

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

THE POLITICS OF SECULARITY/RELIGIOSITY IN KAZAKHSTAN

Akhan BIZHANOV

*D.Sc. (Political Science), Professor, Institute of Philosophy,
Political Science and Religious Studies, Committee for Science,
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Aydar AMREBAEV

*Ph.D. (Philos.), Coordinator of International Projects and Public Relations,
Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies,
Committee for Science, Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Elena BUROVA

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Leading Researcher, Institute of Philosophy,
Political Science and Religious Studies, Committee for Science,
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

Natalya SEITAKHMETOVA

*D.Sc. (Philos.), Professor, Corresponding Member, NAS RK,
Leading Researcher, Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and
Religious Studies, Committee for Science,
Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Kazakhstan
(Almaty, Kazakhstan)*

ABSTRACT

In Kazakhstan the religious situation, with its steadily growing impact on social development, mentality and life-style, is unfolding spontaneously. Expert discussions of religious influence and the degree of clericalization of the secular society are multifaceted and highly contradictory. State politics and the state structure responsible for the interaction with religious institutions are in a state of perpetual transformations, which adds turbulence to the

situation and makes the implementation of different scenarios of changes in the religious (mainly Islamic) landscape possible. The state responds to the threat of radicalization of society using quasi-religious patterns with the use of force, employment of preventive educational efforts and rehabilitation of certain groups of the republic's population. On the whole, the balance between secularity and religiosity requires a consistent and non-contradictory state policy.

KEYWORDS: *legal regulation of the religious sphere, secularity/religiosity balance, spiritual security, modernization of religious consciousness, expert discourse on religions, radicalization of religious consciousness, clericalization trends, statistics and sociology of religiosity.*

Introduction

Kazakhstan is furthering its religious diversity and creates conditions in which officially registered religious associations can function under its Concept of State Policies in the Religious Sphere for 2017-2020 adopted to consolidate stability and security in the context of new geopolitical realities, internal and external challenges.

The state

- (1) is improving the laws and methods of cooperation between the state and religious associations;
- (2) is consolidating its secular principles;
- (3) is developing the system of opposition to religious extremism and destructive religious trends.

The state has declared protection of the freedom of conscience and respect for the religious principles of its citizens as its foundational principles. It has created conditions under which registered religious associations can function, while those religious trends that undermine national security, the state's constitutional foundations and radicalize certain population groups are banned.

The Government of Kazakhstan has adopted a state program of opposition to religious extremism and terrorism for 2018-2022 to protect individuals, society, and the state against violent outcrops of extremism and terrorist threats. There is awareness at the state level that prevention of religious extremism and terrorism should be refined, and that the influence of external radicalization factors within the republic should be suppressed, while the methods used to identify and liquidate religious extremism and terrorism should be improved, etc. By 2020 the society is expected to become fully aware of the basic secular values and learn to reject all manifestations of radicalism and extremism

rooted in the quasi-religious soil. The five-year state program is realized using the funds of the republican and local budgets (a total of over \$700,000). The sum will be adjusted according to the situation. In 2019, Kazakhstan allocated adequate sums to repatriate its citizens and their families from Syria and is funding their adaptation and reintegration at rehabilitation centers in different regions of the republic.

This attention to the measures designed to prevent radicalization based on false religious principles and promote the rehabilitation of those who have fallen victim to these efforts is explained by the danger of transformation of sustainable Islamic into a violent Islamist paradigm. This danger is real in both Kazakhstan and its Central Asian neighbors. In fact, Islamization of secular societies has become one of the global trends. In some regions of Kazakhstan, pre-school children were subjected to radical interpretation of the surahs in kindergartens since the age of 4 and were taught to read namaz since the age of 6. This radical, rather than traditional interpretation of Islam has been stopped short.

Modernization as an inevitable trend apparent in all spheres of life is present in the ideological segment as well as others. Globalization and transformation of the ideas about the world and acceleration of the course of history demand that the place of religion and religious values should be reassessed. The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) responded to the global trend by adjusting, to a certain extent, the order of Friday sermons: today, at some regional mosques the concluding part of the sermon is read in Kazakh and repeated in Russian for Muslims of other nationalities who use Russian for everyday communication.

In the process of its development, the secular Kazakhstani society has acquired a wide variety of philosophies and ideas about the world, while the process of growing religiosity gained momentum. The state has to respond to the mounting and increasingly more purpose-oriented changes, which add urgency to the problem of secularity/religiosity.

The Religious Iceberg of Kazakhstan

According to state statistics, there are 3,720 registered religious subjects that belong to 18 different confessions: 2,593 of them are Muslim; 339, Orthodox; 86, Catholic; 591, Protestant; 8 belong to Society of Krishna Conscience; 7 are Jews; 6—Baha'i; 2—Buddhist; 2 belong to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormons); 1—to the Unification Church (Moonies).

There 3,502 cultic structures in the republic, of which 2,592 are mosques; 301 Orthodox churches; 110 Catholic churches; 407 Protestant prayer houses; 26 prayer houses of the New Apostolic Church; there are also 6 synagogues, 3 prayer houses of Bahai, 2 prayer houses of the Society of Krishna Conscience and 1 Buddhist temple. There are 554 officially registered missionaries in the republic: 268 of them belong to the Roman Catholic Church; 84, to the Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan; 30, to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan; 39, to the Pentecostal Church; 31, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons) and the Presbyterian Church; 30, to the New Apostolic Church; there are 15 Baptist and 9 Lutheran churches; 7 churches belong to the Adventists of Seventh Day and the Society of Krishna Conscience; there are 3 Jewish synagogues, 1 Buddhist temple and 1 Jehovah's Witnesses' church. There are 435 foreign citizens among the subjects; 119 are citizens of Kazakhstan. There are 15 religious education organizations; 400 primary courses held at mosques and church Sunday schools; there are 383 premises used for religious events outside cultic buildings, including prayer rooms for Muslims and Christians; there are also 257 stationary spots for the distribution of religious literature and other religious information materials and objects.

According to expert information, there are unregistered religious organizations that belong to different confessions, including the so-called Islamic “dormant cells,” unregistered Islamic jamaats (the number is unknown) with up to 20,000 members.

Constitutionally, Kazakhstan is a secular state; the majority (76.6%) of the respondents described it as a multi-confessional state; 12.6% disagreed with its multi-confessional nature, while one out of ten remained undecided. The biggest shares of those who belong to religious communities and follow religious norms live in the Zhambyl Region (33.3%); Atyrau (29.9%) and Kyzylorda (25.2%). In southern Kazakhstan, on the whole, the share of the faithful actively involved in religious life is fairly big (as compared with other regions): Almaty Region—18.9%; South-Kazakhstan—12.6% and the city of Almaty—18.3%.¹

Globalization affects, to a certain extent, the process of emergence of Kazakhstani civil identity, wherein local people are drawn into communities that have nothing in common with the country’s ethno-confessional subculture. The country’s western regions (with the exception of the Atyrau and West-Kazakhstan regions) are not highly religious (only 4.8% of the respondents in the Aktobe Region belonged to religious communities and followed religious norms); there were 7.9% of such people among the respondents in the Mangystau Region. The so-called extra-religious religiosity and non-traditional Islamic identity are taking shape. The population of northern Kazakhstan and the country’s capital Nur-Sultan is significantly less religious. The share of atheists is fairly big: while 14.7% described themselves as atheists in Almaty, in Nur-Sultan there are 36.0% of such self-described subjects.

Legal Regulation of the Religious Sphere

Religious diversity in Kazakhstan is regulated by the corresponding laws and by-laws which are altered periodically and contain detailed requirements related to the registration and activities of religious organizations. International missions regularly inform the world about violations of religious freedoms in Kazakhstan. In 2018, Forum 18² organized a monitoring of violations of administrative laws by individual citizens (members of religious organizations) and structures (charity foundations and business centers) and revealed that the Kazakhstani and foreign missionaries regularly violate administrative laws and norms by

- (a) distributing religious literature and attributes;
- (b) violating the order of performing religious rites;
- (c) drawing minors into religious practices;
- (d) violating the order of missionary activities.

The reasons for these violations remain unclear, which means that they either occurred accidentally or were premeditated, or the leaders of religious organizations were not fully aware of their legal

¹ Here and elsewhere we use information of formalized questionnaire population poll carried out by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies at the Ministry of Education and Science in 2018 among 3,500 respondents by the national representative sampling: adult (18+) population of Kazakhstan of the most important social-demographic groups that took into account gender, age, ethnicity, education, social-professional status, the level of income, belonging to definite settlement type, incomes, religiosity, etc. The polls were conducted as personal formalized interviews in the respondents’ flats “face to face” with the use of paper questionnaire (PAPI technology).

² [http://www.forum18.org/archive.php?article_id=2448].

responsibilities. Administrative blunders create an illusion of an infringement on the rights of the believers, but in fact, they stem from inadequate legal awareness of the leaders and members of religious organizations.

According to public opinion polls, 60.0% of the polled assessed state policies as adequate to the constitutional principles of the state/religion relationships; 14.2% were convinced that religious organizations enjoy too much freedom, while 3.1% pointed to excessive limitations introduced by the state; 2.9% believed that religious organizations were being ignored; 18.9% remained undecided.

The religious sphere remains in a turbulent zone partly because the state has not yet arrived at an adequate regulation and satisfactory laws. In December 2017, a draft Law on Amendments and Additions to Certain Legal Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan related to religious activities and religious associations specified the problems of religious rites and wedding or divorce ceremonies, the rules of wearing religious clothes in public places, organizing religious events, production and distribution of religious books, charity activities, construction of religious buildings, religious education, missionary activities, theological rehabilitation services to people in prisons, prevention of religious extremism and terrorism, etc. The draft law defined new concepts—destructive religious behavior, religious radicalism, etc.³

These changes were actively discussed at all levels: society was aware that religiously motivated radicalization should be kept within certain limits, state structures held discussions with heads of religious organizations, while experts, as could be expected, offered diametrically opposite opinions on the content and forms of the suggested changes. Public opinion polls carried out in all regions produced the following results: 54.5% of the respondents positively assessed the amendments; 29.2% were indifferent; 8.1% were negative, and 8.1% undecided.

Throughout 2018, the ministers of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Civil Society (N. Ermekbaev and later D. Kaletaev) and the Committee for Religious Affairs (later transformed into Committee for Public Accord) have twice presented the amendments to the lower chamber of the parliament (Majilis).

Those involved in parliamentary and extra-parliamentary discussions agreed that the suggested amendments needed considerable clarifications. Society (believers, unbelievers and subjects of the religious process), state structures responsible for the state policies in this sphere have been waiting for two years for the amended laws designed to regulate the interaction between the state and religious associations.

In December 2018, the draft was recalled⁴ (due to the need for further refinement according to the expert community) from the Majilis.

In early 2019, the Ministry of Religious Affairs was reorganized once again, and somewhat later, received a new minister.

The experts and public figures agreed that the draft law was recalled because:

- It offered legal measures to keep in check the destructive religious minorities that may bring numerous negative repercussions;
- As could be expected, social rather than religious problems attracted the most attention on the eve of presidential elections; religious aspects were pushed aside until the law had finally been redacted;
- In the summer of 2018 some of the partners put pressure on Kazakhstan at the governmental meetings between foreign ministers of some countries.

³ [https://tengrinews.kz/zakon/pravitelstvo_respubliki_kazahstan_premier_ministr_rk/konstitutsionnyiy_stroy_i_osnovyi_gosudarstvennogo_upravleniya/id-P1700000907].

⁴ [<https://egov.kz/cms/ru/law/list/P1900000025>].

The State and Religion in Kazakhstan: More Turbulence?

Today, the state, which has been cooperating with traditional religious institutions, spares no effort in explaining secular priorities and pointing to religious diversity. Generally, people consider themselves Muslims; religiosity in the republic is on the rise, which has been confirmed by monitoring and by what can be seen in the streets.

“Sustainable development of any state and reproduction of social stability is possible only if the religious situation is taken into account; if it is studied, analyzed and its trends identified. Inadequate knowledge of religious trends and tendencies makes religiosity a factor of social and political risks, cripples manageability of social processes; unpredictable developments cannot be ruled out if the religious factor is used as an instrument of political influence.”⁵

Islam’s increasingly greater role and Islamization of the secular consciousness are associated not so much with social and economic problems—poverty, unequal access to education, malfunctioning social lifts—but by the fact that the religious policy of Kazakhstan is far from perfect, it is one-sided and ranges from absolute liberalism of the 1990s to the restrictions introduced in the early 2000s.

Discourse analysis has identified several approaches typical of oppositional, moderate, and pro-government experts. The majority agrees that the state’s religious policy is not consistent, that it is confrontational rather than compromising; that it lacks ideas, has no continuity and is suppressed by excessive administration. The opposition and the monitoring missions criticize the excessive regulation of the religious sphere.

Moderate experts pay attention to the rift between the state policy and the political trends prevalent in the world; they point out that the state fails to act when immediate actions are needed and that society is very critical of the state religious policies. Certain journalists and publicist writers are very negative because authorities

- (1) have no idea of how they should fight religious extremism
- (2) draw its citizens into an ideological confrontation via its so-called “humanitarian missions” carried out jointly with Russia, the United States and other countries to remove compatriots (religious radicals, who moved of their free will to the zones of conflict to kill the “infidels,” and their families) from the zones of conflicts (Syria).

The uncontrolled clericalization of mass consciousness cannot but cause concern: Islamic clerics are actively involved in all large-scale events; they discuss theology in unsuitable places and try to correct the principles of secular life. The basic descriptions of audiences—their educational and cultural potentials—are not always taken into account, while the secular foundations of the lifestyle of the majority are ignored along with the plurality of ideas about the world and the meaning of life. Many experts disagree with the statements claiming that the spiritual and moral potential is limited to religion; more and more people state that the institute of religion should not replace the sphere of education, enlightenment and culture; that society needs a balance between secularity and religiosity, that the mental specifics of Kazakhs should be taken into account when their spiritual reference points are identified.

Kazakhstan’s clerics are doing their best to preserve the traditional Islamic landscape, which is not that easy. Religious conscience is becoming radicalized partly because of the deficit of traditional religious literature that objectively interprets the history of Islam. The void is filled with radical interpretive practices.

⁵ A. Amrebaev, A. Bizhanov, E. Burova, “Political Science and Sociology on the Role of Religion in the Axiological and Meaningful Space of Kazakhstan Society,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 19, Issue 4, 2018, p. 86.

“In Kazakhstan, the discourse related to Islamic studies testifies that the society had reached the stage of spiritual revival, religious and civilizational re-identification in the post-secular cultural and communicative space. The problems discussed in Kazakhstan—history of Islam in Kazakhstan, prevention of religious extremism, continuity of Kazakh-style Islamic traditions, cultural and axiological alignments, orientation towards the Hanafi madhhab and Yassawi tariqa traditional for Kazakhstan—are suggested by the pragmatic desire to maintain inter-confessional stability in the multi-cultural and polyethnic society with the help of religion that ensured a safe performance of all social rites.”⁶

There are attempts to transform the Kazakhstani model of Sunni Islam into its Arab/Salafi variant; further liberalization of religious politics will encourage those actively engaged in the process. Radical ideology and its promotion in Kazakhstan is a challenge created by the globalist Islamic ideology that wants to adjust the Islamic tradition of Kazakhstan to its own patterns. The Muslims of Kazakhstan should be fully aware of their right to profess Islam of their own madhhab; they should be absolutely sure that by preserving the balance between Islam and secularity the state protects them from radicalism and terrorism.

The mounting rivalry between radical ideological invasions and the Hanafi madhhab is caused by the more or less widespread ignorance of the nature of their madhhab and its correlation with the national spiritual traditions.

The religious sphere is filled with very diverse practices and is far from being geographically unified. The state is determined to consolidate the traditional positions of Hanafi madhhab and Russian Orthodoxy preferred by the majority and the cornerstones of stability. The majority agrees that Kazakhstanis should support traditional religions or those supported by the state, yet there is no unanimity: 66.8% are ready to support them; 16.4% are against them, while 16.7% are undecided.

The following regions attract particular attention: the Mangystau Region (28.6%); East Kazakhstan (25%), Kostanay (24.2%), the city of Almaty (25.9%), where one out of four respondents *does not agree* with the statement that the faithful should support traditional religions. On the other hand, 41.2% in the West-Kazakhstan Region; 30% in the Atyrau Region, 29% in the North-Kazakhstan Region, 24% in Aktobe Region, 21.7% in East-Kazakhstan Region; 20.3% in the Zhambyl Region, 17.9% in Almaty Region, 15.2% in the city of Almaty and 11.9% in the country’s capital positively assess the role of new religious organizations.

Focus groups expressed the opinion that “the Hanafi madhhab cannot and should not be the only religion for all: there cannot and should not be a rule; each person should be free to realize his right to freely choose his religion. Kazakhstan is a secular state, which means that no religion or the demand to follow traditional religions can be imposed upon its citizens. Freedom of conscience and convictions belongs to all and everyone; it includes the right to choose any religion. This principle had been accepted by the international and national law.”

Rationality in the Islamic Discourse and Challenges to the Traditional Islamic Paradigm

The situation in the Islamic world and in Western Europe has pushed Islamic discourse in secular societies to the fore. The time has come to examine how Islam, Islamic science, and Islamic edu-

⁶ Zh. Turganbayeva, N. Seitakhmetova, M. Bektenova, Sh. Zhandossova, “Islamic Identity in the Context of History and its Prospects: Religious and Political Aspects,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus. English Edition*, Vol. 20, Issue 2, 2019, p. 105.

cation can help formulate a tolerant concept of the world based on values and humanitarian and spiritual priorities.

Throughout its history, Islamic discourse was taking shape within the context of rationalism that relied on the conceptualization of the mind as an inalienable quality of a free individual. This explains how the madhhab doctrines appeared: they are rationalist concepts that ensure the rights and freedoms of religious practices in the sociocultural and political space of Kazakhstan and Central Asia.

The above-mentioned problems are concentrated around religious, or even marginal, studies of the Hanafi madhhab and the results of fundamental studies carried out abroad, which, as we have seen, are suggested by all sorts of political, social, and cultural interests.

This creates ideological lacunae that are gradually filled with Islamist ideologies that threaten the traditional religious stability. The issue of the “correct” and “incorrect” interpretations of the Koran and hadiths is the main trap: this inevitably leads to the question of the correct and incorrect practice of Islam, the rites and rituals, fasting, Islamic holidays and prohibition of all secular holidays.

In order to promote Hanafi ideology, the SAMK needs Islamic educational centers. The Abu-Hanifah educational center set up at the Nur-Mubarak University has not yet become sufficiently developed to influence the religious context to any noticeable extent. A Central Asian Hanafiah Center is very much needed to provide theological unaggressive education in Central Asia with due regard for the specifics of the Hanafi madhhab. The studies of the Hanafi madhhab should be realized in the context of the Islamic education philosophy by identifying the educational integrating potential of Hanafiah.

Factors of Radicalization and Experience of De-Radicalization

Today, the religious space of Kazakhstan is gradually turning into a metaphoric battlefield between different philosophical strategies not only along the secular/religious dividing line, but also along the lines of traditional/new religions and moderate/radical impacts. Different interpretations and assessments of religion as a positive or negative factor by the common people have become apparent: a large share of the respondents (56.5%) believe that religion, on the whole, cannot promote aggressiveness and cannot radicalize public relations because it positively affects society. On the other hand, 12.6% believe that religion can be aggressive and can radicalize society. Approximately the same share (12.2%) has agreed with the following statement: “Today the level of radicalism is fairly low, but it will grow.”

Public consciousness is radicalized because the majority of Muslims cannot detect differences between the madhhabs, persuasions and trends in Islam. Experts point to social vulnerability of certain population groups: inadequate working conditions, inadequate educational and family socialization.

This applies, primarily, to the younger generations. An awareness of emotional imbalance, which causes an awareness of social injustice and stirs up strong negative feelings, as well as immature value orientations and vague ideas about the world and religious ignorance also lead to radical activities. The following categories of citizens might be potentially involved in radical activities: the youth, labor migrants who face serious economic and political stress and prisoners.

Today, sustainable religious feelings within the limits of the Islamic landscape, sustainable tolerance of other confessions and cultures are very much needed to de-radicalize the Islamic ummah and Islamic identity. The issues of religious and theological education have been placed on the agen-

da: Islamic education is the main instrument of preventing the deconstruction of Islamic Kazakhstani identity.

Practicing theologians with experience in de-radicalization criticize the official representatives of traditional Islam. Experts have pointed to the mounting crisis of confidence in the official clergy. There are no spiritual authorities—ulema of worldwide fame; there is no openness or transparency; there is no competence in religious questions, no communicative skills and an ability to talk and build up bridges between communities. Traditional clergy is not free from corruption; they squabble over religious statuses. Not infrequently, religious figures are unable to produce the required content, expected results or values. They limit themselves to self-promotion with the help of PR technologies. This is what theologian Askar Sabdin, Director of the Mysl Center of Applied Studies has written.⁷

Experts have openly admitted that the traditional Islamic clergy cannot compete with camouflaged jamaats, trends and sects that reject the local national code and identity. This explains the continued spiritual colonization of the believers by extra-confessional religious structures and leads to an obvious polarization of the faithful.

The official site of the public association Counterterrorist Committee [ctc-rk.kz] refers to the vice-minister responsible for the sphere of religion, who has assessed the scope of the work conducted to prevent radicalism. In 2018, 100 extra-staff lecturers, members of the republican informational-explanatory group (IEG) organized 312 events in the regions, attracting a total audience of 18,500 people; 113 of the events were intended for female believers and drawing 4,500 people. The regional IEG structures organized 38,391 events that attracted 2,139,074 people. It should be said that since the majority of events involve large groups of people, their efficiency should be assessed.

Certain experience has been gained by the rehabilitation/de-radicalization centers working with individuals or small groups. In 2018, 18,159 events of that sort were conducted, engaging 26,263 people; about 2,500 people have been rehabilitated. Rehabilitation and explanation are used in the structures of the penitentiary system of the Administration for Religious Affairs: 7,645 events involved 32,826 people; 286 have abandoned radical ideas.

The regional Administrations for Religious Affairs (recently they were integrated with the Administrations for Internal Policies and the Youth. Today they are called the Administrations of Public Accord within the system of Administrations of Social Development) along with the branches of the SAMK offer theological consultations to those who have suffered from destructive and radical religious trends.

We need integrated programs and methods of de-radicalization and rehabilitation, as well as standards and criteria for persuasion and adaptation of radicals. Objects and subjects of de-radicalization need standards and criteria to an equal extent. Communication and an open exchange of opinions designed to reveal the destructive nature of radical ideology, rather than the use of force, should be studied and implemented.

Different target groups—people imprisoned for the crimes of terror perpetrated in the territory of Kazakhstan, radicals who returned from the zones of terrorist activities, their wives and children—need different rehabilitation approaches and methods, as well as generally humane treatment.

The greater part of the rehabilitation efforts has been transferred to NGOs that should prove their adequacy through a system of state tenders carried every year; sometimes funding is extended to three years.

Obviously, all and everyone engaged in this sphere—people employed by the law and order structures and the penitentiary system, as well as those employed by the NGOs—should have ade-

⁷ [<http://ctc-rk.kz/tag/аскар-сабдин>].

quate knowledge and possess adequate skills. Imams, theologians and other people involved in rehabilitation projects should take special courses to learn more about the psychology and sociology of religion, age and gender psychology, rhetoric, anthropology, conflict resolution studies, etc.

Modernization of Consciousness

Despite the attempts to move religion into the sphere of public policies, it is the state structures that initiate contacts between religion and society, while the religious sphere is spreading beyond the limits of individual space, attracting believers and secular citizens alike, a signal of the imperfect state of public consciousness, the ideological component of which is not corrected by secular means—the family, the system of education and enlightenment, and ideology.

The expert community has pointed out to two sources of radicalization: activities of radical Islamists and an active expansion of numerous foreign missionary movements and quasi-religious organizations.

Today, the analysts have agreed that *quasi-religious Islamic and non-Islamic extremism can potentially spread across the republic*, even if its ideology is an imported rather than a local phenomenon. The state is fighting this negative trend along a wide front stretching from propaganda, including online counter-propaganda, to the use of force.

High technologies limited the role of traditional communication methods, while online platforms of all sorts have become the main source of religious education for the younger generation. There are several discourses on religious subjects in the social networks. Among the officially recognized religious organizations, the SAMK [muslim.kz, hikmet.kz], Asyl Arna TV channel and the Hazret Sultan Mosque are the most active. These and other generators of the official religious online content prefer presenting their material in a formal manner; their non-traditional rivals rely on easily understood and, therefore, attractive methods of information/enlightenment that presume feedback.

Young people are strongly attracted by videos of a negative or shocking nature that normally invites two different responses:

- (1) concern for those who profess true religion and
- (2) religious intolerance of the believers as a whole or of followers of certain confessions/religions.

Religious problems do not raise a wave of answers in the Kazakhstani social media segment: the active and popular users limit themselves to rare and short responses to prominent events in the religious sphere unfolding in the country or in the world. This relates to the latest terrorist acts in New Zealand and Sri Lanka; the majority offered warm comments and compassion. A small part of the Internet audience promoted the idea that what happened in New Zealand should be qualified as “Christian terrorism”; they argued that terrorism is not limited to Islam and that the New Zealand event’s close association with terrorism and extremism in the minds stems from the propaganda war waged by the Western Christian world. These people insisted that the West should classify this tragedy as a “religious terrorist act.”

Religious subjects are discussed, albeit indirectly, in political transit discourses. At the same time, certain rank-and-file users have pointed out that the date of presidential elections was selected deliberately to synchronize the election campaign with the month of Ramadan. The opposition

feared that authorities have relied on the instruments of soft ideological pressure: wittingly or unwittingly, Islamic clergy would promote the interests of the authorities at the evening namaz (Salah), thus undermining the protest potential in the minds and on the squares at the rallies organized from abroad. The opposition pointed out that, on the one hand, Islam sides with strong authoritarian power and preaches abeyance and, on the other, bans conflicts and negative actions during fasts, etc. Another part of the Internet users interprets the economic and political crisis in the country as the best time for the radical Islamization of society. The most respected bloggers, however, stated nothing of the kind.

An analysis of the discourse of religious subjects in social networks in 2019 shows that it is not tied to specific events and is, on the whole, not popular. Discussions are not related to religious leaders or ideologically orientated users; the audience is interested in political events and the transit of power in Kazakhstan.

The non-traditional religious trends (associations) use social networks to promote information rather than become involved in open discussions or open proliferation of confessional materials. Instead, they attract people with more or less shared interests and gradually draw them into their spheres of influence.

This means that the traditional religious organizations should create their own efficient content; they should improve their information presentation style and rely on the potential of online dialog.

Starting in 2018 a humanitarian mission Zhusan has been carried out in Kazakhstan to repatriate those who have travelled to the zone of terrorist activities for different reasons. It was announced that all adults, whose involvement in terrorist activities abroad was proven would be stripped of Kazakhstan citizenship. Today, about 300 citizens of Kazakhstan (including wives and widows of fighters and their children mainly of pre-school and primary-school ages, as well as orphans) have been repatriated.

The users are of diametrically different opinions about the mission: some believe that Kazakhstan should support its citizens no matter what; children that found themselves in the zone of terrorist activities should be rescued by all means. Those who oppose this measure are afraid of ideological and physical threats; they are convinced that the returning fighters will spread extremist ideas in prisons and train others to become fighters.

Conclusions

Religious feelings are growing stronger in Kazakhstan, yet the country is obviously tired of radically minded adepts of any religion. It should be said that

- (a) people are more liberally minded when it comes to personal, group or social perception of religion;
- (b) the number of people who demonstrate their disagreement with the state religious policy may increase, albeit insignificantly; people might be especially opposed to the declared need to follow the historical-cultural paradigms and traditions;
- (c) social discourse, which has become wider due to regional involvement, is very critical about the activities of those who represent the traditional religions and are very positive about new religious practices;
- (d) religious radicalism is expected to emerge.

These trends fully correspond to greater religiosity of modernizing societies and require efficient approaches and acceptable political decisions. The rising impact of quasi-religiosity requires a

modernization of religious consciousness to ensure spiritual security and religious tolerance; it is highly important to promote sustainable tolerant consciousness, Islamic integration in secular society, and Islamic modernization in the sphere of science, culture, and education.

Modernization should promote communication between cultures to achieve a natural balance between religious traditions and technological innovations; it should create a sustainable religious (traditional) identity and a philosophy of a tolerant Islamic personality. This means that we need to conduct a fundamental study of the issue of the transformation of Islam in the course of modernization, which creates new cultural interaction practices.

Radicalization of Islamic consciousness and inter-cultural and inter-confessional intolerance have created the zones of intolerance in which religious problems cannot be settled.

In Kazakhstan, the ultimate result of the development of religiosity is vague. So far, traditional Islam is still the main paradigm and should retain its place in people's minds through the combined interests and capabilities of theologians and experts in Islamic education, enlightenment, and information. Politicization of the Islamic discourse may cause unwelcome effects and a loss of balance between the secular and the religious.

The ideological requirements of new strategies of interaction between cultures and religions have been formulated by new global realities. The correlation between the secular and the religious cannot be understood outside the axiological paradigm that, in its turn, needs better methodologies. Religious policy is gradually developing into an instrument of impact on decision-making; religious ideas are used to realize different strategies fraught with a loss of traditional cultural landscapes and serious instability in society and the state.

The Hanafi ideology is one of the factors of integration of the joint efforts of the state and Islamic institutions adjusted to the highly specific Kazakhstani realities. Turkish or Arabic patterns are unacceptable: they might destroy the Islamic identity of the Kazakhstani ummah. Consolidation of the Muslims of Kazakhstan through Hanafiah will preserve religious sovereignty, Islamic immunity, an awareness of belonging to the Islamic ummah and promote integration in the secular society.

To achieve this, we should perfect our laws related to religion, take into account the realities of religious life in the Republic of Kazakhstan which are complicated, dynamic and concealed from outside observers. This means that comprehensive approaches are required. We should perfect the corpus of laws that regulate religious relations, starting with the definitions of religion, religious activities, religiously motivated extremism, etc. as perceived by law makers and common people. Confessional images of religious associations should be specified.

To add consistency and deepness to the religious policy of Kazakhstan and to preserve the balance between secularity and religiosity, we should limit the role of Islam in politics. It is highly important to redefine the main principles related to religion and its role in a secular state. We should not exclude the possibility that the law-making paradigm will pay more attention to the understanding of the secular and the religious context of Kazakhstani realities.