious minorities. Sociological polls, however, revealed facts of religious conflicts (confirmed by 6.7 percent of Muslims; 15.7 percent of Orthodox Christians; and 15.2 percent of the followers of other confessions) mainly in public places: on public transport, while waiting in line, or in the streets. Conflicts were caused by religious disagreements: "each of those involved in the conflict believed that his faith was more important and insisted that he was right" and "showed ignorance about religion"; there were also many more mundane reasons: "insults on ethnic grounds," "conflicts over a seat on public transport," "negative opinions of believers," etc.[26]

In Russia, respondents are fairly well disposed toward religious pluralism in their country and are prepared to cooperate with the followers of all sorts of ideologies. The poll of 1991 conducted in several regions of the Russian Federation produced the following results. When asked "What is your attitude toward the religious convictions of believers?" 34.7 percent approved of them completely; 48.7 percent respected their convictions, although they did not share them; only 2.5 percent were negatively disposed, while 13.7 percent were indifferent.[27] Later polls conducted by the Center of All-Human Values demonstrated an increase in sympathy among Russians toward believers. In 1996, 54.5 percent of the polled confirmed their respect for the feelings of believers; in 2000, the share was 59.4 percent.[28]

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[24] See: A.I. Artemiev, I.B. Tsepkova, *The Impact of Religious Organizations on the Nationalities of Kazakhstan,* 2nd edition, RK Ministry of Culture and Information, Friendship House—Center for the Studies of the Problems of Ethnic Relationships, 2008, Almaty, p. 189 (in Kazakh).

[25] See: Ibid., p. 186.

[26] A.G. Kosichenko, V.D. Kurganskaia, A.N. Nysanbaev, N.K. Begaliev, op. cit., p. 95.

[27] See: M.P. Mchedlov, op. cit., p. 88.

[28] See: G.M. Denisovskiy, P.M. Kozyreva, *Politicheskaia tolerantnost v reformiruemom rossiskom obshchestve vtoroy poloviny 90-kh godov,* Tsentr obshchechelovecheskikh tsennostey, Moscow, 2002, p. 98.

The public opinion poll of 2001 carried out by the Research Center revealed that members of religious communities in Russia were tolerant and in general positive about their relations with followers of other confessions: only 3.6 percent of the polled believed that a different faith negatively affected their attitude to its followers; a nearly equal share (3.2 percent) believed that this was a positive factor, while the largest share (73.7 percent) asserted that a different faith did not affect their attitude to its followers.[29] This widespread indifference played no negative role at the micro level; this shows that there are no ideological obstacles for normal personal relations.

As distinct from certain religious leaders, the majority (over 70 percent) refuses to accept any of the religions as exclusive or the only true one; it is opposed to actions against other religions.[30]

Young people between the age of 16 and 17, however, are less tolerant toward the followers of other faiths than the older generations. Among the youngest age groups, the share of those who treat different religions negatively is 1.5-2.5 times higher than in the older age groups.[31] The Center of All-Human Values offers the following figures: in 2000, over half of 20-year-olds sympathized with believers (50.3 percent); among the 50-year-old age group, the share was 65.1 percent; while among those over 60, it was 71.6 percent.[32]

Religious intolerance in Russia is rare, but is not absolutely absent. According to the SOVA Center, in 2006, religious intolerance was behind 25 acts of vandalism in churches and other cultic structures; 11 attacks on Muslim religious buildings; and 24 acts of vandalism in Orthodox, Muslim and Jewish cemeteries. On the whole, the nation's past has taught it tolerance, otherwise there would be no ethnic and confessional pluralism either in Russia or in Kazakhstan. Those who believe that people have no religious tolerance are wrong. In fact, intolerance is often deliberately planted in people's minds:

(1) the media regularly insult believers. For example, the Jehovah's Witnesses are called a "religious sect" even though their organization is about 100 years old.

(2) Some members of the power structures permit themselves hostile and insulting comments about members of religious associations. For example, a group of "patriotically minded people" (including 19 deputies of the State Duma) demanded that the General Public Prosecutor's Office start proceedings to ban all Jewish religious and national structures based on the Shulchan Aruch morals as extremist. On 11 January, 2005, the *Rus pravoslavnaia* newspaper published a letter on its website entitled "Evreyskoe schastie, russkie slezy" (Jewish Happiness and Russian Tears). This started a scandal, as a result of which the letter was recalled; the leaders of Russia condemned the calls to outlaw Jewish public structures. In November 2005, during the election campaign in Moscow, the Liberal-Democratic Party of Russia disseminated 1 million copies of a leaflet demanding a "ban on religious sects."

(3) Some of academics are also intolerant for subjective reasons.

Attempts to give an unbiased analytical interpretation of religious phenomena frequently run up against numerous prejudices, preconceived ideas in the spiritual sphere, and stereotypes. Today, religious groups are typically accused of brainwashing. The academic and journalist communities regularly discuss assertions that religious leaders do not hesitate to control, in a very rigid way, the psyche of their adepts. It should be said that sociologists, psychiatrists, theologians, and other respected and trusted experts in Russia and other countries have frequently exposed the talks about brainwashing as deliberate and fatuous lies.

[29] See: M.P. Mchedlov, op. cit., p. 383.
[30] See: Ibid., p. 385.
[31] See: Ibid., p. 383.
[32] See: G.M. Denisovskiy, P.M. Kozyreva, op. cit., p. 98.

## *Conclusion*

After acquiring its sovereignty, the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation established constitutional and legal guarantees against intolerance and discrimination because of religious convictions, which confirms their tolerance of religious pluralism (the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Freedom of Worship and Religious Associations of 1992 is much more liberal than the Federal Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations of 1997). Recently, however, the intention to tighten up the laws relating to religion stirred up intolerance between the state and religious organizations.

The Protestant, neo-Protestant, and new denominations are the most tolerant among the officially functioning confessions. The Russian Orthodox Church and the Islamic communities and organizations functioning under the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan, while maintaining confessional harmony among themselves, are intolerant when it comes to relations with the missionary activities of the so-called non-traditional religious groups. This breaks down democratic processes in Kazakhstan, although there are no serious contradictions and conflicts among the confessions and denominations.

As distinct from the mega and macro levels, there is much more religious tolerance at the micro level. It should be said that in the Russian Federation, the younger population groups demonstrate religious intolerance.