

THE ROLE OF INTER-CONFESSIONAL DIALOGUE AND AGREEMENT IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

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ABSTRACT

The modern world is undergoing profound fundamental changes in virtually all spheres of life: the socio-political, economic, financial and cultural. Contrary to the stereotype that with the growth of science and technology, religion and religious consciousness of themselves disappear, now the reverse process - the process of religious revival. Religion in the modern world actively invades virtually all spheres of society. And it must be admitted that the influence of religion on various aspects of our life is far from unique. Along with the positive aspects the influence of religion on morality and spiritual development of society, observed and negative aspects of the influence of religion on society, in particular, an intense process of union of religion and politics that can lead to unexpected negative consequences. In connection with this situation as a religious world, and in Kazakhstan, which belongs to the category of multi-ethnic, poly-linguistic and poly-confessional countries in the world where there are more than 140 ethnic groups, the role of interfaith dialogue and harmony in the Republic of Kazakhstan for us is quite urgent.

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Modern Kazakhstan is a secular government, building social, citizen society going on the way of democracy and based on market economy. Kazakhstan has been existing as sovereign, independent government after the collapse of the Soviet Union for 19 years. Within these years there were many deep and radical changes in every sphere of our society. As a result of migration processes the demographic situation had been changed, in link with the principle changes occurring in sphere of religion and religious processes. Also it is well-known that in recent decades the Kazakh social terms are characterized not only by establishing of citizen society and market economy, but also by religious boom: also one can notice the rising of position of already existent religious organizations, as well as occurrence of absolutely new, “not traditional” ones among the religious organizations of modern Kazakhstan. In particular, they are such new protestant churches as “Agape”, «New sky», such non-traditional religious cults as “Bahai”, and “Church of Devil”, “Church of Scientology”.

The religious situation in modern Kazakhstan is ambiguous and complicated. By some estimates, by the 1st January of 1989 there were about 700 religious associations belonging to 30 denominations. Today on the territory of modern Kazakhstan are more than 4000 different religious groups and more than 40 denominations. Among them there are 1652 Islamic, including 1642 Sunni, 2 Shia’s, 4 sufi, 4 Ahmadiya organizations. Also 241 religious organizations are working, including 230 Russian Orthodox Churches, 77 organizations of Rome-Catholic Church, 946 protestant organizations. Non-traditional religious organizations of modern Kazakhstan including: 5 Buddhist organizations, 25 Hindu, 12 Krishna, 23 Bahai, 2 organizations of transcendental meditations, 2 organizations of Great Brotherhood, 6 organizations of church scientology.

The constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan provides the principles of freedom of belief and conscience, equal rights of citizens from different confessions to create their religious organizations, the independence of government from church. The whole range of other normative-legal foundations of regulation of social function of religions and religious organizations, status of religions, their true place and role in the life of society is established. Nonetheless status, sphere and influence of religion on social-political and spiritual sphere of society aren’t still defined. This uncertainty, especially its negative results are clearly seen in link with new tendencies that take place in modern religious situation of Kazakhstan. In particular this is so in conjunction with the appearance of completely new religious flows and cults based on set of rather suspicious religious and moral norms and dogmas. One of these radical forms of religious activity could turn to be religious fundamentalism and religious extremism.

Also it can be noted that because of Kazakhstan’s being a secular state our official ideology is enough neutral towards the religious matters and doesn’t support or inhibit any kind of religion. This clearly distinguishes Kazakhstan from states with an authoritarian, totalitarian or theocratic regime.

The interconfessional peace and harmony are vital problems for multiethnic, multicultural and multiconfessional society of Kazakhstan. Today this country became famous not only as a country which mines petrol but as a center of the World spiritual forum where leaders of world and traditional religions gather in order to solve the most important religious problems. In one of the last meetings of the leaders the special role of interconfessional harmony and dialog was stressed. During the meeting the main principles of interconfessional dialog and agreement were worked out and consisted of the following: tolerance, mutual understanding and respect, interethnic agreement and religious toleration. It is worthy saying that it is these principles that are fundamental in the interconfessional relationships existent in our country. The president of the country articulated the same idea when addressing its people and saying that “Kazakhstan has guaranteed the freedom of confession, is consistent in its policy of interconfessional dialog and equality of rights in concern with different religious streams. We have peaceful coexistence of different confessions provided throughout the country...”

It should be noted that Kazakhstan has deep roots and ancient traditions in terms of religious tolerance and inter-denominational agreement. Kazakhstan is situated on the crossroad of cultures and religions from ancient times. It’s known that during the many centuries on the modern territory of Kazakhstan there were such different religious beliefs as tengri, zoroastrism, manu, buddism, Christianity (in particular, it’s branches as nestorian and yakov) and of course Islam which were peacefully coexisted between themselves. This ancient tradition is seen also in modern ethno-confessional policy of Kazakhstan. President of Kazakhstan quoted in his dispatch: intolerance and religious fanaticism are unfamiliar to us. This spiritual tradition and openness to the word of God – is one of important foundations of inter- confessional agreement in Kazakhstan. We are known to the world with our tolerance, international and interconfessional agreement and dialogue. Increasing positive potential of our country to this kind of worldview should be kept carefully and developed further.

This policy of Kazakhstan’s consistent in its foreign affairs. In particular, the goal of Kazakhstan’s chairmanship in the Organization of Islamic Conference is to increase the authority and capacity of the OIC on the worldly scale, as well as to develop consolidation and lines of capacity of the Organization to the cause of international security and cooperation.

Maintenance of the rights means the new approach to activity of the Organization and freedom of the person, propagation of religious tolerance and universal values, search of ways of overcoming of the world economic crisis, maintenance of peace, stability and security. Appointing Kazakhstan as chairman of OSCE is between the already undertaken measures, and in particular, is one of the three new directions of its activity in the given international organization. The moving in the given directions will be continued within the chairmanship of Kazakhstan in the Organization of Islamic Conference.

Despite the certain achievements in sphere of peace and inter-confessional dialogue and agreement within Kazakhstan and as well as in the world, there are certain problems and unsolved questions, which require the urgent decisions, they are, in particular, religious intolerance, religious extremism and terrorism which are the real threaten to the modern world. They can be applied to the sharpest issues of 21 century and the searching of new ways of dialogue is necessary. Despite the certain achievements in terms of keeping and increasing religious tolerance, the issue of religious intolerance is still actual and vitally important.

Religions, first of all, worldwide spread religions and traditional ones, are powerful factors in the development of spiritual and moral foundations of humanity. The function of religion is to keep and increase all the human values, to help it to keep “its face”. The aim of modern world, in particular, modern Kazakhstan is to use human values of humanism and tolerance, interconfessional agreement and dialogue, principles and paradigms of world and traditional religions that were set up during the centuries to keep peace in modern human civilization and supply peaceful coexistence of different nations and confessions.

To increase the inter-confessional peace and agreement, religious tolerance, to increase the role of religion as integrating, spiritual and moral building factor it is necessary to form religious culture and religious consciousness. But it's impossible in the conditions of religious illiteracy of whole population and religious illiteracy of some parts of religious people. By necessity of educational status of the population we mean not only the increasing of religious literacy of population, but also the increasing of political literacy, formation of certain political culture and political consciousness and self-consciousness of the population. This necessity, first of all, is related to that which is one of serious problems of modern civilizations - religious extremism. The religious extremism is the direct result of not only lack of religious knowledge and experience, but also of the joining of religion with politics, when modern politics and politicians in achieving their aims often resort to and use the religious ideas. Involving the religion in policy means that religious leaders will strive to get a political role in society

involving the religion into government affairs. To join the religion and policy is quite a dangerous, as religious and political figures apply to religious feelings, to religious norms and dogmas for achieving their aims and ambitions. Religious extremism is eventually political extremism, as it uses the religion as justification for the aggression of ideology. To prevent the religious and political illiteracy it is very important to form high principles of political culture, to elevate political consciousness and increase people's educational level.

Ethnic and confessional identity takes certain place in developing the inter-confessional peace, agreement and religious tolerance. Than it is obligation upon the world's traditional religions to make certain efforts as to uproot such kinds of negative ethnic and confessional self-identification as egotism, isolationism and bigotry which essentially originates from ethnocentrism, confessional bias and all-around strengthening of negative ethnic and confessional self-identification. The main condition required for positive ethnic and confessional self-identification to take place is, on one hand, stability of existence of ethnic and confessional groups and, on the other hand, peaceful mutual cooperation in multi-ethnic and multi-confessional world. Formation of positive ethnic confessional identity means from one side the establishment of respect for nation and confession, pride for it is history customs and traditions, and from the second side the achievement of the versatility of multi-ethnic and multi-confessional peace, as well as disproving contrast of “our-not our” and accepting “another”, despite of his ethnic and confessional features and understanding of difference and similarity.

Events, based on inter-confessional conflicts, on religious fanaticism and fundamentalism, religious extremism and terrorism and related to them international processes prove the importance and actuality of civilization principles in the world and unveil the fact that the lack of inter-confessional dialogue and agreement in separate countries leads to reducing the level of the life, to worsening the demographical situation, to increasing of marginal layers and increasing social migration, related to changes of geopolitical situation, raises armed conflicts in neighboring regions with all it is consequences, for example, increasing of crime, terrorism and reducing the life safety of social vulnerable layers of population, including the children and youth¹.

As world experience shows, multi-confessional countries are flourishing when keeping the peace between different people is taken as foundation. Conceptual model of modern interconfessional agreement and dialogue should be based on the integrating principle, which

1 G. U. Soldatova. *Psychology of Inter-ethnic Tension* (M.: Smisle- 389), 1998.

means the realization of mutual cooperation of various religions and religious organizations on the base of holistic parity of their interrelations from one side and their development on the base of their own religious traditions and teaching from other side. The process of comprehensive integration should be realized on the basis of equal relations with all other religions and religious organizations, issuing from mutual understanding and trust.

The conceptual model for modern interconfessional agreement and dialog must, first of all, proceed from the principle of integration which foresees different religions and religious groups' interaction in the framework of full equality of their relationships, the growth of these relationships on the basis of original religious traditions special for each one of them. On the other hand, the process of the world integration be fulfilled on the basis of equal and impartial relationships between all other religions and religious organizations that founded on mutual understanding and trust.²²

Religion is unquestionably can be powerful integrating factor, but only if we won't be looking for the difference between our religions, engaging instead in searching for the common features and principles, common foundations and values important for the whole of humanity.

CONCLUSION

Modern Kazakhstan is a secular government, building social, citizen society going on the way of democracy and based on market economy. Kazakhstan has been existing as sovereign, independent government after the collapse of the Soviet Union for 19 years. Within these years there were many deep and radical changes in every sphere of our society. Recent decades are characterized not only by the development of civil society and market economy, but also by a religious boom: also one can notice the rising of position of already existent religious organizations, as well as occurrence of absolutely new, "not traditional" ones among the religious organizations of modern Kazakhstan which sometimes "unconventional" for today's Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that Kazakhstan has deep roots and ancient traditions in terms of

religious tolerance and inter-denominational agreement. Kazakhstan is situated on the crossroad of cultures and religions from ancient times. It's known that during the many centuries on the modern territory of Kazakhstan existed such different religious beliefs as Tengri, Zoroastrianism, Manu, Buddhism, Christianity and, of course, Islam, coexisting peacefully between themselves.

This ancient tradition is seen also in modern ethno-confessional policy of Kazakhstan.

Inter-confessional peace and agreement are essentially important problem for multiethnic, multi-linguistic, multi-confessional Kazakhstan. Today Kazakhstan is well-known all over the world not only as the country mining the oil, but also as a center of the World Spiritual Forum, where leaders of world and traditional religions are gathered to solve the most important religious problems of today. At one of these meetings the importance of inter-confessional agreement and dialogue was highly pointed out. Also during these meetings the basic principles of inter-confessional agreement and dialogue were set up: they are tolerance, mutual understanding, mutual respect, international agreement and religious tolerance. These principles are also foundations of inter-confessional relations within Kazakhstan.

2 Alieva A.K., Usipova G.I. International agreement as factor of providing of stability in conditions of multinational Dagestan // Modern ethno-political processes in North Caucas. (Mahachkala: DNC. RAN., 1999).