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## **PROBLEMS OF TRADITIONAL ISLAM IN RUSSIA**

Traditional Islam in Russia, living through a crisis period at present, has come across a number of problems after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which are connected with quite a few social and political aspects. To get to know the causes of the crisis it is necessary to analyze the history of Islam in the Soviet and post-Soviet periods in the country's history.

### **Islam and Muslims in the destiny of Russia, their role and development path**

According to statistics, Islam is the second religion in Russia in the number of believers. There are from 22 to 28 million Muslims living in the Russian Federation. Researchers of the problem maintain that their number will steadily grow due to natural surplus and practically uncontrolled migration of Muslims from the CIS countries (primarily from Central Asia). Islam appeared in Russia more than 1,000 years ago. Since then Russian people have always been in contact with Muslims, and studied their way of life and religious views. In 986 Volga Bulgaria, which adopted Islam in 992, sent a mission to the Kiev

Prince Vladimir with the proposal to adopt Muslim faith, which he turned down.

History knows not only of a confrontation between the Orthodox Christian world and Islamic states, but also of a courageous fight of Muslims on the side of Russia against the outside aggressors. The adherents of Islam are not only a religious group, but also a foundation, along with Orthodox Christianity, uniting the Russian people and forming our country's nationhood. The people of the Russian Federation believing in Islam are a natural pillar in Russia's revival as a superpower and a barrier for Islamic extremists working for the destabilization of our country and cultivation of religious strife. At present Russia is at the crossroads choosing the road of its further development. There are only two such roads: either to support traditional Islam of the adherents of Sufism and raise its prestige among the Muslims in the country and in the entire Islamic world, or to take the positions of confrontation with Islam, which will be catastrophic for Russia.

### **Problems along the Road of Revival of Traditional Islam in Russia**

The revival and maintenance of the traditional form of Islam in Russia come across a number of problems. One of them is the desire of young Muslims to learn various trends of Islam, which exist abroad in the main and radically differ from traditional Russian Islam. The Wahhabi trend is one of them. It came into being as an ideological instrument against traditional Islam and is used for attaining political aims.

The very notion of traditional Islam in Russia has become rather vague in recent time. Previously, it was understood as a religion preaching, among other things, mutual respect of Muslims and Orthodox Christians, striving for unity in creating Great Russia,

and defense and cohesion of all peoples of the country for its benefit, whereas now the traditional character of Islam is a dubitable question.

The well-known scholar of Islam R. Silantyev says that Islam which teaches Muslims to be law-abiding citizens of Russia and respect the Christian majority of the country's population is really traditional.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of 2011 President V. Putin called for a resolute struggle against religious extremism and manifestations of Wahhabism in the country, and support of traditional Islam at a meeting with religious leaders of Russia. In reply, a number of republics of the country with the predominantly Muslim population suggested that Islamic educational institutions be opened on their territory which should not be inferior to the major Islamic educational establishments in the Middle East. The city of Ufa could become such a center of Muslim education in Russia. Another factor in favor of this proposal was the fact that the headquarters of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia has been in Ufa since the decree issued by Empress Catherine the Great in 1788.

Many high officials of the Republic of Bashkortostan expressed similar views, namely, that young people should be taught traditional Islam on the territory of Russia, but not in the Middle East, which is dominated by Islamic trends alien to Russian Muslims.

The problem of creating an Islamic higher educational institution on the territory of Russia which could compete with prestigious Middle Eastern institutions has emerged a long time ago. The point is that the Islamic educational establishments working after the disintegration of the U.S.S.R. were of a very low quality. The professional level of their teachers left much to be desired, there were no adequate books, textbooks, study aids, and curricula on traditional Islam. Due to this young Russian Muslims went to countries of the Arab world to study, where they got under the influence of radical Islamic trends and

returned home convinced of the “wrong path” taken by traditional Russian Islam. This is confirmed by the growing popularity of radical Islamic trends among Russian Muslims at present.

It is necessary to train specialists for the development of traditional Islam in Russia, who will be able to translate religious texts from Arabic into Russian. As is known, Arabic is one of the most difficult languages in the world. During its existence it has always developed and acquired new words, whereas old words got new meanings. Some of them have several synonyms. Consequently, while studying in Arab countries young men cannot always understand the meaning of one or another word or expression properly, which may lead to negative results.

The Council of Muftis of Russia headed by Ravil Gainutdin, just like the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims, support the idea of the revival of traditional Russian Islam. Representatives of the Council of Muftis of Russia have time and again stated that in its work the Council will rely on the young generation of Muslims, and the entire body of the Council will consist of up to 60–70 percent of young experts in the sphere of Islam.

Today the Council of Muftis has several departments which are in charge of charity activity, religious and educational matters, international ties, and contacts with Islamic states.

The revival of traditional Islam in Russia, presupposing peaceful coexistence and respectful attitude to other peoples and confessions can give unexpected positive results.

It is no secret that for quite a long time already there has been a tendency toward lowering religiousness and spirituality of the Russian Orthodox Christian population. This cannot be said about adherents of Islam living in the Russian Federation. At the same time, according to experts, there is a growing trend of Orthodox religiousness in parts

of Russia where the positions of Islam have always been strong enough. This can be explained by the fact that the Russian Orthodox Christian population, on seeing how its Muslim neighbors cherish their roots and religion, show more interest in their sources and their own religion. It should also be noted that both traditional Islam and Orthodox Christianity become convinced of the need to develop and popularize science at the present stage.

Science devoid of spiritual development, religious tenets and moral standards becomes an enemy of mankind. Spirituality is replaced with the cult of constantly growing consumption. Instead of all commandments the new vulgar axiom is widely used – consume for the sake of consumption. Quite a few European and North American countries serve as an example. Russia also belongs to this list, although with certain reservations.

At the same time, religion without science does not provide an opportunity to society to develop, restricts it with narrow bounds, and suppresses initiative and creative drive. As a result, such society differs but little from primitive communal or medieval society. An example of such society is provided by Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Consequently, a conclusion can be drawn that it is only a synthesis of science and religion that can give Russia an opportunity to become a superpower again with a rich history, inimitable culture, strong army, and high age-old ethical values. The prerequisites of a symbiosis of the spiritual and the rational are contained in Orthodox Christianity and in the world outlook of traditional Russian Islam.

## **Influence of Religious Muslim Education on Traditional Islam in Russia**

The revival of traditional Russian Islam is facing many threats, which may place the question of the very existence of Russia as a stable

sovereign state on the agenda, if they are not nipped in the bud. The disintegration of the U.S.S.R. and the chaos in all spheres of society's life following it has provoked the emergence of dozens of non-traditional radical-sectarian trends of Islam on Russian territory. Russia has become a place where extremist material was freely distributed by Arabs (especially from Saudi Arabia). To boot, numerous spiritual leaders have emerged who called on Muslims (especially young people) to adhere to the Wahhabi trend of Islam.

All this was directed to undermining the interconfessional peace in the country. One of the reasons for it was the policy of the Soviet state which presupposed integration of all Muslims in society unburdened with religious views. All Islamic educational institutions were closed, except one in Bukhara (Uzbekistan), most mosques were destroyed, Islamic intellectuals who called upon the Muslim population to preserve their faith were subjected to harsh reprisals. Thus, the Soviet state provoked the Muslim population to discontent, which had been hidden for many years (up to the 1990s) and did not take an open form.

The Russian Federation has inherited this conflict from the U.S.S.R., and many young Muslims began to take young Russia for an enemy of Islam. A new phenomenon has appeared in Russia, which was termed "ethnic Islam."

Realizing that they will be unable to receive proper religious education in this country, young Muslims have begun to leave for Arab countries to study. There they get under the influence of radical Islamic trends, non-traditional for Russia. Now it becomes clear how Islamic radicalism and extremism come to Russia and why it is so widespread. To tackle this properly, it is necessary to revive traditional Islamic education and prohibit Muslim spiritual leaders to receive religious education in other countries, especially in Arab states where the positions of religious extremists are especially strong (Saudi Arabia).

At present Muslims do not see any special support of their religion on the part of the state, although many of them continue their attempts to revive Russian traditional Islam.

“Traditional Islam has no state support and is therefore in an unequal situation for opposing the Wahhabi trend. This is why it is necessary to support traditional Islam by the state, not only in Russia, but the world over.”<sup>2</sup>

### **External and Internal Directions of Development of Traditional Islam in Russia**

The international situation should not be neglected. There are three main regions on the planet which exert great influence on the entire world: India, China, and a number of Muslim states (Turkey, Iran, Middle Eastern countries).

Muslims have been, and remain, an inalienable part of Russia. This means that in order to become again one of the main actors in the international arena Russia should form a sort of an alliance with the Islamic world. This alliance will have great prospects.

Along with the revival of traditional Islam, one of the major aims of domestic policy toward Muslims is to foster patriotism among them. To popularize traditional Islam it is necessary to pursue a policy which would induce Muslims themselves to oppose manifestations of intolerance and extremism and popularize traditional Islam, patriotism, social justice and peace.

So far the state does not interfere actively in Muslim affairs and does not wish to regulate them, and Islamic spiritual leaders of Russia are seriously worried over the continuing penetration of radical Islam in official quarters, its close contacts with state power and participation in Islamic education in the country. In certain regions of Russia a tendency is observed toward a deterioration of the inter-religious

situation, which is expressed in open aggression of religious extremists against traditional Islamic organizations and leaders of the Muslim community of Russia. Their aim remains the same – to dominate the Islamic area in the Russian Federation.

During the period between 2008 and 2013 more than seventy spiritual leaders of Russian Muslims, who were active supporters of traditional Islam, were killed. Muftiyats began to emerge in many regions of Russia which had no relation to the official spiritual boards of Muslims. They engage in dubious activity, are financed by foreign foundations, establish contacts with representatives of the official authorities in regions and mislead them in order to get favorable treatment. Moreover, they officially receive financing from the federal and regional budgets and demand government assistance in their work.

Parallel with it, Islamic radicals worm their way into the leading bodies of the Central Spiritual Board of Muslims and try to change the established priorities of their work to revive traditional Islam. Attempts are made to seize control over the educational system of Muslims, propaganda of radical Islam is carried on, and young people are persuaded to get religious education in the Middle East, which discredits authoritative Russian Islamic higher educational institutions.

The local authorities prefer not to interfere. There is no hope for any support on the part of the state, as a result the local traditional spiritual boards of Muslims have to wage a struggle against extremists alone.

Proceeding from this, a general deterioration of the situation can be expected. The Muslim community will be unable to cope with Islamic radicalism. Having a clear-cut plan of actions, supported materially and information-wise, and using incompetence of the local and federal authorities, the extremists have all opportunities to control the Muslim community of the country. The existing situation can only

be changed if scholars and representatives of traditional Russian Islam and religious leaders succeed in persuading the Russian state and the official authorities of the need to act together for the sake of victory over religious extremism and the subsequent revival of traditional Russian Islam.

Quite a few specialists working in this sphere are doing their best in order to establish a useful dialogue with the expert community and academic circles for tackling this task. The Islamic factor in Russia is growing stronger, and this is a worldwide tendency.

Suffice it to turn to expert conclusions: during the past 15 years the number of adherents of Islam in the world has grown from 800 million to 1.5 billion.

A considerable number of Muslims lives on Russian territory. We must work on their proper upbringing and education, if we do not want to face the situation some 10 to 15 years later, with which several European countries, including France and Britain, have come across recently.

Parallel with teaching Muslims it is necessary to create prerequisites in society for respectful attitude to representatives of Islam.

We should cease to call radical Islamists Muslims. There should be a precedent in Russia of calling only those representatives of Islam Muslims who behave decently in non-Muslim society, and are an example of restraint and tolerance.

This may lead to the situation in which Islam will cease to be a synonym of extremism, radicalism and terrorism and Islamophobia will disappear by itself.

However, all this can only be achieved with the help of the state. The official authorities should take an initiative upon themselves to educate the younger generations of Muslims within the framework of

traditional Russian Islam. Only then will they be able to become a generation worthy of their ancestors who had lived for centuries in peace and mutual respect with other peoples of Russia.

A. Ryazanov, Russian expert and author, asserts that it is in the interests of the Russian state to support traditional “non-political” Sufi Islam and pursue a policy of containment with regard to its radical trends, whose aim is to seize political power (including by methods of force), and also to create Muslim states. In conclusion it would be appropriate to cite the words of one of the Haddiths: “Muslim is a man whose tongue or hands harm nobody.”<sup>3</sup>

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## **THE PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, TRANSCAUCAZUS AND CENTRAL ASIA**

The specific features of interaction of politics and religion in Russian society are conditioned by a number of historical and national circumstances. Throughout centuries there have been factors aimed either to increasing its role or alienating it from the country’s socio-political life. During a certain period there was direct interference of the

state in the affairs of religious organizations and their submission to it. The situation in modern Russia is also of a specific nature, when social apathy and mistrust in all authorities become a regular characteristic of the behavior of many sections of the population, be there an economic crisis or socio-political instability. In the post-conflict period in the Chechen Republic, when the revival of Islamic and ethnic customs and traditions of the people is taking place, achievement of national unity and civil establishment and development of society become especially important. Islam helps achieve this aim because it is an integrating factor, but it experiences a heavy burden of various unfounded, sometimes discriminatory socio-political decisions and economic reforms, open violence and political pressure of the authorities. Perhaps, it can be said not only of Islam, but also of other religions, but we shall dwell only on Islam. Although the Constitution of the Russian Federation presupposes separation of religion from the state, this premise is difficult to implement in full measure. In my view, there is an unspoken moratorium in Chechnya on the realization of this article of the Constitution. Despite different purposes and spheres of action, religion and politics are invariably interconnected. Moreover, it seems arguable to us that they have different aims. The main aim of both is the creation of such socio-economic system which would be in line with people's wishes and aspirations.

The traditional forms of the intertwining of politics and religion in the history of Russia can be examined on the example of the Chechen Republic. Here are some aspects of their interaction. The first is the influence of religion on politics. It is felt, above all, in that religion as a definite system of world outlook, including social and ethical standards, influences the hearts and minds of its adherents, their desires, social behavior, and political actions. Naturally, this influence

is the stronger the deeper their religious faith – Islam in this case, and the greater their readiness to follow its standards in everyday life.

In Chechnya, where Islam is part of the culture of Chechen society, religion sometimes determines the political actions of the present-day authorities in the republic. As is known, the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Russia was marked by radical transformations in the state and political system and modernizing changes in the economy, ideology and culture. Modern Russian society, including North Caucasian society, has for many years already been in a state of transition and systemic and structural transformation. Economic and political transformations in the country and the systemic crisis of Russian society connected with them have led to the transformation of spiritual and cultural values and ethnic entity. They have also been reflected on the state of Islam in Russia, which has been on an upgrade since the 1980s.

The revival of Islam in Russia, including the Chechen Republic, was a reaction, above all, to the internal socio-political transformations. The very process of the revival of Russian Islam was accompanied with positive and negative tendencies. Islamic renaissance in Chechnya had the most tragic consequences. Old mosques were restored and new ones built, Islamic schools and institutes were opened, religious dogmas were studied, and corresponding literature was published. Muslims' contacts with foreign brethren by religion and centers of Arab-Muslim culture were broadened. In the Chechen Republic along with all this, religious-political parties and movements were set up pursuing radical aims, right up to the change of the existing political system and spiritual and cultural identity of Russian Muslims through the forcible introduction of non-traditional religious-political and ethnocultural values. A no small role in these developments was played by the International Islamic Organization registered in Moscow and in other

cities of the country, which supported, financially and ideologically, new Muslim religious-political organizations. During that period many emissaries, who did not stay long in Moscow or other places in Russia, found themselves in the Chechen Republic, for some reason or other. The Russian-Chechen conflict which flared up at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and turned into a crime against humanity had not only a political background, but also an inter-religious tint. The separatists in Chechnya, with a view to legitimizing their actions constantly resorted to religion, thus increasing interethnic and inter-religious tension.

At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it became necessary to change the situation drastically: a new system of world outlook should have formed in Chechen society which would have asserted that religion, particularly Islam, not only did not contradict the realities of our day, moreover, contained a great potential for the development of civil society and demonstrated itself as the supreme condition ensuring the integrity of the Russian Federation. During that tragic historical period the policy of the new leader of Chechnya, Ahmad-Hajji Kadyrov, took shape on such platform. The appointment of a religious figure as head of the administration of the Chechen Republic was a clever choice of Russia's President Putin. It was aimed at stemming separatist tendencies in the region and stabilizing the socio-political situation in the country.

At present religion becomes one of the legitimate factors of the public life in the Chechen Republic. State power turns to the basic principles and values of Islam, thus emphasizing its confessional identity. We can frequently see the leadership of the republic in a mosque. Religion not only does not contradict modern realities and democracy, but also has a great potential for the development of the civil foundations of society's development. Religious-political radicalism and extremism are directly connected with the low level of

socio-economic development, which is expressed, among other things, in xenophobia, part of which is dislike of Islam, in Russian society. Islamophobia has now become part and parcel of the consciousness of a considerable section of the country's population. This is due to the inner conflict in Russia which has features of inter-religious tension, and is also connected with the international situation. Regrettably, there is a stereotype in Russian society nowadays – international terrorism is a synonym of Islamic terrorism.

For the ruling circles of many states terrorism becomes a handy instrument of pursuing domestic and foreign policies convenient for them. Many people emphasize the fact that this becomes a policy of western countries. Such ideas can be found in the policy of the Russian leadership. In this sense fight against terrorism is a convenient pretext for the creation of intrastate socio-political constructions, as well as the far-fetched foreign-policy plans and technologies.

A special place belongs to the confessional organization and the activity of religious figures themselves among the elements of the religious complex which connect religion with politics. Depending on the specific features of religion, particularly Islam, this influence can be open and comprehensive or predominating. As far as the Chechen Republic is concerned, it is important that the spiritual leaders there have always played an authoritative socio-political role. I should say that there are no discussions as to the form of Islam which should exist in the republic. It should only be traditional Islam – another trend of it is not recognized either by the authorities or politicians. Here we see that politics exerts pressure on religion. The constitutional separation of religion from the state does not deny the possibility of close interaction between religious and secular institutions. Historical experience of the activity of government institutions confirms the readiness of the state to cooperate with religious bodies, protecting the religious rights of

citizens, initiating a dialogue of Islam with Orthodox Christianity, and quite often financing the construction of mosques, churches, religious centers, etc.

Big mosques are now under construction in Chechnya, tombs of Chechen holy men and places connected with their life are taken care of. The Kunta-Hajji Russian Islamic University is functioning in Grozny, the capital of the Chechen Republic. Its students (about four hundred of them) will get specialty of imam-khatyb – teacher of Arabic and the Shariah sciences and the diploma of a higher education. The creation of this university was not an easy thing, for some of the authorities were against it. But here, too politics played its role. Moreover, President Putin has sent a message of greeting to the republican leadership on the occasion of the opening of the university.

Three schools have been opened in the republic where pupils, apart from regular curricula, will learn the Koran. Each school has one hundred boys from ten to thirteen years of age, and the term of study is three years.

Every year the Chechen Republic is the venue of the International peace forum “Islam – religion of peace and creation,” in which authoritative Islamic religious figures from various countries, public and political figures, and representatives of other confessions take part. One of the aims of the forum is to step up the activity of Russian Muslims to oppose religious-political extremism and terrorism and support government bodies and public organizations in pursuing a policy of tolerance and respect for the peoples of Russia.

In the center of Grozny stands the “Heart of Chechnya” mosque which is a beautiful sight of the city. The mosque can accommodate more than ten thousand parishioners and is Europe’s biggest.

Political figures of different orientations, primarily those in power, use religion in their interests. They use different means, among

which are the granting of material privileges, certain pressure on the public, appeal to common interests, etc. These means are used in modern Chechnya, too. Such form of intertwining politics and religion has a long-standing tradition in Russia, and it is widely used by modern politicians. The head of the Chechen Republic is the initiator and active proponent of work for establishing and maintaining mutual connections between the spiritual board and the government of Chechnya.

Protest sentiments are quite often expressed through religion. In modern Russia turning to religion of considerable sections of the population is conditioned, among other things, by their mistrust in the policy pursued by the authorities and statements made by state figures.

Thus, politics and religion are invariably connected with each other. Underestimation by the authorities of the religious component of their policy, just as politicization of religion lead to curtailment of systematic purposeful work on religious education of the people.

The North Caucasus is one of the most risk-contributing regions of modern Russia. Ethnic and confessional diversity of the population of the North Caucasian region aggravates the perception and effects of socio-cultural risks entailed by modernization. Global and Russian risks are increased by concrete regional ones. An important place among them is held by ethnopolitical risks, such as extremism, terrorism, nationalism, xenophobia and radicalization of young people [Astvatsaturova, 2012: 44; Avksentyev and others. 2014]. One of the prospects for overcoming them is the preservation of a dialogue on the basis of North Caucasian and Russian values, and strengthening of Russian identity.

Another category of risks is the social one – social and territorial differentiation, deterioration of living standards, unemployment, and criminalization, including among young people.

Socio-cultural risks are caused by the disintegration of the value system, destruction of group cultures, and loss of ideology by the modern generation of Russian people. In the view of O. Astafyeva, the socio-cultural risks also include risks connected with globalization, belated cultural development, loss of basic characteristics of ethnic cultures and, accordingly, transformation of models of ethnocultural identity, negative self-organization, absence of proper cultural policy, etc. [Astafyeva 2008: 183; Shadzhe 2014: 303].

### **Traditions and Innovations in the Context of Socio-cultural Risks**

It is known that there are two types of socio-cultural transformations: traditionalization and modernization. The former is transfer from openness to closeness or greater closeness of society by creating or strengthening the elements of culture and social structure which ensure priority of prescribed standards and rules of behavior of subjects as compared with a possible initiative of their actions. Modernization is transfer from closeness to openness of society or its greater openness by differentiating and complicating its structure which considerably broadens the freedom of choice and responsibility of subjects in accordance with a greater complex character of personality and its growing requirements.

Tradition is understood as a mechanism of the reproduction of social institutions and norms in which the maintenance and preservation of the latter are based on the very fact of their existence in the past and traditional actions and relations are oriented not to reaching a definite goal and not to realizing a specially fixed norm, but to repeating the past sample [Levada 1970: 253].

Innovation is more often understood as the introduction of something new of a technological or scientific-technical character

requiring socio-cultural interpretation. This is a specific mechanism of the formation of new models, patterns of behavior, and technologies, which become prerequisites for the renovation of society and culture.

Traditional society is opposed to modern one by a number of parameters: the form of activity of actors of social action (collectivism and individualism), distinctiveness of a social structure (diffusion and differentiation), the way of perception of reality (emotionality and rationality), the method of interaction outside (contextuality, isolation and expansion). As a result of a search for philosophical foundation of traditional society it has been determined that the main parameter of any society is openness or closeness, and differences between all forms of openness and closeness are determined by orientation to the past or to the future. From these positions traditional closed society has the following features: it opposes innovations which exceed a certain static limit. The system of relations in this society is not only a result of the reproduction of a traditional program, but also a guarantee of their preservation from the impact of the sources of unsanctioned innovations. The specifics of traditionalism lies not in the absence of innovations, but in the domination of the value of statics, which is expressed in the strict filter of innovations and the narrow step of novelty and suppression of everything which goes beyond the allowed framework.

Succession, base of support on one's own traditions are necessary for any society wishing to ensure its stability and identity. With such approach tradition as a parameter of order becomes an equal participant in a dialogue between the new and the old, which guarantees the originality of the very process of changes and development.

Such view is applicable to regions of Russia, primarily the North Caucasus, where deep-going layers of original culture still exist and are interpreted in the aspect of spiritual renovation.

The Russian scholar E. Pain believes that there are two different phenomena – socio-political traditionalism and cultural traditionalism, and there are quite a few examples of how carefully certain societies treat their ethnocultural heritage, at the same time demonstrating an active bent to economic and socio-political modernization [Pain 2003: 16].

Lectures revisited. URL: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/reith1999/lecture3.shtml>

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*This article is based on a report made  
at the All-Russia scientific conference  
“Islam at the Beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”  
in Makhachkala, Republic of Dagestan,  
on December 19–20, 2013.*

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**THE NORTH CAUCASIAN REGION AS AN AREA  
OF SOCIO-CULTURAL RISKS. SOCIAL RISKS AT  
THE PRESENT DEVELOPMENT STAGE  
OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS**

The society of risk now acquires the features of generality. An analysis of risks, including socio-cultural ones, is often actualized in the conditions of transitivity. Transitional society is characterized by

the transitory nature of all elements of the social system from society of a transitional type to modern society, which gives rise to contradictions in perception of social changes. This conditions the contradictory character of social risks in transitional society, as well as the attitude to them in society.

The North Caucasus is one of the greatest risk-generating areas of modern Russia. The ethnic and confessional diversity of the population of the North Caucasian region in modern conditions exacerbates the perception of socio-cultural risks, brought about by modernization.

Megarisks, global and Russian risks, are increased by concrete, regional ones. An important place among them is held by ethnopolitical risks, such as extremism, terrorism, nationalism, xenophobia, and radicalization of young people. One of the means to overcome them is the preservation of a dialogue on the basis of North Caucasian and Russian values and the strengthening of Russian identity.

There is another category of risks – social ones. They include social and territorial differentiation, a lower quality of life, unemployment, and criminalization, especially among young people.

The socio-cultural risks are caused by the disintegration of the value system, destruction of group cultures, and the absence of ideals among the modern generation of Russians. The socio-cultural risks also include those connected with globalization: belated cultural progress leading to information-communication inequality, greater volumes and greater role of information, loss of basic characteristics of ethnic cultures, and, accordingly, transformation of models of ethnocultural identity, negative self-organization, lost opportunities of cultural policy, etc.

## **Traditions and Innovations in the Context of Cultural Risks**

There are two types of socio-cultural transformations: traditionalization and modernization. The former is transfer from openness to closeness, or greater closeness of society by way of creating or strengthening those elements of culture and social structure which ensure the priority of prescribed standards and rules of behavior of subjects as compared with the possible initiative of their actions. Modernization means, among other things, transfer from closeness to openness of society, or its greater openness, by differentiation and complication of its structure, which broadens the freedom of choice and responsibility of subjects in accordance with the progress of the individual and his or her greater requirements.

Innovation is understood as the introduction of something new of a technological or scientific-technical character, which requires socio-cultural interpretation. This is a specific mechanism of the formation of new models, patterns, behaviors, and technologies which become prerequisites for the renovation of society and culture.

Traditional society is opposed to modern one by several parameters: the form of activity of the actors of social action (collectivism and individualism), social structure (diffusion and differentiation), the way of perception of reality (emotionality and rationality), the method of interaction outside (contextuality, isolation and expansion).

One of the basic parameters of traditional society is its openness or closeness, and orientation to the future or the past. A specificity of traditionalism lies not in the absence of innovations, but in the domination of the values of statics of shape and essence.

The Russian scholar Emil Pain believes that there are two different phenomena – socio-political traditionalism and cultural

traditionalism, and that there are quite a few examples how cautiously societies regard and behave toward their ethnocultural heritage, demonstrating at the same time great interest in economic and socio-political modernization.

Cultural traditionalism with such approach not only does not prevent the development of modernization structures, but is also one of the conditions of modernization.

### **Regional Specificities of Identification Processes and Possibilities of Adaptation to Socio-cultural Risks**

In our view, the promising correlation of conventionality and modernization is expressed in the identification of ethnic groups.

A number of objective factors, such as the existence of the North Caucasian region in the Russian Federation, inevitable modernization (industrialization, urbanization), the drawing of all societies in globalizing world civilization cannot but leave the peoples inhabiting the region in their original state. Modernization, slowly but truly, transforms societies and cultures, as well as the region as a whole. The start of modernization in the North Caucasus began with its inclusion in state and political relations with Russia and in interethnic contacts with the Russian population whose greatest intensity was observed in Soviet time.

In experts' view, at present the North Caucasus has entered a stage of "stадial" modernization, primarily, the tumultuous urbanization of its republics.

However, socio-political and cultural modernization does not coincide. As far as the peoples of the North Caucasus and the region as a whole are concerned, it can be said that socio-political modernization can well be traced, whereas modernization of culture is not evident

enough. Culture remains largely traditional. Regeneration of traditional social institutions, mechanisms and ties is one of the facets of the stepping up of ethnic identity. The connection of traditions and ethnicity in the North Caucasus is quite natural, inasmuch as it fully corresponds to the matrix of the traditional socio-cultural system. Nevertheless, configurations of group and individual identities and identification processes look like plural, multilevel and fragmented. New identifications emerge regularly, including post-modernist, taking shape under the influence of a new space – virtual, network, etc.

Moreover, experts note that along with the seeming conventionality and archaism of social relations, the North Caucasus is one of the most dynamic regions of Russia. In this connection it would be necessary to pay attention to the dynamics of modern interethnic and confessional processes. The potential of risk of these processes is quite great.

In the light of these concepts it would seem that North Caucasian society cannot simply be determined as traditional, all the more so as modernized or modernizing. It exists and develops by itself in the realm of “conventionality – modernity,” gravitating now to one, now to the other pole by its separate sectors. As we have noted, the stability of ethnic patterns of traditional culture increases the originality and dynamics of the process of updating the North Caucasus and adapts it to socio-cultural risks.

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## **THE POLITICAL SITUATION IN KYRGYZSTAN**

Since the beginning of 2014 political instability in Central Asia has been on an increase, which is associated with the stepping up of the activity of the opposition movements. This situation applies to Kyrgyzstan in the first place, which has been the scene of continuing inter-clan struggle for a long time due to its adverse economic and political position. The political landscape of this small republic is characterized by many parties and groups of influence whose activities are determined by the ambitions of individual figures, above all, but not by any coherent programme.

The national opposition movement “Patriotic Forces of Kyrgyzstan”, claiming the status of the united opposition, was formed on February 12, 2014. According to analysts, its nucleus consists of influential people from the South. At the same time, R. Dzheyenbekov, a representative of the North and the leader of the “Democracy” parliamentary group, has become the chairman of the national opposition movement.

The nomination of a compromise figure demonstrated the opposition's refusal to protect regional interests in favor of national ones.

In December 2013, Dzheyenbekov visited the Maidan in Kiev, where he spoke in support of the protesters.

Kyrgyz newspaper “Delo № ...” wrote that the Euromaidan masterminds have announced a general gathering in Kiev: the Ex-President of Georgia Mikhail Saakashvili, the former Prime Minister of Poland Jaroslaw Kaczynski, the current Foreign Minister of Lithuania Linas Linkyavichus, Ravshan Dzheyenbekov represented Kyrgyzstan. Washington planned to give him the role of “Kyrgyz” Saakashvili.

On April 10, 2014, the first trial of strength of the new opposition movement took place when rallies were held simultaneously in major cities of Kyrgyzstan. They were not numerous, and the opposition failed to destabilize the situation in the republic at this time.

The opposition camp in the country is not uniform. In addition to the national organized movement “Patriotic Forces of Kyrgyzstan,” former associates of President Atambayev, known for their pro-Western orientation have personal motives against the incumbent president. According to independent experts, the West is trying to introduce another “revolutionary project” in Kyrgyzstan now, aimed at maintaining instability in the region and removing it from the sphere of influence of Moscow. An assumption is voiced in the republic that the domestic political struggle will not be stopped, but will replace the accents and participants even in case of success of the opposition.

The opposition proclaimed the strengthening of parliamentarism and the fight against the current authoritarian power as its primary goal. Actually, all the previous “revolutions” in Kyrgyzstan, which ended in the forced resignation of the country’s presidents, took place under these slogans. The National Liberation Movement is also against all major projects proposed by the present government, such as entry into the Customs Union, the removal of the United States’ air base from the Manas airport, and the new terms of the agreement on the “Kumtor” gold mining enterprises.

Independent experts believe that the opposition's demands are populist in nature and pose a threat to the economic security of Kyrgyzstan. This refers in particular to the nationalization of “Kumtor”. Its adoption would lead to a halt of the enterprise’s operation and would cause a great damage to the budget of the Republic, when there are no financial resources of its own for the development of the deposit. The refusal to participate in the Customs Union and the Eurasian

integration, as a whole (as the opposition insists) will eventually lead to the economic isolation of the republic and its transformation into an economic protectorate of China, which is effectively developing the Kyrgyz market. Meanwhile, according to Dzheenbekov, such a threat does not exist, however, it comes from Russia, which is not a friendly country to either Kyrgyzstan or other countries on the region, for that matter.

According to Dzheenbekov, “Central Asian countries need to start talks on the inviolability of borders in the region, in order to revise the concept of national security and foreign policy priorities, as the Russian threat is getting closer to our borders every day.”

The leader of the “New Opposition” has actively advocated the preservation of the United States' military base at the Manas airport. He explained the need to maintain the US military presence in the country with the ability to earn rentals, additional jobs for local residents, continued partnership with the United States, and the security problems that had worsened after the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan.

President Atambayev has strengthened the executive branch and his position through staff changes, thus opposing the growing influence of the President in the South to the intensification of the opposition. Increased tension between the legislative and executive branches in the republic has taken place against the background of the growing opposition since the beginning of the year.

Thus, the collapse of the parliamentary coalition and the resignation of the cabinet (as a result of no confidence vote to the government) were due to the confrontation between the executive and the legislature.

Kyrgyz experts believe that “frequent personnel changes in the policy of Kyrgyzstan are systemic in nature. The political system and culture of the country have a low credit of trust on the part of the political

forces. A politician belonging to a particular group of influence becomes undesirable for other political groups after a certain period of work at the top. They initiate the process of his discredit and removal from the post.” The last change of government was associated with the stepping up of the activity of the party “Ata-Meken”, which is referred to the pro-Western lobby. The unstable political situation in the country deters many foreign investors. At the end of 2013 participants of the riots smashed the office of the Australian gold mining company “Z-Explorer”. In 2014 one of the Kazakh companies was paralyzed as a result of mass protests. Demands to nationalize “Kumtor” were accompanied with blocking of roads and violence.

Russian investments are becoming increasingly important for the country where foreign investors are hesitant to invest considerable funds in the country and to participate in long-term projects. Currently, the Russian Federation is among the four key investors of Kyrgyzstan. In 2013, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic reported a threefold increase in investments of Russian businessmen in the Kyrgyz economy. Assistance provided by the Russian Federation expressed its intention to build a few large hydropower plants, duty-free supply of fuels and lubricants, implementation of energy projects of “Gazprom”, including the sale of “KyrgyzGas.”

In April 2014, “Gazprom” acquired OAO “KyrgyzGas” for a nominal sum, possessing the gas distribution network in the country. “Gazprom” has guaranteed investment assets of 20 billion rubles over five years. Observers have noted that the transaction is considered a great success, because “KyrgyzGas” is burdened with debt and infrastructural problems, and it was difficult to find an investor.

Cooperation between the two countries has also been strengthened in the military sphere. The Russian Federation renders military-technical support to the armed forces of the Kyrgyz Republic,

it has strengthened its military presence at the airbase in Kant. It should be noted that the coordinating role of Kyrgyzstan in the CSTO has increased considerably with the opening of its operations center in the south of the republic, in the city of Osh, and in 2013 large-scale military exercises of the CSTO were held in the country.

Official Bishkek adheres to the declared position of the complete removal of the US air base from the Manas civilian airport. The signing of a memorandum on the sale of 51% shares of the airport Manas to a sum of \$1 billion to the Russian company “Rosneft” in February 2014 evoked great repercussions. As the prices of fuels and lubricants are subsidized by the Russian side, it provided Kyrgyz aviation with access to cheap fuel. The opposition has criticized the government, saying that it sold strategic assets of the country. However, the share of receipts was up to 60% of Manas revenues from the NATO center of transportation, and the airport can fall into a serious crisis without external financial resources, according to the republic's authorities. At the same time, the accession of Kyrgyzstan to the Customs Union and deeper economic integration with Russia, provoke greater controversy in the country. The opposition has organized protests against the entry of the Kyrgyz Republic into the Customs Union which have taken place even in Bishkek. Many people fear the negative consequences of this step for the economy, especially rising prices of essential goods, as well as a rise in the prices of goods from China due to the introduction of new customs regulations which replenish the budget of the Kyrgyz Republic. There is no unity on this issue in the republican parliament.

The decision to join the Customs Union has ambiguously been received in the country. This could become a political “trump card” of the opposition in order to achieve certain preferences for the economy of Kyrgyzstan. In particular, it concerns a transitional period for three

years and provides subsidies for the maintenance of the national economy in the case of the Kyrgyz Republic joining the Customs Union. The President rejected the “road map” on the entry of the Republic in the Customs Union, which had been evolved by the Eurasian Economic Commission.

The Government of the Republic intends to develop a “road map” of Kyrgyzstan’s entry in the Customs Union, after which it shall have to pass expertise in parliament, and only then will it be submitted for public discussion. Then it must be approved by Kyrgyz Parliament, and finally – the founding fathers of the Customs Union.

At the moment, cooperation with Russia remains the dominant vector of foreign policy of Kyrgyzstan. Financial support of Moscow promotes this in many ways. However, the stepping up of the activity of the pro-Western circles, in conjunction with the economic and social problems, threatens Kyrgyzstan with another round of political transformations.

The traditional confrontation of the North and the South may be an additional factor of destabilization of the political situation in the country. At the same time, we should not exclude that such separatist sentiments can be heated by the pro-Western forces interested in destabilizing.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> <http://topwar.ru/45998>

<sup>2</sup> <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-gov/2649>

<sup>3</sup> <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-gov/2641>

<sup>4</sup> <http://analitika.org/kyrgyzstan/kg-gov/2649>

<sup>5</sup> [http://vesti.kg/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=item&id=27247](http://vesti.kg/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=27247)

*“Rossya i novye gosydarstva Evrazii /  
IMEMO RAN”, Moscow, 2014, No 2, pp. 84–89.*

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## **TURKMENS: ETHNOS AND FAITH**

“Turkmen-nama” – “The Book of the Turkmens” was published in 2012 and reprinted in 2014. (Shohrat Kadyrov. “Turkmen-nama. Historical and Ethnographic Atlas.” Upsala Moscow. IFECAS. 2014 – 338 pp.).

Shohrat Kadyrov, the Institute of Oriental Studies, presented a comprehensive historical picture of centuries-long formation of the Turkmen people and their transformation into a single nation. This first so fundamental historical and ethnographic work is based on scientific data, accumulated by his predecessors. The detailed information on history, arts, crafts, demography, household relations, customs of Turkmen and their ancestors are described, as well as features of Muslim culture and national life of modern Turkmenistan – all information from the Neolithic to the present day is covered in the work under review.

The publication goes beyond the usual boundaries, as the author enters into polemics with various ethnological and ethnographic schools, putting forward his own ideas about ethnicity, and attempts to make them the key to the other sections of the book. The concept of ethnicity, its development and functioning of nation building is explained in extensive introductory chapter “What is ethnicity” (pp. 16–67). Readers can skip this theoretical section as it is quite complicated and written for an academic audience.

Briefly, S. Kadyrov's hypothesis about the nature of ethnicity is as follows: the ethnographer proposes to use faith in kinship, in irrational concept of the mind and emotions of a person for determining stability of the ethnic group. Kinship is the sacrament of birth and death, as it has the features of faith (p. 49). At the same time the scholar

draws our attention to the rationality, functionality, and social usefulness of faith. Such faith, in his opinion, is close to the faith of man in the family, the loved ones, and it can be applied to all ethnic communities. Faith in relationships, real and imaginary, is the most important feature that is attached to all ethnic groups and types – so it is possible to formulate the main conclusion of the theoretical reasoning of S. Kadyrov.

According to him, an essential part of this faith is “belief in an exemplary relationship.” The author implies a certain ethnic core, which is regarded as a sample in different ethnic groups and communities. «The sample is not constant in the historical and ethnographic perspectives. Thus, different ethnic Turkmen: Salyr, Chovdur, Ersari and now Ahalteke were “exemplary” among the Turkmen at different times.» – S. Kadyrov writes (p. 56).

As a result, the scholar offers his definition of ethnicity – “Ethnos is a group of people united by kinship, its idealization and by choice of an example group on the criterion of primogeniture in it, a group, structured according to the degree of kinship to the older (ancient), and later to the dominant subgroup numerically or in the status position. This is a social structure, where relations and consolidation of members are based on faith and beliefs of the unity of the real and the fictional relationship to each other, the absolute and, at the same time, the relative value of kinship” (pp. 53, 56).

Such a hypothesis about the nature of ethnic group, put forward by the author of the book “Turkmen-Nama” can cause a lot of questions from experts, because evidence is clearly insufficient, and the original conceptual apparatus is unusual not only for ordinary, but also scientific perception.

Faith is declared as a binding concept in the chain of logical constructions of S. Kadyrov. Almost sacred belief in kinship that

permeates ethnic communities at all levels up to modern nations, and which should be taken for granted, simply does not require scientific evidence. This is the original postulate of the author. He just believes in this faith, proclaims its paradigm of ethnicity (p. 57), and claims that the definition of ethnic lexeme of “imagination kinship” or “idea of kinship” appeared in place of the concept of “faith in relationships” by mistake. (p. 49).

Naturally, there are many doubts about such allegations. First of all, are almost all people in the world believers in reality? Rather, they are in small traditional archaic ethnic groups and worship their totems. But is it widespread among today's major communities, especially Western ones that took shape among nations and peoples? Is this faith at all? How can the bearers of this faith describe it – both intellectuals and ordinary people? Somewhere it can be akin to belief in God's chosen people, messiahship, reminding of belief in ancestors or “national spirit.” Someone can call it psychic norm. This may be an instinctive feeling, the collective unconscious, biological property, which does not have anything to do with faith in a general meaning.

Rather, in most cases it would be better to talk about the feeling, feeling of kinship or common origin by blood, spirit, culture, historical destiny, that is not necessarily faith, and, moreover, a blind faith. Therefore, it seems more correct to speak about the idealization of kinship, rather than faith in relationship.

At the same time, the spiritual faith – Islam – has played a very important role in the centuries-old ethnic self-construction and self-identity formation of the Turkmen. Unfortunately, it is said in the book in passing. The solidarity of the Turkmen tribes and people took place not only on the basis of linguistic community and economic structures, kinship and political alliances, but also because of ethno-social reorganization associated with entering into multinational Islamic

civilization, in ruling dynasties and armies of Muslims. At the same time, the tribal hierarchical management structures were changed.

This story is described in part in the “Book of the Turkmens”. It shows the influence of the Arab, Iranian, Turkic areas and the Mongol presence on the formation of Turkmen Muslim culture and ethics. Although Islam began to win the hearts of the Turkmen already in the seventh century, it has been firmly established among a significant part of the tribes in the tenth century, when the territory of modern Turkmenistan became the center of the Seljuk state. Many Turkmen had found themselves in Asia Minor and the Middle East during the military campaigns of the Seljuks. Some of them had assimilated, but a lot of them still live in Syria, Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan. A majority of Turkmen is Sunni, but there are many Shiites among them.

The new aristocracy, revered for its piety, godliness, religious teachings and practices began to emerge among the Turkmen along with the spreading of Islam. The religious aristocracy even caused certain changes in ethnic formations, which can be traced to this day. Noble extended families – ovlyads (hojja seids, ata, magtymy, sheehy) – often try not to mix blood with commoners, while the ovlyads are considered to be saints (pp. 146–147). It is assumed, that ovlyads are able to form exemplary ethnic cores inside sub-ethnic groups of the Turkmen nation, presenting some kind of examples to follow, and some of them can become dominant even in politics. But we should not exaggerate the importance of traditional cultural-kinship unification in the modern state system of Turkmenistan.

It is obvious that the presence of Turkmens in the dynamic Islamic world in the first centuries of its active expansion in the territories of different peoples had caused intensive processes of

ethnogeny in their communities. This had influenced the increasing anthropological diversity of the inhabitants of the Caspian area.

Probably, at this stage archaic faith in totems, ancestors and kinship start to give way to faith in spiritual kinship, and the influence of religion and culture on the formation and development of ethnic groups has qualitatively changed. Nowadays monotheistic faith blocks recurrences of ancient faith in blood kinship in many cases, whether real or imagined.

Turkmenistan has retained the custom of ancestor worship, but it is not faith in them. Believers appeal for intercession and mercy to Allah. Faith in kinship is an anachronism for modern society, but idealization of the custom still remains, which is natural to people. Ethnic consciousness is expanding, ethnic groups are evolving, becoming super-ethnic groups, and the role of religious faith remains quite stable.

Ethnologists, and in general, social scientists are engaged in a rather complicated task on the interaction of ethnic processes of development or degradation of our spiritual life. In the meantime, Russian anthropologists and ethnographers carry on unproductive debates about the features and nature of ethnos and do not notice that each school sets different goals and objectives of research, use different methodologies, put forward different concepts in the same terms and study quite dissimilar societies. Some of them make conclusions on the examples of the United States and other advanced countries, others – on Eurasian societies, for example, Turkmenistan, and it has eventually brought research and discourse on ethnicity and nation to a standstill.

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**WILL IT BE POSSIBLE TO CONQUER  
THE “ISLAMIC STATE”?**

This question is asked by almost every analyst whether professional or amateur (the latter are many and varied). Discussions on the subject were especially lively at the turn of the 1970s – 1980s, after the Islamic revolution in Iran. The main thesis at the time was that the revolution of 1979 was a temporary deviation from “normal development,” that it would pass as a sickness, and everything would turn back as it used to be. Beginning from the 1990s the belief in the ultimate victory over the Taliban and HAMAS has lived on. The end of “political Islam,” which is often a synonym of Islamism, has been predicted time and time again. However, Islamism has gained in strength. The Islamists are thirsting for power, and gain it in certain countries. They have entrenched themselves in new (mainly African) territories. Islamists sit in parliaments of most Muslim countries, where they present the main opposition force to the ruling regimes. They organize manifestations of tens and hundreds of thousands of supporters in big cities, and millions of Muslims take their side.

What do the Islamists want? They want “more Islam” in the state, the economy, the family and society, which have lost their religious identity over the centuries. Islamists have different programs, and use different methods to attain their aims. Some of them say that people should return to Islam immediately, disregarding losses and difficulties, by hook or by crook. Others maintain that there should be no hurry, matters should proceed softly, and society should itself realize that the only way out of the general crisis is transfer on to the “Islamic development path.”

## **Where Is the Strength of Islamism?**

Islamism as an ideological concept is a reaction of the Muslim world to its economic and political failures, collapse of its national and imitation development models, and insolvency of the ruling elites. The Islamists base themselves on concepts and standards laid down in Islam, confirming the only correct “Islamic alternative.” The proof of its righteousness and success is the divine predestination, as well as the contention that Islam is the “most perfect and ultimate religion.”

Islamism is a “monster” natural for the Muslim world, a complex phenomenon with deep historical and cultural roots and modern reasons.<sup>1</sup> Not taking into account these circumstances, it will be impossible to pursue a correct policy in the Muslim world, just as the victory over religious and political extremism will be impossible either.

Islamism is not something taken from the outside. Of course, the Taliban has been formed with the help of the Pakistani Intelligence service. Israel has also helped create HAMAS hoping to use it against the Palestinian resistance movement of Yasir Arafat, and al Qaeda has come into being with support of western special services. However, the favorable ground for Islamist groupings has been prepared for decades, long before coming to power of foreign “engineers.” Analogues of al Qaeda, Taliban, jihad movements, etc. would have come into being by themselves, along with other groupings and under other names, just as the emergence of an “Islamic state” has become inevitable in the chaos of the chronic crisis in the Middle East. Richard Young describes the situation there as “myriads of polarization levels within society.”<sup>2</sup> However, Islamist stars have been the brightest ones in this “cosmos.”

It is useless to try to establish total control over the Islamists. True, they can be manipulated, only to a certain extent, because they are extremely unyielding, dead set to their world outlook, and proceed from their own interests. It is only in this context that we should

understand compromises between the Islamists and the United States, European countries, and Russia.

### **Islamism is differentiated within itself.**

#### **There are three trends in it**

The first, more moderate Islamists pursue a comparatively milder policy, laying greater emphasis on the cultural and educational spheres, and Islamization of the family life. They act within the framework of the constitutions of their states. The moderate Islamists maintain a dialogue with the West, do not reject its values outright and use democratic institutions in their activity. Islamists of Turkey, Tunisia, and Tajikistan can be cited as an example. (The moderate Islamists do not call themselves such, but present themselves as Islamic reformers, which is just, in a way).

The second trend is represented by radicals who are more resolute in their theory and practice. They would like to see Islam as the foundation of a broad “Islamic *perestroika*.” Just like the moderate Islamists, the radicals successfully use democracy in their interests, take part in elections, and even win them. They act not only within the constitutional framework, but also use street protest actions which play a no small role in traditional and post-traditional society, almost on a par with parliamentary and presidential elections.

The third, extremist, trend is oriented to uncompromising and even armed struggle. Islamist extremism is similar to terrorism, which can be seen almost every day all over the world. The extremists are striving to reach their aims here and now. They are not bound by moral or political liabilities with anybody or anything. This explains their extreme cruelty. As they assert, they are responsible only to our Lord for their actions, and His name justifies their deadliest deeds. The “global index” of terrorism, according to the data of the Australian-

American-British Institute of Economics and World for 2014 has grown by 44 percent. More than 80 percent of victims of terrorist acts were in Afghanistan, Iraq, Nigeria, Pakistan and Syria. However, a civil war has been raging in Iraq, Syria and Afghanistan, which is characterized, as a rule, by the extreme degree of violence against the peaceful civilian population. This is why victims in the course of the civil war can be regarded not only a result of terrorist acts, but also as war casualties.

All these three trends in Islamism are close enough. There is a great distance between the President of Turkey Recep Erdogan and the former head of al Qaeda Osama bin Laden, however the paradigm of Islamism is broad enough, and both these figures can be part of it. It is not every moderate Islamist that will inevitably turn into an extremist. It takes time for an Islamist to become an extremist. Yet, we cannot ignore the fact that part of Islamists (especially young men) often take to more radical positions. People in Russia know this well enough on the example of the North Caucasus where the third generation of militant fighters has grown up (Opti Mudarov was 19 when he committed an act of terror in Grozny on October 5, 2014). Young men pertain to glorification of jihadist-militants, who cannot be vanquished even by the military coalition created by the United States, to say nothing of national special services of many countries, including Russia.

Hence, it follows that military victory over Islamist extremists, who are best of all represented by the Islamic state, will be temporary and give a pause, not long enough, before the further confrontation both within the Muslim ummah and between Islamism and non-Muslim oecumene – the West, Russia, China, India, and certain African states. The latter contention returns us to the problem of a “clash of civilizations.”<sup>3</sup> Tension between Islam and other civilizational areas, above all, the Euro-Christian area, will long be on the agenda. In this

case Islam comes out not as “simply” religion, but in a broader sense as a socio-cultural entity united by common history and tradition, as a civilization with Islamism as its segment. If civilizations do not clash, they “chafe against each other” in a harsh manner, and this is especially dangerous where Islamism acts on behalf of Islam.

The westernized Muslim elites and part of society supporting them (mainly the middle class) are the direct opponent of Islamists. From the point of view of the Islamists, they are hypocrites, traitors of “true Islam,” and stooges of the West, and earlier of the Soviet Union, and Islamist attacks are spearheaded against them. The West in this context is a secondary foe. Blows against it (September 11, 2001), attacks on U.S. military, terrorist acts in Europe are, above all, the desire to bolster up self-esteem. The prestige of Islamists is enhanced by their struggle against foreign presence on Muslim lands, and interference of western countries with internal Muslim affairs. It is a kind of Muslim-Muslim civil war.

### **Where Is the Weakness of Islamism?**

Extreme Islamism today is vulnerable because it does not have charismatic leaders of global importance, like, say, Osama bin Laden. There are no persons comparable to Ayatollah Khomeini. Without such people a religious-political movement becomes defective. The head of the Islamic State Khalif Abu Bakr al-Bagdadi is not fit for the role of the messiah, inasmuch as he has not acquired enough political and religious authority. There are no indisputable authorities among Islamists either in the Middle East, or North Africa, or Central Asia.

Another weakness of the extremists of the Islamic State is their cruelty – they kill non-Muslims, priests who are not to their liking, western and Iraqi journalists, they restore slavery and use medieval Shariah punishment. All this discredit them in the eyes of most

Muslims who are convinced of Islam being tolerant religion, religion of peace. Thus, the extremists narrow down the base of their support themselves (in 1990–1991 in Algeria they found themselves isolated from society and were defeated due to their cruelty).

Finally, the Islamists are ignorant in the matters of state management. The downfall of radical and extremist Islamism begins with their gaining political victory, to be moiré exact, with their coming to power. The time comes when Islamists have to tackle the daily economic, social and political problems, implement reforms, maintain stability and establish their legitimacy as the ruling regime. To do this proves more difficult than criticize and protest in the name of Islam.

Muhammad Mursi who became President of Egypt in 2012, failed to cope with these tasks. The Afghan Talibs were unable to extricate the country from the impasse of the crisis. The Shi'ite Islamists in Iran could not overcome a crisis in their country. I shall venture to suppose that the defeat of the Islamic State in Iraq will begin as soon as its leaders come to power by creating their own quasi-state. True, they will hardly be allowed to do this.

However, there are exceptions. We mean Turkey, where the followers of moderate Islamism, having come to power in 2002, have been working for positive economic results, remain allies of the West, and, though cautiously, take part in the fight against the extremists. Turkey, as a national state created by Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, a consistent opponent of religious conservatism, has been a “secular exception” in the Muslim world. The ruling Party of justice and development “has changed the domestic policy of Turkey and also its foreign policy in accordance with Islamic vision.”<sup>4</sup>

Mention should be made of Tunisia, where a ruling coalition emerged in 2011 with the participation of the moderate Islamic party “a-Nakhda,” which is compared with the ruling party of Turkey.<sup>5</sup>

We should note that “an-Nakhda” suffered defeat at the 2014 elections, but it did not act outside the constitutional framework, and its secular opponents immediately announced that they were not going to oust it from the political process.

Authoritarianism can justly be called the main obstacle on the way of Islamists. Suffice it to recall the regimes of Saddam Hussein, Muammar Qaddafi, Islam Karimov, who is still in power in Uzbekistan, and Bashar Asad, still ruling Syria, although with great difficulties. The dictatorial regimes established by them, despite their cruelty and harshness, are more rational and answerable for action than the often unpredictable rule of religious fanatics.

Indicative in this respect is the situation in Syria, where Bashar Asad still retains his presidential post largely due to support of Moscow and Tehran. For Vladimir Putin he remained the last and only vestige of the former Soviet presence, memory about the bipolar world when the U.S.S.R. was equal to the United States. In the course of the civil war in his country Bashar Asad succeeded in gaining certain popularity thanks to his ability to oppose the extremists. His departure, on which the members of the international coalition insist, can result in the disintegration of Syria and, without doubt, in the strengthening of the positions of the Islamic State.

It would be appropriate to recall the situation in Afghanistan at the beginning of the 1990s. After the withdrawal of the Soviet troops from that country Russia has refused to come out as the successor of the U.S.S.R., having abandoned President Mohammad Najibullah, who had been in power there from 1987. Even deprived of assistance and doomed to failure his regime continued to exist for considerable time and was overthrown only in 1992. It can be assumed that given foreign aid Najibullah could have stayed in power for longer time and bolstered up the forces of national reconciliation, which could have prevented the

capture of Kabul by Taliban in 1996. In that case developments in Afghanistan, and in the entire Greater Middle East, for that matter, could have been different. Incidentally, the execution of Najibullah by Talibs reminded the assassination of the Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi in 2011. Bashar Asad also tried to form some general national coalition, an alternative to which would be the exacerbation of the civil war and the strengthening of the extremist forces.

The authoritarians adhering to the positions of secular nationalism cannot ignore the Islamic factor. Taking into account the general growth of religious consciousness, they have to appeal to Islam in order to bolster up their popularity among faithful Muslims. This gives additional legitimacy to their rule. They “catch” Islamic slogans from the religious opposition. The problem of relations with Islamists is always pressing for an authoritarian ruler. As a rule, the authorities wage a struggle against them, and in some countries (for instance, in Central Asia, in monarchies of the Persian Gulf, in Egypt under the former president Hosni Mubarak and the present one Abd al-Fattah as-Sisi) their parties and movements have been banned. However, there is another experience: the kings of Morocco have been in constant secret contacts with Islamists, including radical ones, and their dialogue makes it possible to avoid excesses typical of most Arab states. In any case, the authoritarian rulers have to observe a balance of power, inasmuch as persecutions of the Islamists can give an opposite effect, giving them more popularity among the local population. The Russian North Caucasus is a case in point, where the Islamic opposition continues to act and gain popularity, despite systematic actions (even military) against it.

## **Conclusion**

The influence of Islam on politics at national and regional levels and globally will grow, which is a prerequisite of the broadening of the geopolitical area of Islamism. This is due, among other things, to the constant instability within the Muslim world, as well as its conflict relations with the West. One of the consequences of the slow transformation of the system of international relations and one of the world poles of forces is Islamism, and above all, its radical and extremist trends, which can be considered an “asymmetrical answer” of the Muslim ummah to multipolarity.

In extreme forms Islamism will reveal itself spontaneously. However, it may be possible to predict somehow the time and place of its manifestations. They emerge, first and foremost, in countries and regions gripped by systemic crises and also where pre-crisis phenomena are observed. If one looks at a map, the greater part of the Muslim world, except Southeast Asia (although the protest potential in an Islamic form is growing in Indonesia) and western part of North Africa, is under threat.

The main source of tension is the Islamic State, whose military and political potential proved unexpectedly high. Evidently, some time later members of the international coalition will announce military victory over it, which will boil down to the destruction of the strongholds of the Islamists and their heavy weapons, as well as the establishment of formal control of the local authorities over the liberated territories. However, military victory will not lead to a political solution of the problem.

The war against the Islamic State may give rise to the emergence of more extremist groups.<sup>6</sup> It is indicative that along with the fight against the Islamic State the UN Security Council also discussed the problem of its isolation, which means recognition of the possibility of

its existence for quite a long time (and even establishment of informal dialogues with it).

After defeat the jihadists will go underground, return to the countries of their origin from where they have come to the Middle East, and will continue their activity there. They will engage in propaganda, recruit supporters, and continue fight in the ranks of the Islamic opposition. The growing terrorist threat in European countries and in the United States will also be possible. They will spend the energy accumulated during their operations in the Middle East, and will take revenge against members of the international coalition and those who were their allies, including Russia, which supplies arms to the Iraqi government.

The Islamic State is simultaneously a subject and object of politics. Its role as a subject is indisputable. At the same time it can be regarded as an object used by foreign actors. Among the real and potential manipulators are Qatar, Turkey, and the United States. For Qatar the successes of the Islamic State means a testimony to its political significance and ability to influence the situation in the region. Turkey regards the Islamic State as an instrument for weakening the Kurdish movement and a means of pressure brought to bear on the Syrian regime. In the United States the Islamic State is viewed as an instrument to influence Bashar Asad and even to remove him. Common enmity becomes a sort of a bridge for improving relations between Washington and Tehran.

For Moscow the success of the Islamic State, in addition to the Taliban threat, can be another circumstance in favor of the Russian presence in Central Asia, and also the strengthening of the OCST. As shown by experience, the fight against the Islamic State may go on without uniting its opponents, primarily Russia. However, in that case Moscow may become tempted “to play the card of Islamism” in its

conflict with the West. First, Russia can assert that Islamism is solely a reaction of the Islamic world to the expansion of the West. Such approach was clearly seen in the policy of the Soviet Union in the early 1980s, after the Islamic revolution in Iran. At the time, speaking at the 26<sup>th</sup> congress of the CPSU Leonid Brezhnev said that under the banner of Islam a struggle for liberation was unfolding.<sup>7</sup> Official Russian ideology has appealed to the striving common to Muslims and Orthodox Christians to preserve their socio-cultural values which are allegedly threatened by the outside forces. Ultimately, the intention to create an Islamic state is quite comparable to the striving of the Russian ruling class to take their country along its own development path.

### **What is to be done to weaken the Islamic State and defeat it?**

To wage military operations simultaneously on the territory of Syria and Iraq, preventing regrouping and moving the Islamic State's units. In case of carrying on a land operation, to draw military units from Arab countries. To destroy the Islamic State's infrastructure.

To deal pinpoint blows in order to avoid casualties among the civilian population, even people sympathizing with the Islamic State. Otherwise the popularity of the latter will be growing. When there is no possibility to avoid casualties to express regret and pay compensation to the victims' families.

To inform the population about all cases of cruel behavior of the Islamic State militants toward the local population.

To search for and find potential charismatic leaders among high clerics and politicians, try to stem their activity, and get rid of them.

To use contradictions between Islamist organizations, for one, between IS groupings and al Qaeda, and watch the movement of militants from the IS organizations to al Qaeda.

To prevent in every way possible the activity of the former IS militants in the Muslim medium, especially their attempts to form groups around themselves and carry on propaganda work in Muslim temples.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> G. Mirsky. *Monstr islamizma* [The Monster of Islamism] // Vedomosti. 2014. October 16.
- <sup>2</sup> R. Young. From Transformation to Mediation: The Arab Spring Reframed. – [S. I.]. March 20, 2014. – (Carnegie Europe Paper).
- <sup>3</sup> I have already tried to answer this question. See: A. Malashenko. *I vsyo-taki oni stalkivayutsya* [Yet They Clash with One Another] / Moscow Carnegie Center. Moscow, 2007. (Briefing, vol. 9, issue 4).
- <sup>4</sup> Eligur B. Turkey's Declining Democracy // Current Trends in Islamic Ideology. – Vol. 17 / Hudson Inst. – [S. I.]. August 2014. – P. 151.
- <sup>5</sup> *Islamisty pobedili* [The Islamists Have Won] // [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2011/10/25\\_a\\_3812142.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2011/10/25_a_3812142.shtml)
- <sup>6</sup> J.M. Dorsey. War against Islamic State: Sowing Seeds of more extremist groups // [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/war-against-islamic-state\\_b\\_5907794.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/james-dorsey/war-against-islamic-state_b_5907794.html)
- <sup>7</sup> Report of the CC CPSU to the 26<sup>th</sup> CPSU Congress and current tasks of the party in the sphere of domestic and foreign policy. – Moscow, 1981, p. 18.

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