

RELIGION IN SOCIETY

THE RELIGIOUS SITUATION TODAY
IN KAZAKHSTAN

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Introduction

The events that occurred at the end of spring and the beginning of summer in 2011 in Kazakhstan (the suicide bomber in Aktobe, the attack on policemen by a group of extremists in the village of Shubarshi, and the threats from the Taliban to carry out terrorist acts in Kazakhstan if the country's government decides to send Kazakhstan servicemen into Afghanistan) have riveted society's attention on the religious situation that has developed in the republic today.

It is worth noting in this respect that throughout the twenty years of the country's independence, the top leaders of the Republic of Kazakhstan (RK) have never tired of repeating the need for stability in the interconfessional and ethnic spheres. However, state policy has failed to give the religious sphere its due attention, concentrating instead on enhancing economic development and reinforcing the position of the ruling regime.

Leaving the religious sphere unattended has given missionaries from all over the world free license to come into the republic at will, whereby some of them are pursuing clearly extremist ends. Development of the situation along these lines has become possible for the following reasons.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, which failed, in the seventy years of its existence, to bring Communism as a guiding ideology to fruition, post-Soviet people, convinced of the utopianism of this idea, lost the moral reference point in their lives. The morals standards of decency, honesty, and discipline cultivated in the Soviet Union also fell into oblivion.

The "barbaric" 1990s moved power, connections, so-called telephone justice (a particular stage of corruption whereby decisions were made and commands given over the phone rather than through legal mechanisms, thus creating

virulent lawlessness), pulling strings, and other defects characteristic of a degenerating society to the forefront. So, having lost their former ideals, people began looking for new foundation stones to build their world outlook on. This led to the ensuing vacuum being filled with all manner of new ideas largely promoted by the liberal legislation. The difficult time of building an independent state produced a large number of eth-

ically challenged and unconscientious citizens who are trying to commercialize public conscience.

During its first years of independence, the state essentially paid no attention to the religious sphere, since it was too busy resolving economic issues and building the political regime, although the latest events in the RK have proven the erroneousness of this strategy.

The Traditional Religions in Kazakhstan: Islam and Orthodoxy

Over the course of history, two traditional confessions have developed in Kazakhstan—Sunni Islam and Orthodox Christianity.

After Islam came to Kazakhstan, it did not easily take root in the country since most of the tribes living in Kazakhstan at that time were nomadic, in contrast, for example, to the settled population of Transoxiana. So Islam did not occupy a dominating role in the khanates that united the tribes of that time and, consequently, did not have much influence on the policy they carried out. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to claim that the Kazakh tribes did not confess Islam. It put down the deepest roots among the Kazakhs who settled in the towns located along the Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers. Nomadic Kazakhs also observed some of the rules of Islam; the women of these tribes wore the traditional headwear (*saukele*) that covered their hair and necks, as well as clothing that hid their arms and legs.

Since the olden days, the Sufism preached by Hoja Ahmed Yasawi was popular among the population of the steppes, Muslim aestheticism, self-sacrifice, and mysticism being the main components of this religious trend. But Muslims who preach traditional Islam do not recognize Sufism.

Just like their medieval ancestors, most present-day Kazakhs uphold religious views that are a kind of synthesis of traditional Islam and elements of Tengriism. This kind of unification envisages, for example, revering the spirits of ancestors (*Arwah*), baking seven flat cakes (*zheti nan*), etc., which contradicts traditional Islam.

Precisely due to the fact that there has been no strict observation in Kazakhstan of the canons of the traditional Muslim faith from time immemorial, at the end of the Soviet period and after the republic gained its independence, it was popular to talk about the “special path of Islam” in Kazakhstan. But the traditional adherents of Islam, including the Kazakhstan youth who obtained their religious education in the learning institutions of the Middle East, deny this interpretation. This is precisely why the misunderstanding between middle-aged and young Muslims is growing. And whereas the first, which form the backbone of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK), call for preaching traditional Kazakh Islam, the so-called new Muslims (mainly young people) are demanding strict adherence to the traditional precepts of their religion, rejecting any offshoots.

Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan became widespread after the Kazakh khanate joined the Russian Empire and colonization of the Kazakh lands began. But this religion was only practiced by the Slavic pop-

ulation that arrived in the Kazakh khanate along with the Russian troops. Later, Russian Old Believers found refuge from religious persecution here; migrating to the remote corners of the khanate, they created their own closed communities.

Despite the fact that Orthodoxy existed in Kazakhstan for more than 250 years, it did not become widespread among the Kazakhs; this was due to the resistance the Kazakhs put up to Russian colonization and, correspondingly, to the new religion. With the advent of the Bolsheviks and establishment of Soviet power, religion, including Orthodoxy, was outlawed throughout the entire territory of the former Russian Empire.

The European colonizers used missionaries to impose their religious views on the rulers in order to draw a particular state into their sphere of interests; the Soviet Communists, who rejected religion, used other methods. For example, during the existence of the Soviet Union, mixed marriages became widespread, particularly among the supreme leadership of the national republics, the representatives of which married Russian girls in order to promote their successful career growth, thus demonstrating their loyalty to Moscow.

Moreover, after the country acquired its independence, Protestantism gained a certain amount of popularity among the Kazakhs. Experts explain this by the fact that the activity of the adherents of this branch of Christianity was relatively well sponsored not only by Western missionary organizations, but also by entire states.

The active missionary efforts of Western preachers led to the appearance of new Protestant churches in Kazakhstan; there were more than 500 throughout the republic as a whole.¹ Protestant religious associations and communities also expanded and reinforced their position, raising their number to almost 1,000.

After it acquired its independence, Kazakhstan, according to its Constitution, was declared a secular state in which freedom of conscience was recognized as one of the most important human rights. What is more, the Constitution declared the principles of equality of religious associations and non-interference of the state in their internal affairs.

In 1992, the Law on Freedom of Confession and Religious Associations was adopted which became the legislative and legal foundation of interconfessional relations; it was liberal in nature and recognized as meeting international standards.

Many researchers note that the current religious situation in Kazakhstan is largely determined by the specific polyethnic structure of the population. At the end of the 1980s, the share of ethnic groups traditionally preaching Christianity did not exceed 11-13% in most of the post-Soviet states with a predominantly Muslim population (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan). In Kazakhstan, however, the share of Muslim ethnic groups has always been less than 50% (beginning in the mid-1930s), while the mass emigration of Europeans from the country in 1993 brought the number of Muslims up to more than half of the population. In 1998, however, the share of non-Muslim nationalities in the country was much higher than the corresponding index for other Muslim republics of the CIS. Muslim ethnic groups constitute the ethnoconfessional minority in almost half of Kazakhstan's provinces.

The demographic factor is forcing Kazakhstan's authorities to establish a balance between Orthodoxy and Islam, without giving clear preference to either of these two religions.²

According to sociological surveys, between 60% and 70% of the population in present-day Kazakhstan are believers; approximately 80% of Kazakhs consider themselves Muslims, while some 60% of

¹ See: A. Mukhashov, "Religioznaia palitra sovremennogo Kazakhstana (obzor konfessii)," *Kazakhstanskaia pravda*, 1 July, 2003.

² See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, "Religiozniy faktor v politike i v ideologii natsionalnykh dvizhenii v Rossii i Kazakhstane. 1989-1997," available at [<http://www.panorama.ru/works/rk/index.html>], 1 August, 2011.

Russians and other representatives of Slavic nationality regard themselves as Orthodox Christians. But if we take more objective criteria for qualifying a person as the follower of a particular religion (relatively regular attendance of prayer meetings, constant adherence to religious rituals, living in compliance with the standards of faith, knowledge of the main religious texts, and so on), the real number of believers amounts to 10-20% of the population.³

The SAMK and Metropolitan District of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) in the Republic of Kazakhstan head the two largest confessions existing in Kazakhstan.

Both the SAMK and the leaders of the ROC eparchies adhere to the same platform regarding the maintenance of peace and stability in the country and constantly emphasize their mutually friendly relations, which does not prevent them, however, from struggling not only against each other, but also against the missionaries of the new religious vectors that did not used to have any followers in the republic to maintain control over their sphere of influence in religious affairs.

In the context of the tough battle between the SAMK and the ROC, which society and the media have become involved in, open lobbying of the interests of the two confessions is going on at the state level. In the future, this situation might lead to aggravation of the religious processes.⁴

Eid al-Adha (the Muslim Festival of Sacrifice) and Christmas (according to the Orthodox calendar) have been declared state holidays in Kazakhstan, which goes against the country's Constitution and infringes on the rights of other religious trends.

As for the latent standoff between the SAMK and the ROC, the following example is a good case in point. At the end of 2010, there was a scandal in Kazakhstan involving the leadership of the above-mentioned largest confessions caused by an idea voiced by Head of the Metropolitan District of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan, Metropolitan of Astana and Kazakhstan Alexander. It essentially boiled down to use of the Kazakh language during services and sermons in the republic's churches in addition to the usual Church Slavonic.⁵ The metropolitan promised that the Kazakh language would be used for publishing spiritual literature, operating the metropolitan's official website, and preaching sermons.

The SAMK took this statement as an indication that the ROC wanted to convert Kazakhs who traditionally confessed Islam to Orthodoxy. Deputy of the Supreme Mufti of Kazakhstan Muhammad Hussein-kazi Alsabekov said: "It is not right for representatives of other religions to preach sermons in Kazakh. It will be highly provocative for representatives of other religions to preach sermons in Kazakh among Muslim Kazakhs."⁶

So the following conclusions can be drawn regarding the current religious situation in Kazakhstan.

- First, there is still a latent standoff between the Russian Orthodox Church and the SAMK, which is adhering to the "set rules," in accordance with which neither side has the right to interfere in the sphere of influence of the other.
- Second, the SAMK's displeasure with the proposal to use the Kazakh language in Orthodox services shows that religion in Kazakhstan has ethnic hues: Kazakhs follow Islam, while Russians and the representatives of other Slavic ethnicities adhere to Orthodoxy.

The results of a poll of respondents carried out by Kazakh researcher G. Balaeva show that religion is playing the role of an ethnocultural indicator. For example, 63% of the re-

³ See: A.I. Artemiev, R.A. Podoprighora, I.B. Tsepikova, "Kontseptsii gosudarstvennoi politiki Respubliki Kazakhstan v sfere religii i deiatel'nosti religioznykh organizatsii," *Informational-Analytical Bulletin*, Special Issue, No. 11, 2005.

⁴ See: *Ibidem*.

⁵ See: V. Maltsev, "Astana byot v kolokola," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 3 December, 2010, p. 2.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

spondents said they followed Islam, 24.2%, Orthodoxy, 1.4%, Catholicism, and 0.2%, Protestantism. Here we are talking about the total number of people who define their affiliation with a particular religion, which for most of them means cultural or ethnic identification (including those who respect spiritual values but do not take active part in religious life).

The analysis showed that the share of those among “non-atheists” who observe all the religious teachings amounts to approximately 18%; believers who do not actively participate in religious life account for 47%; those who traditionally observe religious rituals amount to approximately 20%; and those who respect religious values constitute about 15%.⁷

The length of time a person has followed a religion is also of great importance. Forty-seven point two percent of the polled answered that they have been confessing the religion they affiliate themselves with since birth. Religion essentially acts as an element of the national culture and is perceived as part of intergenerational continuity and respect for ancestors and their spiritual heritage.⁸

- Third, the state fully supports the positions of the SAMK and the ROC, since they unite most of the country’s residents.

Nevertheless, things are far from smooth in the sphere of activity of the SAMK and the ROC. In order to present a clearer picture, we need to turn to the history of the establishment of these spiritual organizations in Kazakhstan.

The SAMK was created in 1990 on the basis of the Kazakhstan kaziat, which for 40 years belonged to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (CASAM) with its headquarters in Tashkent,⁹ on the initiative of Imam Nisanbaev (who also headed it). Tashkent was responsible for personnel policy, compiling the list of pilgrims going on hajj, religious education, and publishing activity. The proposal to separate the Kazakhstan kaziat from the CASAM was supported by the republic’s authorities from the very beginning; they saw to it that the main problems of public life were resolved within the republic.

The further history of the SAMK went through several stages, but its main thrust was strengthening the power of the supreme mufti of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Ratbek Nisanbaev, who pursued a policy aimed at replacing the authoritative Islamic leaders of the country (most of whom were representatives of non-Kazakh ethnic groups) with people of Kazakh nationality, despite the fact that the latter had neither a religious education nor any practical experience with working in mosques. Creation of the SAMK coincided time-wise with the widespread wave of religious renaissance. Many more people began participating in Muslim undertakings and mass construction of new mosques began. But due to the absence of a developed Islamic tradition in Kazakhstan, only a few of the new mosques were provided with educated imams.¹⁰

Due to the great difficulties the SAMK encountered during the first years of its existence, it was difficult to organize its own system for training imams, sending pilgrims on hajj, and so on. Moreover, at the initial stage, the SAMK was not recognized abroad; the Kazakhstan leadership played a significant part in overcoming this barrier. For example, in February 1993, during his visit to Egypt, Nursultan Nazarbaev asked for 25 students from Kazakhstan to be accepted at Al-Azhar University. This type of “intercession” on the part of the country’s president was prompted by the fact that after

⁷ See: A.G. Balaeva, *Emo-religioznaia identifikatsiia molodezhi Kazakhstana: sotsiologicheskii aspekt: Dissertation abstract for a degree in social sciences*, L. Gumilev Eurasian National University, Astana, 2010.

⁸ See: G. Telebaev, “Religioznaia identifikatsiia naseleniia i religioznaia situatsiia v Respublike Kazakhstan,” *Social Surveys*, 2003, pp. 101-106.

⁹ See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, op. cit.

¹⁰ See: Ibidem.

the republic acquired state independence, Kazakhstan's ethnocratic state bodies began showing clear preference of Islam as the traditional religion for the Kazakhs.¹¹

Moreover, in order to enhance ethnic consolidation of the Kazakh nation, the state frequently rendered direct financial assistance to building mosques. However, this support later ceased both due to certain changes in confessional policy and because of the rapid deterioration of the economic situation.

Despite the policy conducted by the state aimed at assisting the SAMK and developing Islam in Kazakhstan, not all of the republic's imams supported the country's Spiritual Administration. For example, rumors that the supreme mufti was corrupt and that he was ousting ethnic imams of non-Kazakh ethnic origin from the key posts became widespread among the clergy.

The provision on life leadership of the Islamic High Council envisaged in the SAMK Charter made it impossible for even the members of the Spiritual Administration Presidium to have an influence on the situation (this gives grounds for claiming that the SAMK had an authoritative style of administration).

Later, this opposition grew, thus threatening state policy in the religious sphere; while on the other hand, a certain invisible dividing line was designated between the Muslims who supported the SAMK's policy and those who did not like it.

So, since the very beginning of the SAMK's existence, there has been no unity or consolidation among the Muslims of the republic. For example, in 1997, more than 5,000 mosques functioned in Kazakhstan, no more than 15-20% of which were registered. These figures make it possible to conclude that most of Kazakhstan's Muslim communities are not controlled by the SAMK¹² (despite the fact that the Islamic High Council makes relatively strict demands on them to undergo registration in state structures).

As a result, in 2000, Ratbek Nisanbaev was removed from the post of supreme mufti of Kazakhstan and Absattar-kazi Derbisali was elected in his place. It should be noted that the state structures played a direct part in this "overturn." For example, in an interview with the *Zhas Alash* newspaper, Derbisali said the following: "I am not going to bend over backwards. I played a direct part in replacing first chief mufti Ratbek-kazi. Yes, the state structures had to interfere in removal of the chief mufti."¹³

So the state, by appointing a loyal imam as leader of the SAMK, once again interfered in the internal affairs of the Muslims. This resulted in the split between the authorities and the country's Muslims widening even more, since the latter want to nominate their own candidates as head of the SAMK. All the same, this is the third time that Absattar-kazi Derbisali has been re-elected to the post of supreme mufti of Kazakhstan (the last time was in 2010 for a term of 5 years).

It should be noted that the state has not only been interfering in Muslim affairs, but also in the activity of the ROC. For example, when in 1991, the Alma-Ata, Chimkent, and Ural independent eparchies were formed in Kazakhstan by a decision of the Holy Synod (instead of the one Alma-Ata-Kazakhstan eparchy that existed earlier), the country's officials stated that the existence of three eparchies in the territory of an independent state that were not united into one church hierarchal structure was a destabilizing beginning from the viewpoint of preserving and strengthening ethnic consent.¹⁴

As a result, an Orthodox inter-patriarchal commission (IPM) was formed at a sitting of the Holy Synod on 16 July, 1995 at the request of the archbishops of Kazakhstan, which consisted of the bish-

¹¹ See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, op. cit.

¹² See: Ibidem.

¹³ B.T. Sapar Ali, T.Zh. Eldesbai, "Osobennosti religioznoi situatsii v Kazakhstane: strukturnoe reformirovanie DUMK ne terpit," available at [<http://www.ia-centr.ru/publications/7463/>], 1 August, 2011.

¹⁴ See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, op. cit.

ops (archbishops) of the Urals, Chimkent, and Alma-Ata. Archbishop of Alma-Ata and Semipalatinsk Alexy was appointed as commission chairman. The IPM essentially became a specific centralized structure of the ROC in Kazakhstan.

Incidentally, according to the authors of the collective work "Religiozniy faktor v politike i v ideologii natsionalnykh dvizhenii v Rossii i Kazakhstane. 1989-1997," the Kazakhstan authorities regarded Archbishop Alexy, who maintained friendly relations with the members of Nursultan Nazarbaev's family, as the main representative of the ROC even before the formation of the IPM. In December 1994, he was granted Kazakhstan citizenship by a special decree of the President of Kazakhstan.¹⁵

In 1999, the Astana and Alma-Ata eparchy was created. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexy II was reluctant to support the desire of the believers and state structures to unite the Orthodox churches into a single Kazakhstan administration. Not until May 2003 did the ROC Synod adopt a decision to create a Metropolitan District in the republic, which was to be headed by His Most Holy Metropolitan of Voronezh and Lipetsk Methodius.¹⁶

The appointment of a non-Kazakh to a supreme post in Kazakhstan's Orthodox organization shows the ineffectual influence of the state structures on the policy carried out by the ROC in the country (they have much more influence on the policy of the SAMK).

On 5 March, 2010, the Holy Synod removed Metropolitan Methodius from the administration of the Astana and Alma-Ata eparchy and Archbishop Alexander of the Kostroma and Galich Eparchy was appointed in his place. What is more, according to a decision of the Holy Synod of 26 July, 2010, the Metropolitan District as part of the Astana and Alma-Ata eparchy was renamed the Metropolitan District of the Russian Orthodox Church in the Republic of Kazakhstan. The head of the Metropolitan District of the ROC in the RK is now called His Holy Metropolitan of Astana and Kazakhstan.

Nevertheless, the position of the ROC has weakened somewhat lately in Kazakhstan due to the outflow of the Russian-speaking population, difficulties with holding services, and the absence of a corresponding material base, as well as the greater attraction of other Christian churches. In recent years, many of those who formed the canonic foundation of Russian Orthodoxy have transferred to Protestant confessions and denominations.¹⁷

On the other hand, the position of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan has also been weakened by the shift in the state's attention and efforts toward Islam, which is related to the increase in the number of different Muslim extremist trends.

The Kazakhstan authorities are trying to find a way to streamline relations inside the country's Muslim community, but they are acting irrationally and often overdo it. For example, at the end of June, Chairman of the Agency for Religious Affairs Kairat Lama Sharif held a meeting with Absattarkazi Derbisali, at which the supreme mufti supported the "One Nation-One Religion" initiative.¹⁸ During the meeting, Mr. Sharif and Mr. Derbisali also discussed strengthening the role of the Muslim clergy in Kazakhstan and further raising the status of traditional Islam of the Sunni Hanafi madhhab.

So it is clear that the recent events in the country took the authorities by surprise and now they are doing their best to find a solution to the aggravated situation in the Muslim community, believing that new concessions will help to resolve the problem.

¹⁵ See: *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ See: Ya. Trofimov, "Geopoliticheskie aspekty dinamiki izmeneniia religioznoi situatsii v Respublike Kazakhstan," available at [<http://www.religare.ru/article6503>], 1 August, 2011.

¹⁷ See: A.I. Artemiev, R.A. Podoprighora, I.B. Tsepkova, *op. cit.*

¹⁸ See: "New Head of the Agency for Religious Affairs Meets with the Mufti of Kazakhstan," available at [<http://www.islamsng.com/kaz/news/2139>], 1 August, 2011.

But Kairat Lama Sharif's "One Nation-One Religion" initiative is undoubtedly a utopia and could have even more negative consequences, since it is a priori impossible to inculcate one religion in Kazakhstan's multi-confessional society. It should also be kept in mind that the main priority of Kazakhstan's state policy is to create a so-called Kazakhstan nation and, based on Kairat Lama Sharif's initiative, moderate Islam will be its religion.

However, it goes without saying that the state will continue to try and increase its influence on the religious processes since autonomous development of this sphere is becoming one of the most dangerous threats to the ruling regime and power elite. For example, when presenting the new head to the staff of the Agency for Religious Affairs, Kazakhstan Prime Minister Karim Masimov said that "regulation in this sphere will take the necessary course."

Islamization in Present-Day Kazakhstan

Experts note that the religious sphere in Kazakhstan today is experiencing another wave of Islamization.¹⁹ In so doing, people experiencing socioeconomic difficulties are being drawn to Islam, finding new strength in this religion. What is more, failure of state laws (due to the increase in corruption, rampant crime, and so on) is forcing society to turn to those laws that have stood the test of time, i.e. the laws of God.²⁰

It is obvious that Kazakhstan society is showing a waning interest in political parties and, consequently, has little trust in the ability of parties and the state to resolve society's urgent problems. The Nur Otan Party's strong affiliation with the state structures is prompting the population to go underground or even resort to violent methods rather than enter an open constructive dialog with the authorities.

It should also be kept in mind that, according to the observations of sociologists, 39% of the country's population live on an income equal to one monthly calculation index (MCI) per person and around 40% live on two MCI. That is, most of the country's population (80%) lives on the minimum wage, which naturally increases social tension.

So, the Kazakhstan authorities are already reaping the returns of the policy they have been pursuing for the past twenty years, i.e., the thinking part of the population, the intelligentsia, has been eradicated and priority has been given to small-minded people (both in the state agencies and in the defense and security structures). Consequently, the population is continuing its downhill decline; most of the population are uneducated and apolitical individuals who are only familiar with extreme forms of protest. For example, at the end of June 2011, a woman set fire to herself in the building of the Nur Otan Party to demonstrate her protest against her son being sentenced to 10 years in prison for keeping drugs. Self-torture or even suicide have become the accepted way to demonstrate protest against the injustice and tyranny of the authorities in Kazakhstan. And whereas such methods may be used by prison inmates to achieve better conditions, it is a sad state of affairs when ordinary citizens must resort to them as the only possible way of standing up for themselves.

This hopelessness stems from the riot in present-day society of such defects as corruption, pulling strings, and telephone justice. Instead of using civilized methods to resolve disputes, behind-the-scene talks involving acquaintances, friends, relatives, and money are the common practice. This is

¹⁹ See: B. Seidakhmetova, "Islam v Kazakhstane," Interview with Political Scientist Adil Kaukenov, available at [quorum.kz/6123/], 1 August, 2011.

²⁰ See: Ibidem.

raising the level of national discontent, thus creating a clear threat to the ruling elite and to relative stability of the sociopolitical situation in the country. The loss of near and dear ones is often leading to bereaved people taking out their wrath on those who are to blame for this.

On 17 May of this year, 25-year-old R. Makhatov blew himself up in the building of the Department of the National Security Committee of the Aktobe Province. The explosion left three people injured, while Makhatov himself was killed on the spot. According to official information, he blew himself up "in order to avoid taking responsibility for the crimes he committed in an organized crime group."²¹ However, according to relatives and acquaintances of the victim, he did not commit any crimes, but was involved in one of the religious trends.

The explosion in Aktobe does not fit into the protest acts against the current flaws in society, and this act was probably called on to show the authorities how flimsy the ethnic and inter-confessional consent is that the domestic government officials are so proud of.

It should be noted that the new theologians and their followers are also coming into increasing conflict with the official clergy in Russia as well. An example of this is the murder in Ingushetia of Rector of the Institute of Theology Maksud Sadikov.²² It can be presumed that if all the customs posts on the Russian-Kazakhstan border are closed, it will be much more difficult to control the penetration of religious ideas, books, and brochures into the country. What is more, the qualification and training of those who have been appointed to deal with them remains at a relatively low level. They are not only incapable of preventing a possible terrorist act, but also of weeding out potential future followers of extremist ideology. For example, there is also a resident of Kazakhstan, 35-year-old A. Zhekebaev, on the list of most dangerous terrorists of the Northern Caucasus consisting of 52 people.²³

Nevertheless, the authorities are not focusing their attention on resolving the population's urgent problems, but rather on strengthening the defense and security departments. Immediately following the Aktobe terrorist act in June 2011, the internal contingents of the Kazakhstan Ministry of Internal Affairs (with participation of the Burkit special subdivision) carried out exercises.²⁴

In recent years, representatives of the titular nation of Kazakhstan have been showing a greater interest in Islam. Whereas this religion used to mainly be widespread in the rural areas (the cradle for preserving Kazakh traditions and customs, including religious), now Islamization is reaching the large cities.

The fact that, according to the data of 1 January, 1989, only 46 of the 671 religious communities in Kazakhstan were Muslim (two of which were not registered) shows the religious indifference of Kazakh society right after the country gained state independence. Most of the mosque imams belonged to non-Kazakh ethnicities (Uzbeks, Tatars, Uighurs, Balkars, Chechens, and Dungans); and there were also 1,232 unregistered mullahs.²⁵

Meanwhile, by 2003, there were 1,652 Islamic associations functioning in Kazakhstan, most of which (1,642) were Sunni.²⁶

According to the data of the SAMK, in 2000, more than 5,000 mosques functioned in Kazakhstan. But in 2009, only about 2,500 mosques were organizationally subordinated to the Spiritual Adminis-

²¹ A. Rysaliev, "The Influence of Islamic Religious Ideas in West Kazakhstan" (interview with Azamat Maitanov), available at [www.ipwr.com], 1 August, 2011.

²² See: "Teologu ne prostili kritiku vakkabito," available at [www.gazeta.ru/social/2011/06/08/3656953.shtml], 1 August, 2011.

²³ See: "Kazakhstanets okazalsia v spiske podgotovlennykh dlia teraktov v Rossii smertnikov," available at [tengrinews.kz/kazakhstan_news/190102/], 1 August, 2011.

²⁴ See: "Vnutrennie voyska gotovy k likvidatsii vnutrennikh konfliktov," available at [www.tv7.kz], 1 August, 2011.

²⁵ See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, op. cit.

²⁶ See: A. Dzhaliyov, "Religioznaia situatsiia v Kazakhstane: terpimost naseleniia i pogolovnaia bezgramotnost SMI," *Panorama*, 16 May, 2003.

tration. The large number of mosques not subordinate to the SAMK shows that some Muslims do not agree with the strategy and tactics of its leadership.²⁷

The most important trend is that the baton of religious development in Kazakhstan has been passed from the auls to the large cities. The Kazakh aul, in the form it used to exist, is steadily becoming a thing of the past. An essentially new urban culture is gradually appearing before our eyes in which religion will evidently occupy a more significant place than before. According to the data of sociological surveys, the most intensive increase in Islamic religiosity today is seen precisely among the Kazakhs.²⁸

The fact that large cities, as places where people are actively drawn to religion, are promoting an increase in the number of convicted believers, means that we are talking about a deep-rooted trend that has long-term development prospects. It is precisely the big city that is determining the main development trends in present-day society.²⁹

As T. Kozyrev notes, "at this juncture, it is extremely desirable that the form of Sunnism traditional for Central Asia based on the traditions of the Hanafi madhhab plays the role of the 'pure Islam' that will replace the traditional Kazakh version, rather than radical Wahhabism and the Hanbali madhhab accompanying it (the most radical of the four that exist)."³⁰

This expert is also correct in saying that the most dangerous development scenario for the state in the religious sphere is the transformation of Islam into a grass-roots religion. In this case, the social splits will coincide with the differences in ideology and world outlook. Destructive forces, primarily, religious extremists, might take advantage of this situation. In the context of the rather serious social stratification existing in Kazakhstan society, it would be unforgivably negligent to totally exclude this alternative. A particularly alarming situation is developing in the West Kazakhstan.³¹

For example, between 1 and 9 July, 2011, nine people were killed in the village of Shubarshi (the Aktobe Province) who were suspected of murdering three policemen. As the police reported, this organized crime group, under the cover of religious ideas, was engaged in stealing oil from the pipeline located close to the villages of Shubarshi and Kenkiyak, as well as in committing other mercenary violent crimes.³²

This is far from the first clash between Kazakhstan defense and security officials and Islamists. In the past 10-15 years, the authorities have had to deal with Chechens and Daghestanis, who have been trying to cultivate extreme forms of Islam, as well as with Salafis from among Uzbeks and Uighurs, who are frequently members of the Islamic Movement of Eastern Turkestan, Hizb ut-Tahrir, and other militarized sects. But it was ethnic Kazakhs who participated in the above-mentioned incident that occurred in Shubarshi.³³

There was another clash between a group of religious extremists and a special task force of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in the spring of 2011 in Almaty, during which both sides suffered losses; the leader of the combatants turned out to be a man of Kazakh nationality. What happened is another confirmation of the fact that Kazakhs (who are distinguished by their tolerant attitude toward different religions) are becoming increasingly drawn into all kinds of religious trends.

Immediately after the incident in Shubarshi, society lavished criticism on the state structures, since, in a short space of time, two events that shocked the republic had occurred in the same province

²⁷ See: B.T. Ali Sapar, T. Zh. Eldesbai, op. cit.

²⁸ See: T. Kozyrev, "Kazakhstan mezhdru Vostokom i Zapadom," *Mysl*, 2011, No.4.

²⁹ See: Ibidem.

³⁰ Ibidem.

³¹ See: Ibidem.

³² See: "Zavershilas spetsoperatsiia po obezvrezhivaniuu podozrevaemykh v ubiystve politseyskikh v Aktiubinskoy oblasti," available at [www.kt.kz], 1 August, 2011.

³³ See: M. Aleksandrov, V. Iadukha, "I ty, Kazakhstan...", available at [www.rosbalt.ru], 1 August, 2011.

(Aktobe). Due to the tragic events in the village of Shubarshi, the Union of Muslims of Kazakhstan (UMK) demanded the immediate resignation of akim of the Aktobe Province Eleusin Sagindikov. For example, Head of the UMK Murat Telibekov said that the tragedy in Shubarshi came about because of the unfavorable economic situation in the region. He also said: "This was a kind of protest. Wahhabism is sublimation of economic demands, intolerance of the tyranny of the local authorities, absence of ideology, and social injustice... Unfortunately, the SAMK has been unable to offer another ideology and we are beginning to lose voters who are falling under the influence of an alien ideology... People are looking for their own ideology to express their protest and religious extremism is ideally suited to these protest moods."³⁴

According to Nurlan Erimbetov, on the other hand, most young people who received an education in Kazakhstan are not needed in their own country. He also noted: "We will be making a very big mistake if we regard these clashes and collisions as a religious problem. This has nothing to do with it. People are joining the Wahhabi party like they would any other party, and they will be willing to leave it if their problems are solved."³⁵

So, young people, having lost faith in the ability of political parties to improve their economic position, are beginning to place their hopes on the religious community, presuming that it will be able to get the state to resolve the current problems. In so doing, an entire social stratum is forming in Kazakh society that is convinced that a dialog can only be held with the authorities through religion.

As D. Satpaev notes, no one is offering any mechanisms for resolving the economic problems in the regions by lowering the level of social tension. "Most people, particularly young people, really do think that they have no future under the existing political and economic system. Consequently, they have nothing else to lose. And this means they are willing to take what the government has no intention of giving them voluntarily," he summed up.³⁶

So, according to the Center of Analysis and Forecasting C.A.P. Public Fund, almost 17% of young people in Kazakhstan are inclined to engage in active protest if their basic rights are violated.³⁷ Whereby, according to this Fund's sociological surveys, more than half of the young people of Kazakhstan who have a personal income of less than 30,000 tenge a month are more concerned about resolving their housing and employment problems. Most of them (51.5%) do not participate in public life. However, only 3.4% of the polled representatives of young people consider themselves non-believers, which shows the constant rise in the influence of religion on social conscience.

The authorities should be given their due: Ak-Orda (the residency of Kazakhstan President.—*Ed.*) reacted very promptly to the events in Aktobe. For example, in July, akim of the Aktobe Province Eleusin Sagindikov voluntarily left his post; his place was taken by akim of the City of Aktobe Arkhimed Mukhambetov. When presenting the new head to the staff of the regional akimate, Head of the Presidential Administration of Kazakhstan Aslan Musin said that the authorities were particularly concerned about the religious situation in the Aktobe Province.³⁸

It must be admitted that these fears are unfounded; there are 111 religious associations functioning legally in the Aktobe Province, 83 of which are Islamic, 7 are Orthodox, 20 are Protestant, and one is Hebrew.³⁹ It is obvious that Islamic organizations are the best developed in the province. Experts also note that there are many followers of the radical religious movement of jihadism, which sees only armed struggle—jihad—as the main and predominant doctrine, in the Aktobe Province,

³⁴ "Religioznyy ekstremizm—porozhdenie Akordy," available at [<http://www.guljan.org/ru/news/komments/2011/July/268>], 1 August, 2011.

³⁵ "Religioznaia obstanovka v Aktiubinskoi oblasti osobo bespokoit—A. Musin," *BNews.kz*, 1 August, 2011.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ See: I. Mednikova, "Molodye kazakhstantsy gotovy k mitingam," *Respublika*, 25 April, 2011.

³⁸ See: "Religioznaia obstanovka v Aktiubinskoi oblasti osobo bespokoit—A. Musin."

³⁹ See: A. Karataev, "V poiskakh very," *Aktiubinskiy vestnik*, 10 February, 2011.

as well as throughout West Kazakhstan as a whole.⁴⁰ This religious trend became widespread in West Kazakhstan in particular due to its geographic proximity to the Northern Caucasus, which is the main center for the spread of jihadism. Said Buriatskiy was one of the main ideologists of this religious movement in the post-Soviet expanse. In March 2010, he was killed by the Russian special services. Said Buriatskiy frequently came to Kazakhstan, and in particular to Aktobe, to give his lectures.⁴¹

After becoming inculcated with the ideas of jihadism, young people of Kazakhstan went to the Northern Caucasus, where the armed underground of Caucasian Muslims is establishing a theocratic state called “the Islamic Emirate of the Caucasus.” On the other hand, jihadism permits expressing disagreement with the state’s policy, using in so doing forceful methods of struggle. For example, there is a fetwa of Sheikh Abu Jandala al-Azadi (the ideologue of jihadism in Saudi Arabia) which lets followers off the leash and justifies the murder of policemen and any other law-enforcement official of secular power.⁴²

As for the SAMK, its reaction to the Aktobe events was rather limp; it was clearly related to the position of the authorities, but not of the Administration itself (which, according to Islam, should be tolerant of everything). For example, Press Secretary of the SAMK Ongar-kazi Omirbek said that the activity of the Salafis in Kazakhstan, to whom, according to some data, the criminal group destroyed in the Aktobe Province belonged, should be prohibited.⁴³

In so doing, he noted that the Salafi trend has become particularly widespread in the western oil-bearing areas of the country (the Atyrau, Mangystau, and Aktobe provinces) due to the high activity of missionaries from Arab countries. Here we should note the artificial division of Muslims putting up armed resistance to the law-enforcement structures into Salafis and Wahhabis. All of them consider themselves followers of the so-called pure faith, that is, traditional and the only Islam without any admixtures of local specifics.

Immediately following the events in the village of Shubarshi, the SAMK appointed a new imam to this settlement—a graduate of the Shymkent madrasah.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, it would be wrong to say that Muslim trends not traditional for Kazakh society are only developing in the west of the country. Despite the fact that the Salafi trend has become widespread, the authorities are continuing to take extremely tough measures against believers, including those in prisons. It has become known that many people convicted under religious articles are later given additional prison terms. Convict A. Muzdybaev, a member of a religious community in the Mangystau Province, mentioned this practice. According to him, in 2007, religious convicts from all the colonies in Kazakhstan were sent to correctional colony No. 20 in the village of Zhitikar (the Kostanay Province). There they were physically tortured and humiliated, as well as forbidden from praying. All of the believers were put in a general colony for life-term prisoners.⁴⁵

However, religious convicts do not want to reconcile themselves to this state of affairs. In July 2011, 16 inmates of a colony in Balkhash, which was stormed by special task force officers, blew themselves up. Among the rebelling prisoners were those convicted of grave crimes, including extremism.⁴⁶

⁴⁰ See: A. Rysaliev, *op. cit.*

⁴¹ See: *Ibidem.*

⁴² See: *Ibidem.*

⁴³ See: “Dukhovnoe upravlenie musulman Kazakhstana nastai vaet na zaprete deiatelnosti salafitov v strane,” available at [www.nomad.su/?a=3-201107140015], 1 August, 2011.

⁴⁴ See: “V aktiubinskom Shubarshi naznacheni novyy imam,” available at [www.kt.kz], 1 August, 2011.

⁴⁵ See: A. Rysaliev, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ See: “Samopodryv sovershili vzbuntovavshiesia zakliuchennyye kolonii v Balkhashe,” available at [www.newskaz.ru/incidents/20110711/1681542.html], 1 August, 2011.

Meanwhile, religious extremists continue to be brought to criminal account in Kazakhstan. The state is trying to incarcerate all “dangerous elements” in prison, thus lowering the risks in the religious sphere: during the first six months of 2011, 14 criminal cases on extreme crimes were instigated in the republic. The activity of 21 unregistered religious associations was also exposed and halted and 85 people were brought to administrative account.⁴⁷ In Astana, more than 60 people were registered under the steps taken to expose people involved in religious extremism.

However, this policy is not optimal. In contrast to the 1990s, the demanding approach toward religion among young people, rather than among late-Soviet adults, is a special feature of the development of Islam in Kazakhstan today.⁴⁸ The older generation finds it hard to accept that their children are being drawn into religious practices. Parents used to seeing their children in secular dress do not want them to change either their world outlook or their outer appearance by wearing hijab, short pants, or growing beards, for example.⁴⁹

The current members of the ruling regime who at one time belonged to the Communist Party have difficulty in understanding the religiosity of the younger generation, since when they were young they had entirely different priorities. This is precisely the reason for the mutual lack of understanding between the authorities and the SAMK, on the one hand, and the religious youth, on the other.

The second feature distinguishing the development of Islam in Kazakhstan lies in the fact that this process is occurring independently of the state, which is first manifesting incompetence and then hostility. After realizing that it is losing its influence on the religious youth, it begins hurling accusations of extremism at these young people.⁵⁰

The position that espouses “true” and “imposed” religion looks impotent; in fact the conflict is not between peace and radicalism, but between knowledge and ignorance. When people begin reading the Koran independently, they understand that there is no extremist Islam, there is only one, true, Islam.

However, it should be noted that the events that occurred (the suicide bomber in Aktobe, the attack of a group of extremists on policemen, the threats of the Taliban, and the rebellion in the colony in Balkhash with participation of a religious extremist) have forced the Kazakhstan authorities to change their attitude somewhat toward this sensitive sphere of public relations. The Agency for Religious Affairs was established as early as the end of May. It was headed by Kairat Lama Sharif, who earlier occupied the post of Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to a few countries of the Middle East and is far from inter-elite controversy. Various forums, conferences, and online press conferences with the participation of the country’s top leaders began to be held, that is, the authorities entered into a dialog with the population.

For example, during an online conference on the information website *Zakon.kz*, Karim Masimov said that the authorities should not prohibit wearing hijab,⁵¹ while during the presidential election race, Nursultan Nazarbaev, speaking in the town of Turkestan, expressed his negative attitude toward this Muslim custom.

Judging from what Karim Masimov said, the authorities, having decided not to come into conflict with representatives of religious communities, have withdrawn from their policy of strict prohibition of certain religious rituals and traditions and believe that such issues can be settled where they

⁴⁷ See: “V RK za polgoda vzbuzhdeno 14 ugolovnykh del po priznakam prestuplenii ekstremistskogo kharaktera,” available at [www.kt.kz], 1 August, 2011.

⁴⁸ See: B. Gabdullin, “U nas idealnaia revoliutsionnaia situatsiia” (interview with Adil Toyganbaev), *Central Asia Monitor*, 8 April, 2011.

⁴⁹ See: A. Karataev, op. cit.

⁵⁰ See: B. Gabdullin, op. cit.

⁵¹ See: M. Zhakeev, “Glava Pravitelstva RK vyskazal svoiu pozitsiiu po povodu nosheniia khidzhaba v Kazakhstane,” available at [inform.kz], 1 August, 2011.

arise. For example, the state structures transferred the problem of wearing hijab in schools to the directors of these schools. In so doing, the state shifted the responsibility for resolving the problem of hijab to society (teachers, parents, and pupils). But the authorities' policy is extremely contradictory even in this issue, since the schools in the country are state-run (which means that the regulations in them should be set by the state). In this case, the authorities are shunning responsibility because they fear a split in society.⁵²

The prime minister designated the state's position as follows: "We must be relatively strict about extreme forms that have nothing in common with real confession."

Nevertheless, the state, concerned about the situation in the religious sphere, has begun pursuing a more cautious policy. On 23 June, a sitting of the Expert Committee under the Kazakhstan Security Council was held. The agenda included examining the development of the ethno-religious situation in Kazakhstan. The importance of harmonious cooperation between the state and the civil sector when drawing up a contemporary platform of state-confessional and ethnic relations in Kazakhstan was designated.⁵³

On 10 June, another sitting of the Interdepartmental Commission of the Security Council was held on national security strategy under the chairmanship of Kazakhstan Presidential Assistant, Security Council Secretary Marat Tazhin. During the commission meeting, its participants noted the importance of observing constitutional regulations on Kazakhstan's status as a secular state, as well as preventing activity that contradicts legislation and could be detrimental to the country's security.⁵⁴

On 13 June, 2011, Omirtai Bitimov was appointed as new ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Afghanistan by a decree of the head of state. It should be noted that throughout May 2011, sending Kazakhstan servicemen to Afghanistan was a hot topic in the media and society. The discussions became even more heated after the Taliban threatened to carry out terrorist acts in Kazakhstan if its government decided to go ahead with its plans. As a result, at the beginning of June, members of the Senate of the Kazakhstan Parliament refused to support the intention of their colleagues, Majilis deputies, to send Kazakh military specialists to the combat zone in Afghanistan.

But the most serious step taken by the Kazakhstan authorities after the first alarm bells were sounded in Aktobe was the Development Conception of Moderate Islam in Kazakhstan drawn up by the newly hatched Agency for Religious Affairs. As Kairat Lama Sharif said, "Islam did not appear in Kazakhstan twenty years ago, it became widespread as early as the Middle Ages, and during this time many traditions have formed that we sometimes consider national. They are becoming interwoven with our religious traditions, therefore everything that concerns rituals and wearing special clothing must be developed anew, and we have our own view of this."⁵⁵

So, it is still obvious that the authorities are striving to impose their own version of Islam on the Muslims, and this is aggravating the existing contradictions between them even more.

All the same, the authorities' reaction to the events that occurred in the west of Kazakhstan was slightly delayed, while the steps taken were not of a preventive nature but took place *ex post facto*. In short, due to the shortage of resources and lack of creative ideas, the authorities prefer to take extremely tough measures, not understanding that faith is above the fear of death.

Still unsure of how to act in conflict situations (for example, during national uprisings or strikes), the Kazakhstan authorities are using the tough methods of struggle which were used, for example,

⁵² See: S. Tasbulatova, "Khidzhab: nosit nelzia zapretit," *Ak Zhaiyk*, 7 October, 2010.

⁵³ See: "V Astane sostoialos zasedanie Ekspertnogo soveta pri Sovete Bezopasnosti RK," available at [www.kazpravda.kz/c/1308831043], 1 August, 2011.

⁵⁴ See: "V Akorde sostoialos zasedanie MVK Sovbeza po voprosam strategii natsionalnoi bezopasnosti," available at [inform.kz], 1 August, 2011.

⁵⁵ "Kontseptsia razvitiia umerennogo islama budet razrabotana v Kazakhstane," available at [www.newskaz.ru/society/20110617/1601787.html], 1 August, 2011.

when dispersing the oil workers' strikes in Mangystau and Kokshetau. In the second case, when the head of the fraudulent Club of Millionaires was arrested, police employees beat up the ordinary shareholders.

The authorities' coercive actions are widening the gap between ordinary citizens, on the one hand, and the police and government elite, on the other.

The religious processes going on in Kazakhstan are largely associated with the development of Islamic financing in the country. The world financial crisis of 2007-2009 brought the economy of the CAR countries up against potential risks and threats associated with the Anglo-American model of development, and the republic's leadership began searching for other alternatives, one of which was Islamic financing.

In 2009, the Islamic Bank of Al Hilal began functioning in Kazakhstan and the first Investment Fund operating on the principles of Islamic financing opened,⁵⁶ as well as other financial organizations providing funds for opening private businesses, buying housing, and so on.

The state is unable to prevent this process, although penetration of such financial instruments into the country will inevitably lead to an increase in the spread of Islam. For example, Nursultan Nazarbaev set the task of creating a regional center of Islamic banking in Almaty by 2020.⁵⁷ What is more, according to the forecasts, by that year, one tenth of the Kazakhstan economy will be financed by Islamic money.⁵⁸

Experts also say that by 2014 there could be complete adaptation to the principles of Islamic financing in Kazakhstan.⁵⁹ The advanced Muslim countries, where the principles of Islamic financing are being successfully applied (the UAE, Malaysia, etc.), will help to accelerate this process. For example, the government of Abu Dhabi has already confirmed its intention to invest \$1 billion in Kazakhstan.

Non-Traditional Religious Movements and Sects in Kazakhstan

Thanks to Kazakhstan's liberal legislation, during its 20 years of independence the number of religious organizations in the country has grown and today their number fluctuates between 3,800 and 4,300 (in 1990, there were 671). It should be noted that a sixth of these associations preach without state permits or the status of a legal entity.⁶⁰

It is not possible to determine the number of followers of non-traditional religious trends since there are no criteria for evaluating the non-traditional nature of a particular religion. For example, the Salafis consider themselves true Muslim believers.

Nevertheless, according to sociologists' estimates, 3-5% of the Kazakhstan population follows non-traditional confessions, although this index does not fully reflect current reality. For exam-

⁵⁶ See: S. Sabekov, "V Kazakhstane otkrylsia pervyy Investitsionnyy fond, rabotaiushchiy po printsipam islamskogo finansirovaniia," *Inform.kz*, 1 August, 2011.

⁵⁷ See: "Nazarbaev postavil zadachu sozdaniia regionalnogo tsentra islamskogo bankinga v Almaty k 2020 godu," *Nomad.su*, 1 August, 2011.

⁵⁸ See: "Soglasno prognozam, k 2020 godu odna desiatia chast ekonomiki Kazakhstana budet finansirovatsia za schet islamskikh deneg," *Zakon.kz*, 1 August, 2011.

⁵⁹ See: A. Orazymbetov, "Perspektivnoe napravlenie," available at [www.kursiv.kz/1195211350-perspektivnoe-napravlenie.html], 1 August, 2011.

⁶⁰ See: A. Ivanilova, "Poklonenie volkhvam," *Novoe pokolenie*, 3 June, 2011.

ple, the SAMK regards some Islamic religious communities as pseudo-Muslim, since their activity contradicts the Hanifi madhhab. The SAMK includes Ahmadiyya, Bahai, the teachings of Ismatulla, Mahdiyya, Salafism (Wahhabism), Taqfir, the Sufi trend of Kurban-ali, and Shi'a among such communities.⁶¹

An increase in religious radicalism among the believing population in the republic was first seen in the 1990s. This process was caused by the natural spiritual-moral needs of society, on the one hand, and the activation of different communities (which often were at conflict among themselves) and absence of the necessary level of religious education among the rising generation, on the other. Another circumstance which to a certain extent promoted radicalism of the conscience of the religious part of the country's society was the absence of the necessary level of theological knowledge among the population (particularly among the rising generation) due to the lack of a corresponding educational program. Rejection of courses in religion and abolishment of the Committee for Religious Affairs at the end of the 1990s blatantly showed the mistakes and shortcomings of state policy in regulating the religious sphere of social life.⁶²

The cracks that appeared in the traditional religious structure of society also prompted the people of Kazakhstan to become involved in the activity of various non-traditional sects. The situation was also aggravated by the fact that, after declaring their support of an interconfessional dialog as an element of ideological stabilization of society, the state agencies of Kazakhstan initially refrained from discriminating against certain confessions and religious trends.

Government policy toward religious minorities did not actually start to tighten up until 1994 when provisions were introduced into the new Civil Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan on mandatory coordination with state structures of candidates for leaders of religious associations appointed to Kazakhstan by foreign religious centers and mandatory accreditation in the local power structures of missionaries who are not citizens of Kazakhstan and spiritual educational religious associations and establishments (Art 109). Later the provision on coordination with state structures of issues regarding the activity of foreign religious associations and the appointment of leaders of religious associations by foreign religious centers was enforced in the Constitution of Kazakhstan of 1995 (Art 5.5).⁶³

But even after 1994, the state did not do anything in particular to prevent the spread of non-traditional religious trends. As a result, the sects became widely developed, whereby some of them commercialized their activity and engaged in blatant extortions from their congregations.

Totalitarian sects with an extensive network and many cells present the greatest danger of all the non-traditional confessions. The Jehovah's Witnesses and Satanists, as well as Sun Bok Im, Agape, New Life, and others, can be related to them. Their danger lies in the fact that they do not accept other ways of thinking, practice an authoritarian style of administration within the framework of a community, and are mainly oriented toward drawing the indigenous and Muslim population on the whole into their ranks. In terms of their potential for extremism, they present the greatest danger for the development of interconfessional relations in the republic.⁶⁴

Statistics claim that 80% of the members of various religious extremist groups are young people, 10% of whom are adolescents under the age of 18.⁶⁵

⁶¹ See: Zh. Amerbekova, "Borba za umy," *Megapolis*, 9 January, 2006.

⁶² See: M. Asanbaev, "Sovremennaia religioznaia situatsiia v Kazakhstane: factory riska i potentsial religioznoi konfliktnosti." Part 2, available at [http://www.aspect-m.kz/rus/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=19:-2&catid=4:2010-09-21-05-01-01&Itemid=6], 1 August, 2011.

⁶³ See: A. Verkhovskiy, S. Jukeeva, V. Ponomarev, op. cit.

⁶⁴ See: M. Asanbaev, op. cit.

⁶⁵ See: D. Arystanalieva, "Vyberi vernyy put," available at [www.westkaz.kz], 1 August, 2011.

Young people are easily drawn into the ranks of non-traditional and, at times, extremist religious trends because they have still not formed a clear world outlook and do not have theological knowledge. So the state's prime task must be to draw up a youth policy that concentrates on organizing leisure time, providing high-quality education, finding jobs, etc.

The high missionary activity of Western preachers (particularly from the U.S.) has led to the appearance of new Protestant churches in the republic. Correspondingly, the position of Protestant religious associations and communities has significantly expanded and strengthened. The personnel policy of these organizations is also promoting this trend; they are headed not by foreign pastors who come to Kazakhstan or supervise activity from abroad, but by ethnic Kazakhs.⁶⁶ So we are talking about religious expansion in Kazakhstan; the same processes occurred during colonization of the Asian and African countries.

The present situation is prompting the Kazakhstan authorities to examine and adopt certain legislative prohibitions on the activity of sects and banned pseudo-religious communities in the country, as well as to strengthen control over the activity of their foreign branches and centers.

However, Kazakhstan's legislation in the religious sphere is full of inconsistencies and loopholes which allow religious organizations banned in other countries to live comfortably in the republic.

For example, Kazakhstan legislation still contains no such concepts as "sect" or "destructive organization;" and this is despite the fact that the number of their victims is rising with each passing day.⁶⁷

The data of the Association of Assistance Centers for the Victims of Destructive Religious Trends in Kazakhstan also testify to the increasing number of victims of sect activity every year. For example, whereas in 2008, 840 people turned to the centers for help, in 2010, this number had risen to 930; while most of the victims are from the Almaty and Karaganda provinces.⁶⁸ But according to the results of the first half of 2011, the Association has received only 11 such appeals.

The abrupt drop in appeals to assistance centers is possibly associated with their low efficiency; people prefer to fight against the activity of sects on their own, which creates greater risks both for the state and for individuals and society as a whole.

Seeing that the situation in the country is becoming aggravated, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are suggesting that the Law on Freedom of Confession and Religious Associations be tightened. Such attempts were made in 2000 and 2009, but at that time the Constitutional Council rejected the amendments. Experts are presenting numerous arguments in favor of the lack of sophistication of this law. In particular, at present, it is enough for a religious association to have 10 members and present its charter in order to be registered.⁶⁹

Another factor drawing young people into sects and destructive organizations is the absence of a legislative base for regulating parental responsibility for the choice of religion of their children. For example, NGOs suggest legislatively restricting the involvement of children in the activity of religious organizations, but here again specialists are coming up against the unsophisticated nature of legislation, particularly that relating to the family.

According to the Kazakhstan Constitution, parents may predetermine the religious affiliation of their children. According to the data of NGOs, in Kazakhstan children can be made to participate in religious activity from the age of three, whereby upon the will of one of the parents (regardless of

⁶⁶ See: G. Tortbaev, "Religioznaia ekspansiiia Kazakhstana," available at [<http://www.zonakz.net/blogs/user/patriot/12652.html>], 1 August, 2011.

⁶⁷ See: A. Loginov, "Itogi stolichnoi nedeli: Strana dolzhna znat svoikh 'geroev,' ili Partizany v parlamente," available at [www.contur.kz/node/1666], 1 August, 2011.

⁶⁸ See: A. Ivanilova, *op. cit.*

⁶⁹ See: *Ibidem.*

whether the parents are married or separated). There is not one law in the country that contains provisions restricting children's participation in religious activity. In this respect, theologians suggest that parents should be responsible for their children's religious upbringing until they reach maturity, but after the age of 18 every person should be free to follow the religion of their choice.⁷⁰

It should also be noted that there is a very selective approach in Kazakhstan with respect to religious trends that are considered extremist. Most of the religious organizations banned in the republic are Muslim. In so doing, strange as it may seem, religious missionaries (in the form of various Christian and Eastern preachers who represent religious institutions that are non-traditional for the local population), as well as sectarian organizations and movements, are engaging entirely legally in their activity in Kazakhstan.

Whereas radicals from Hizb ut-Tahrir, Eastern Turkestan, Al-Qa'eda, the Taliban, Lashkar-i-Tayba, the Muslim Brotherhood, and Asbat-al-Ansar went underground, Scientologists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons, and various cults of Oriental and Satanist orientation are actively filling their ranks with new adepts from among the country's indigenous population. And this is given that the non-traditionalism and sectarianism in their views and outlook is not only detrimental to society, but also discredits the main idea and essence of religion. What is more, as practice shows, they try to alienate people from their families, society, and the cultural and social life of their own ethnicity.

Many of the missionaries deny and ignore the historical traditions, customs, and morals of different ethnicities and undermine the physical and mental health of the people of Kazakhstan. In so doing, they are not only eroding the roots and fundamentals of the traditional religions and confessions, they are also shaking the foundations of society and the state.⁷¹

Conclusion

Until the 2000s, it was the Uzbeks, Chechens, and Uighurs confessing Islam, as well as Orthodox Old Believers, and not Kazakhs and Russians (the representatives of the two main ethnic groups of the country) who were considered the most religious population of Kazakhstan.

Islamic roots and traditions were the strongest in the southern regions of Kazakhstan bordering on Uzbekistan, on the settled population of which the Muslim religion traditionally has a high influence. Due to its geographical proximity to the Northern Caucasus, which is known for spreading non-traditional Islamic confessions throughout Russia, Salafism became widespread in the west of Kazakhstan. North, East, and Central Kazakhstan are more moderate in the religious sense.

Despite the fact that the reference guides about Kazakhstan say that 70% of the country's population is Muslim, no more than 10% are practicing believers who perform the 5 pillars of Islam. However, after 2000, their numbers abruptly rose. The main reasons for the increase in religiosity of the population in Kazakhstan has been the deterioration in the economic situation and the drop in education level; this is true of all countries of the world. Other reasons are the efforts of missionaries and the governments of various states to attract Kazakhstan young people to study in religious institutions.

The Kazakhstan authorities tried to control this process by supporting the Koranite movement headed by Aslan Musin and promulgating the SAMK. During the economic crisis, sermons were preached on the need for reconciliation, since Islam prohibits rising up against a righteous

⁷⁰ See: I. Zenin, "Svoboda very, krome detey do 16!," *Vzgliad*, 20 April, 2011.

⁷¹ See: M. Asanbaev, op. cit.

ruler (this is precisely why the image of righteous Nursultan Nazarbaev is intensely cultivated among the Muslim ummah of Kazakhstan). At the same time, attacks were made on the Muslim population of the country, expressed, for example, in carrying out audits of the imam advanced training institution and the ban on wearing hijab in learning establishments. The suicide bomber who blew himself up in Aktobe was presented to society as an inveterate criminal and representative of the criminal world.

After the events in the Middle East, which showed that external sponsoring and the impoverished state of the population could lead to an uprising even among Muslims, the policy of the Kazakhstan authorities toward the country's believers also changed.

The first signals indicating the unfavorable situation in the country's religious sphere most clearly sounded in the post-crisis period and particularly in 2010-2011, which was when a shootout occurred in a micro region of Almaty between religious extremists and a police special task force, the suicide bomber blew himself up in Aktobe, and religious extremists carried out their attack in Shubarshi.

The general increase in religiosity of the population and number of associations of the most diverse confessional orientations is creating certain problems for the state structures, which, poorly equipped, are trying to resolve them using tested administrative instruments.⁷²

One of the reasons for the state's departure from democratic principles and its tighter control over the activity of religious associations is the fact that not only the status of religion but also its influence on present-day Kazakhstan society have still not been determined. Despite acknowledging the social and personal significance of religion and religious organizations, they are often still regarded as something alien and temporary.⁷³

The ill-considered actions of the authorities relating to promulgating the SAMK have led to an incorrect perception of Islam by the country's population which, identifying it with various pseudo-religious trends, sees it as a threat (although traditional Islam does not call for violence). People are afraid of those who wear hijab and a long beard and, until such stereotypical thinking is eradicated, society will continue to be mistrusting and tense.

Islam is widespread in such large cities as Almaty, Astana, and Aktobe, whereby the latter is a very interesting phenomenon. Religious Shi'ite trends (mainly extremist) from the Northern Caucasus which go against the Sunni religion traditional for Kazakhstan have become widespread in Aktobe.

It should be noted that religion has never played a decisive role for the tolerant Kazakhs. This is precisely why experts evaluate the widespread religiosity in present-day Kazakhstan as mistrust in the ruling party and the state as a whole. This is prompting people to join religious organizations as though they were political parties. It stands to reason that they cannot tame the defects of present-day society, but still they are trying to combat them.

The authorities, in turn, alarmed by the events in the Middle East and the increase in the population's religiosity (both the first and the second create threats and risks for the ruling elite and national security as a whole), are trying to take control over the development of Islam in the country.

For example, a development conception of moderate Islam is being developed, initiatives are being declared on the basis of the "One Nation-One Religion" principle, and so on. But the state, by interfering in the strictly personal relations between man and God, is trying to impose its own vision on society of how it should observe religious rituals, thus alienating the Muslim part of the population even more. The policy the state has chosen in the religious sphere has a powerful negative charge; such maneuvers by the authorities could arouse severe opposition from the Muslims of the republic, right down to their use of forceful methods of struggle.

⁷² See: A.I. Artemiev, R.A. Podoprigora, I.B. Tsepkova, op. cit.

⁷³ See: Ibidem.

It is entirely obvious that the growing religiosity among the people of Kazakhstan is caused both by the urgent socioeconomic problems associated with finding a job, obtaining a high-quality education, the absence of career growth, and so on, and by moral-ethnic issues (the spread of telephone justice, pulling strings, nepotism, and so on).

The above-mentioned problems are most widespread among young people who are falling increasingly under the influence of religious trends. This is due to the lack of trust in political parties and state structures.

This gives rise to the following task: democracy must be further developed and the struggle strengthened among real political parties rather than among the political projects created by Ak Orda.

The conscious choice of religion is largely related to young people's level of knowledge. So the state must raise the quality of teaching in higher educational institutions and develop the system of preschool institutions and secondary special establishments, providing them with highly qualified professors and psychologists.

The need has most likely arisen for adopting a new edition of the Law on Religion which will clearly define the criteria for registering religious organizations. In this respect, current religious organizations must be reregistered in order to determine whether they correspond to the new law.

The personnel policy of the Ministry of Justice and the Agency for Religious Affairs should also be reexamined; and specialists must be selected who have an education in religious studies and practical experience working in NGOs and research organizations.