
STUDY OF THE STATE RELIGIOUS POLICY IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

**Timur Talgatovich Aimukhambetov^{1*},
Natalya Lvovna Seitakhmetova², Assem Tashimovna Mukhitdenova¹,
Shamshiya Saidgalievna Rysbekova¹,
Aliya Omirbekovna Omirbekova¹ and
Marzhan Bashanovna Alikbayeva¹**

¹ *Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, al-Farabi Ave. 71, Almaty 050040,
Republic of Kazakhstan*

² *Institute for Philosophy, Political Science and Religion Studies, Kurmangazy St. 29, Almaty
050010, Republic of Kazakhstan*

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Abstract

Modern realities require from the Kazakh society and the state to properly comprehend the role of interaction between secularism and religious traditions in the formation and development of public and state institutions, the state as a whole. In order to strengthen the domestic stability of society in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the state policy on interaction between the state and religious confessions is carried out. The purpose of the study is to determine the views and vision of relations between the state and religious confessions in the Republic of Kazakhstan. In this article, the authors have analysed the sociological survey aimed at studying the interconfessional situation and society's attitude to the interaction between the state and religious confessions in the Republic of Kazakhstan. Based on this study, the authors have identified the society's views on this type of interaction, and the issues that should be addressed in it.

Keywords: religious, interconfessional, situation, religion, politics

1. Introduction

At the present stage, a number of countries, through the constitutional proclamation of the secular direction of the state, seek to eliminate the participation of religious confessions in socio-political activities. At the same time, the state uses religious confessions as a social institution, involving them in the solution of social problems of society by the formation of various mercy communities. In the literature, this relationship is defined as a partnership of a special kind. Thus, Western researchers Glazier [1], Crines & Theakston [2] reveal the essential aspects of the process of influence of religion, religious

*E-mail: timnesh@mail.ru

beliefs and phenomena on the formation of political reality and on the activities of the political elite.

Religious confessions can contribute to the process of state building acting as the state's partner integrating and consolidating society, promoting communication between different social groups of society, generating public support for the implementation of national strategies, and negatively affect by separating society, provide opportunities for interference in the domestic affairs of the country by external forces through their channels, influence the manifestations of protest moods in society, etc.

It should be noted that there is no single approach to the formation of relations between religious denominations, society and the state. These relations are formed based on general civilizational principles, under the influence of ethno-national traditions [3]. The main directions of such relations lie in the cultural, social and political spheres and are determined by the specific historical context [4].

In this connection, researchers distinguish societies with a single national Church [5], multi-confessional societies with a dominant Church [6] and societies where secular life is separated from religious [7]. The influence of religion on social and political life in each of these societies is different. This classification is rather conditional and is determined, first of all, by the legislation of the country. At the same time, the real modern life of most western states is rather secularized [8]. As for the Muslim countries, the picture is often the opposite [9]. In most of them, religion has a state status and has a great influence on social and political life [10, 11].

Kazakhstan occupies a special geopolitical position in Asia – it is located at the intersection between countries with traditional Christianity (Orthodoxy) and Islam, which enriches and at the same time complicates religious processes on its territory. Kazakhstan during the 20th century developed in multi-confessional and multi-ethnic conditions, in relation to which representatives of Western civilization from the end of the 20th century began to use the term “multiculturalism” [12].

After gaining independence, Kazakhstan condemned illegal actions against religion and believers, which took place when it was part of the USSR. From this point on in the Republic, the guarantee of the principle of freedom of religion has been guaranteed. In the period of weak state power and underdeveloped socio-cultural institutions, the resulting ideological lacunae in the Republic of Kazakhstan began to fill in with new religious movements and institutions. These circumstances led to a sharp increase in the number of religious denominations and associations. Traditional and newest religious formations have emerged as independent subjects of social processes taking place in Kazakhstan, and have created a number of new problems, one of which is the emergence of a new religious picture of Kazakhstan society. Despite the possibility of constructive equal dialogue and mutual enrichment of various cultures and faiths, the threat of hostility and confrontation, including on religious or ethnic and religious grounds, has increased [13].

Today in Kazakhstan live, according to the National Census of 2009, representatives of 125 nations and ethnic groups. They represent various cultures, religious and linguistic groups, social formations. Analysis of the statistical data of the institutional formation of the religious network indicates the completion of its extensive development in Kazakhstan and the slowing down of its expansion (on average 2% per year), which can contribute to enriching the internal spiritual and cult life of the Church. It can be stated that at the end of 2017 (compared to 2000) the level of declared religiosity increased from 58 to 79%. Naturally, an increase in the level of religiosity occurred in those regions where it was low. As of March 2018, the religious network in Kazakhstan is represented by 18 different confessions, numbering more than 3.5 thousand confessional subjects. Currently, there are 3,496 places of worship in the country, of which 2,602 are mosques and 300 – Orthodox churches [Official website of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the civil society of the Republic of Kazakhstan, <https://diakom.gov.kz/ru>, accessed 31.01.2018]. This revival of traditional Churches was due to the favourable attitude of the authorities towards the reproduction of the necessary number of communities. In general, the Kazakh space is characterized by two defining components: multi-religiosity and multi-ethnicity.

The distribution of religious organizations as of 2018 on a confessional basis indicates the preservation of Islamic domination in the state, which accounts for about 75% of the total network of religious organizations. The Russian Orthodox Church ranks second in terms of the number of active communities, but its overall representation in the religious network of Kazakhstan decreased to 10.5% from 14.1% in 2000. Concerning Protestant organizations, the rate of growth of the total network of institutions over the past ten years, in comparison with the previous decade, has dropped significantly. Their current institutional network has actually reached its maximum limits [<https://diakom.gov.kz/ru>].

Therefore, the confessional structure of Kazakhstan from 1991 to 2018 experienced a significant transformation. Despite an obvious significant quantitative and qualitative increase in believers, places of worship, material support, influence in society, etc., the religious situation in Kazakhstan has undergone numerous complications. The main ones are: 1) a significant increase in the number of religious organizations after independence; 2) the lack of developments in the forms and methods of state regulation of interfaith relations; 3) the growth of ethnic-religious denominations from 2 to 18; 4) today, religion enjoys a high degree of trust, but it plays rather a separative and not an unifying role.

Thus, on the one hand, the processes of building up a religious network are evidence that the Kazakh state is adopting the principles of democracy and freedom of religion. On the other hand, they gave rise to a number of fundamental problems for society, among which the problems of inter-confessional and state-confessional relations are particularly acute. Moreover, Western scholars argue that “many problems of modern society, such as

fundamentalist movements and terrorist acts, racism and xenophobia, as well as ethnic conflicts, have a religious aspect” [14].

All the processes that are happening today in the religious life of Kazakhstan can be divided into two groups. Firstly, these are relations between different religions, for example, between the main traditional religions and non-traditional religious associations, between certain non-traditional religious associations. Secondly, it is a relationship within one religious direction. This mainly concerns the main confession of Kazakhstan (Islam), where interfaith conflicts between representatives of the Islamic clergy of various ethnic and regional affiliations have permanently exacerbated.

In the situation of interfaith clashes and state-Church contradictions in relations with non-traditional confessions, when conflicts do not disappear and are not resolved, but only exacerbated, the actual task is to study the relationship between the state and religious denominations in the Republic of Kazakhstan from the point of view of the public of Kazakhstan, the population of the republic to find ways of optimizing state-confessional relations, forecasting and preventing religious conflicts, which turns into an urgent social need and an important condition for building a civil society. At the same time, ensuring freedom of conscience is one of the main tasks in the process of forming state-confessional relations in Kazakhstan.

2. Research methods

The analysis of state religious policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan was carried out on the basis of a sociological survey in the form of a standardized questionnaire aimed at studying the interconfessional situation and public opinion on the relations between the state and religious confessions in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The survey was conducted in Almaty on the basis of the Association of Colleges of Almaty with the assistance of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religion Studies of the Committee of Science of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan on a sample of 600 respondents, of which 500 respondents were students in schools and colleges of Almaty, and 100 respondents – teachers in schools and colleges of Almaty.

The sociological survey was conducted in two stages:

Stage 1 – February 1st, 2014 – June 1st, 2014: Almaty State Business College, Almaty Economics College, School lyceum No. 131, Linguistic Gymnasium No. 35.

Stage 2 – February 1st, 2015 – June 1st, 2015: College of Turan University, Central Asian Technical and Economic College, Gymnasium No. 25, Linguistic Gymnasium No. 15.

3. Results

The preliminary survey of the respondents was aimed at determining the percentage of believers among the respondents and their confessional composition.

According to the preliminary survey, the following was determined: about 30% of the respondents were religious people who observed the main religious rites of their religious confession, about 50% of the respondents were believers, but they did not observe the main religious rites of their religious confession, about 5% of the respondents identified themselves as agnostics or atheists, about 15% of the respondents found it difficult to answer this question.

Thus, it can be concluded that the vast majority of the respondents consider themselves religious people, but the secular way of life does not always contribute to the ability or desire to perform all or main rituals of their religious faiths. Nevertheless, the indicator of lack of religiosity in almost a fifth of the respondents is a kind of signal about the growing influence of globalization on the society's worldview in general and the younger generation in particular.

Also, according to the preliminary survey, it was found that out of 80% of the respondents who identified themselves as believers: about 65% of the respondents identified themselves as representatives of Islam, about 30% of the respondents identified themselves as representatives of Christianity (Orthodoxy), about 5% of the respondents identified themselves as representatives of other religious confessions (Buddhism, Tengrianism, Zoroastrianism, Confucianism).

So, the vast majority (95%) of the respondents referred themselves as belonging to traditional religious confessions present on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, and only 5% of the respondents identified themselves as representatives of other religious confessions.

Moving on to the immediate goal of the study, which was to determine the views and vision of relations between the state and religious confessions in the Republic of Kazakhstan, the respondents were asked about their attitude to strengthening the role of the state in interconfessional relations, about their views on the interaction between the state and religious confessions and the role of the state in state-religious relations.

When answering the question about the attitude to strengthening the role of the state in interconfessional relations, we obtained the following results: about 10% of the respondents fully supported strengthening the state and its regulatory functions in religious-confessional relations, about 50% of the respondents partially supported strengthening the state and its regulatory functions in religious-confessional relations, about 15% of the respondents did not approve of strengthening the state and its controlling functions in religious-confessional relations, and about 25% of the respondents had no idea about this type of relations and the processes taking place in them (see Figure 1).

Consequently, according to the received answers, about 60% of the respondents partially or fully support the reforms of the state in the interaction with religious confessions. However, 15% do not support these changes and

25% of the respondents have no idea what is happening in the interaction between the state and religious confessions. This leads to the conclusion that it is necessary to more actively promote and explain the actions of the state in this area, which will increase the awareness of the population and will contribute to an increase in the number of people supporting these initiatives. Also, some changes should be made through public hearings and discussions, as in some aspects the number of those who do not approve of this direction may increase to 65% of the number of respondents.

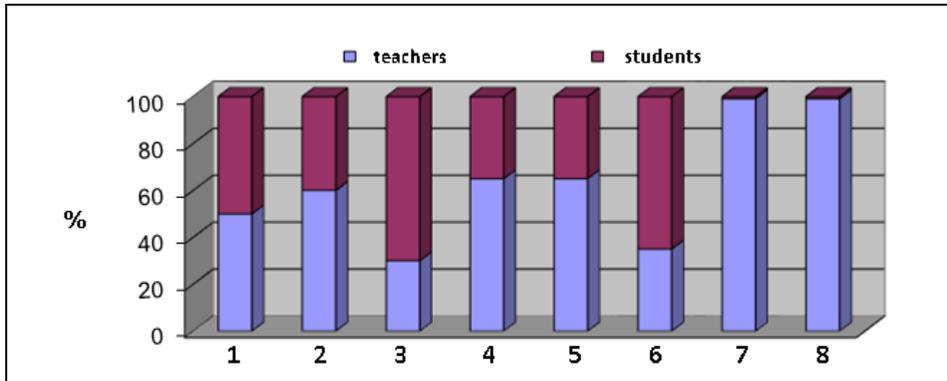


Figure 1. Distribution of respondents' opinions on the spheres of interaction between the state and religious confessions depending on the age group (%).

Legend:

- 1 - Prevention of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions;
- 2 - Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in the upbringing of the younger generation;
- 3 - Teaching the basics of religion studies in schools, colleges and higher education institutions of the country
- 4 - Training and retraining of religious personnel;
- 5 - Training and retraining in the field of religion studies;
- 6 - Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in social actions and assistance to the poor;
- 7 - Strengthening control over the activities of religious figures, licensing;
- 8 - Establishment of centers for the dissemination of religious literature

The respondents' statements of their own views on the interaction between the state and religious confessions were evaluated by the need for interaction in the following areas (presented in order of the frequency of the respondents' mention):

1. Prevention of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions.
2. Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in the upbringing of the younger generation.
3. Systematic teaching the basics of religion studies in schools, colleges and higher education institutions of the country.
4. Training and retraining of religious personnel for qualification.

5. Training and retraining of highly qualified personnel in the field of religion studies.
6. Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in social actions and assistance to the poor.
7. Strengthening control over the activities of religious figures, licensing.
8. The establishment of several centres under the control of the relevant authority for the dissemination of religious literature of different character.

Analysing this list, it should be noted that according to the respondents, the prevention of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions is of the greatest importance in the interaction between the state and religious confessions. That is, it is necessary not just to prohibit their functioning, but to inform the society of their negative activities and to take other actions that contribute to the solution of this issue.

The second and third aspects are interrelated and their main object is the knowledge of students about religion in general and various religious confessions in particular. Largely, ignorance was identified as promoting wrong representation and interpretation of religious confessions.

The fourth and fifth aspects of the interaction between the state and religious confessions are also interrelated, since the country lacks systematic training of professional scholars of the religion and clerics, and, especially, the system of advanced training of these personnel, which adversely affects this area of cooperation.

The sixth aspect is taken from international practice, where religious confessions deal with issues of social life, which to some extent facilitates the activities of the state.

The last two aspects are related to the attempt to protect society from negative influences in the religious sphere through their control and monitoring by representatives of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Social Harmony. But in this case, the opinions of the respondents diverged, and some of them noted that the solution of these issues would lead not to the resolution of the issue, but to its aggravation.

In addition, among different age groups (students and teachers) there were differences in opinions and the degree of necessity of the presented spheres of interaction between the state and religious confessions.

Thus, the sphere of control over the activities of religious figures and their sermons and the creation of several centres controlled by the relevant body for the dissemination of religious literature of different character were announced by the representatives of the older age group (teachers) and were not noted by the representatives of the younger age group (students).

At the same time, young people paid more attention than the older generation to such areas as strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in social actions and assistance to the poor and systematic teaching the basics of religion studies in schools, colleges and higher education institutions of the country. The opinions of both age groups of the

respondents on the issue of prevention of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions were the same (Figure 1).

Further, the respondents were asked to assess which of the spheres of interaction considered in the framework of interaction between the state and religious confessions should be the prerogative of the state, and which – the area of responsibility of religious confessions themselves (Table 1).

According to the results of the survey, it can be concluded that the interaction between the state and religious confessions is necessary in many areas. Moreover, this interaction should take the form of a dialogue of equal partners in resolving issues related to the whole society.

Table 1. Respondents’ opinions on the role of the state/religious confessions in state-religious relations.

No.	Sphere of interaction	Respondents’ opinions on the predominant role (%)	
		of the state	of religious confessions
1.	Prevention of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions	65	35
2.	Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in the upbringing of the younger generation	55	45
3.	Systematic teaching the basics of religion studies in schools, colleges and higher education institutions of the country	75	25
4.	Training and retraining of religious personnel for qualification	35	65
5.	Training and retraining of highly qualified personnel in the field of religion studies	65	35
6.	Strengthening the interrelationship of religious confessions with the state in social actions and assistance to the poor	25	75
7.	Strengthening control over the activities of religious figures, licensing	90	10
8.	The establishment of several centers under the control of the relevant authority for the dissemination of religious literature of different character	90	10

4. Discussion

The growth of the religious network in the late 80s-early 90s caused the need for the development of the form and methods of state regulation of interfaith relations. Despite certain attempts to find the optimal model of state-confessional and interfaith relations, the risks of religious conflicts do not diminish.

The analysis of the survey results showed that the greatest concern among the respondents was the possibility of negative impacts of non-traditional religious confessions. In this connection, when discussing the study results, we will dwell on this aspect of the problem.

In Kazakhstan, the attitude to the problem of sectarianism is very ambiguous. The period of atheism and the struggle against religion has been manifested by the fact that today there is an opinion that faith brings hope for something better, and therefore a part of the population has an opinion (which is also confirmed by the results of the conducted study) that all attempts to regulate relations between the state and religious associations are resumption of persecution and violation of the freedom of conscience. Also, it seems that the people tend to overlap the freedom of conscience and freedom of religion.

Therefore, the modern state religious policy of Kazakhstan, which is based on the new concept of state policy in the religious sphere of the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2017-2020 approved on June 20, 2017, becomes understandable from a political point of view. In accordance with this concept, it should be carried out by the authorized body in the religious sphere, one of the tasks of which is to neutralize the activities of destructive religious movements.

A similar body exists in France. Sixteen dead adherents of the 'Order of the Temple of the Sun' were found who committed suicide December 23, 1995 in the city of Vektor. After that under the state apparatus, the office has been established that monitors and limits the activities of such organizations. The main objective of the activities of the known Commission of MIVILUDES (Interministerial Mission for Monitoring and Struggling against Sectarian Deviations) is as follows:

1. To observe and analyse sectarian movements and frauds that violate human rights and fundamental freedoms, pose threat to public order and violate existing laws.
2. To promote respect for civil liberties, coordination of preventive actions of public authorities against fraud of sectarian movements.
3. To establish information exchange between public services and administrative practices regarding the fight against sectarian movements.
4. To promote awareness and education of civil servants on this subject.
5. To inform the population of the existing and possible danger that exists in sectarian organizations and to assist and rehabilitate victims of these movements [*Resolution of the social approach of the member States of the European Union to various violations of the law by new organizations operating under the protection granted to religious associations, of 22.05.1984, www.stolica.narod.ru/stran/006.html, accessed 31.01.2018; 15].*

At the same time, constructive interfaith relations should be built on containing confrontation as a form of social interaction, being limited by different degrees of isolation from society. The development needs of these relationships require the establishment of contacts with other social groups. This does not exclude the presence of a constructive element in the destructive

interfaith relations and, conversely, an element of destruction in constructive relations in general [16].

Some Western sociologists [17, 18] attach great importance to the protection of the most vulnerable persons, especially children, members of religious, esoteric and spiritual groups in case of improper treatment, rape, neglect, suggestion by brainwashing of rejection of school, which makes it impossible for social services to exercise supervision and calls on the governments of the member countries:

- if necessary, to create or support independent national or regional information centres on groups of a religious, esoteric or spiritual nature;
- to include information on the history and philosophy of important religious schools in the general school curriculum;
- to apply the usual procedures under criminal and civil law against illegal practices carried out on behalf of groups of a religious, esoteric or spiritual nature;
- to ensure that legislation regarding the obligation of adoption of children in schools should be strictly applied, and that appropriate authorities should intervene in the event of non-compliance;
- where necessary, facilitate the establishment of non-governmental organizations of victims or relatives of victims of religious, esoteric or spiritual groups.

5. Conclusions

Religion in its religious sense is not a correct object of state religious policy; however, the field of religion as a sphere of public life can be an object of state religious policy. The theoretical analysis of the administrative impact of the state on the structural components of this sphere has shown that the field of religion as a sphere of public life is a rather specific object of state religious policy, since for the administrative influence of the state only part of this field, which is associated with the practical aspects of religious relations, religious activities and the creation of religious organizations, is available.

Based on the results of the conducted sociological survey, the following conclusions can be formulated. Most of the population of Kazakhstan supports the reforms carried out by the state in the interaction between the state and religious confessions, but there is a sufficient number, which considers this type of interrelationship insignificant. The main questions that the respondents consider to be the most relevant in the interaction between the state and religious confessions have been identified, which indicates a certain awareness of the population about this type of relationship. Interaction between the state and religious confessions is necessary in many areas. At the same time, this interaction should take the form of a dialogue of equal partners in resolving issues related to the whole society.

Recognizing, overall, a fairly tolerant attitude of the followers of various confessions towards other believers and religious organizations, the authors will nevertheless note the main threats in the sphere of inter-confessional and state-confessional relations. Mostly they have different ethno-confessional origins and character; however, most of them, despite the absence of politicization of religious relations in the state, have political overtones. At the same time, many conflicts in Kazakhstan in the 21st century are not open, but such secrecy is dangerous, since any external factor, an actualized event can shift the well-established balance of influence and become an open conflict. In the last decade, interfaith contradictions began to acquire a somewhat hidden form, which does not mean their absence.

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