

## **ISLAM – RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH RELATIONS AND THE STATE IN THE POST-COMMUNIST RUSSIA**

### **Abstract**

After the fall of Soviet Union we can state a fact of a religious heritage in Russia. It is applied not only to the traditional religious institutions, like Moscow Patriarchy, but also to different heterodox religious movements. Now we can state a fact of the originally shaped religion policy of Moscow.

Orthodox Christianity in Russia has one universally recognized center – Moscow Patriarchy. Its position is shared by 90% of Russian Christians. But we can't say that the leaders have one consolidated opinion about the problems of the relations between Islam and Christianity. We can single out two groups; one can be called „For Islam” and the second „Against Islam”. Their followers have different views on the problems of proselytism, inter-religious dialogue and religion policy of the state and the foreign policy of Russia.

The same, but much more multifaceted situation is in Russian Islam. Muslims in Russia don't have any universally recognized authority. There are several organizations, regional or aspiring to the center position, authorities, sheikhs and popular homilists with their own opinions. Here we try to classify the main organizations and their views on the problem of a dialogue with Russian Orthodoxy, Christianity at all and the Russian State's regional policy.

**Key words:** Christianity, Orthodox, Russia, Islam, Moscow.

The collapse of the USSR was marked by a rapid growth of interest among the population in conventional and non-conventional forms of religion, where some sought a new ideology, some an alternative to the annoying communism, while others sought resources for career advancement. As early as the late 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, all around the country there were new churches and mosques being built. TV started making timid attempts to cover religious holidays. Religious organizations tried to strengthen their relations with their overseas coreligionists, from whom they received funds for the revival of Christianity, Islam, Catholicism, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions.

---

<sup>1</sup> sotnik37@mail.ru

Religiosity is becoming a popular phenomenon closely integrated into politics. Religious organizations not only contend for their worshippers, but also try to use religions as an ideological basis for their projects.

There are two major religions in Russia, i.e. Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam.<sup>2</sup> It is these two religions that have drawn the bulk of attention of the state power for the last 20 years, the reason for which is not only the number of worshippers compared with other religions. Orthodox Christianity is becoming a sort of main religion of Russia. Notwithstanding the secular Constitution, the leaders of the state attend churches, Orthodox hierarchs voice their expert opinions on a range of political, economic, and cultural issues on governmental TV.

Relations between the state and religious organizations are governed by the Federal Act on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations.<sup>3</sup> In accordance with Article 4 of the Act, the Russian Federation is a secular state. No religion may be established as a state or compulsory religion. Religious associations are separate from the state and are equal before the law. But, as it has been repeatedly stated, the law in Russia operates given the reality.

The legal basis of the Russian Federation, which was formed in the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, has been established according to Western analogues set up mostly on the basis of Protestant system of relations, which had been established in the USA in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, between state, religion and society.<sup>4</sup> However, not only were the relations between the power and religion in Russia different from those in Europe, but also the 20<sup>th</sup> century historical development of Russia proposed a vigorous alternative to European view on this matter. So, secular legislation is regularly corrected both in the center and in the field. This situation is a constant point of discussion by the representatives of various new religious cults.<sup>5</sup> In fact, a hierarchy of religions and denominations of faith is being formed in the present-day Russia, where the first place is held by the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), the second by Islam (more on Islamic organizations below) and the third by Judaism and Buddhism as conventional religious cults, and further on by other cults.

The situation has emerged for the following reasons. Irrespective of the declared freedom of conscience, the Soviet power suppressed worshippers and religious organizations. Due to the crisis of the Soviet system in the late 80s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

2 Also Buddhism, Judaism, Catholic Church and different protestant cults and shamanism are widespread in Russia. But the main part of the population are atheists or non-practical believers. For example, according to official statistics of 2008, only 3% of the Russians follow the full tradition and 9% in part. At the same time 73% identify themselves as Orthodox Christians, 78% of them maintain the usual eating patterns. For detailed statistics see Role of Quadragesima in the Russians' life, All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research Media-issue №938. <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/10035.html> (accessed 21.07.2008).

3 The Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations" №125Ф3. Adopted by the Parliament (Duma) September 19, 1997 and by the Council of Federation September 24, 1997. Signed by the President of Russian Federation B. Yeltsin September 26, 1997.

4 Filatov Sergey, Religious Life in Eurasia: Responses to Globalization (in lieu of an introduction), in: Religion and Globalization in Eurasia, Moscow, Carnegie Endowment, 2009. p.12.

5 For example in June 2007 the conference "Human Rights for Defense of Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations (10 years Anniversary of the adoption of Federal Law "On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations")" took place in Saint-Petersburg Christian University (educate pastors for different protestant associations). The position of Russian Authorities was criticized hard.

a mass interest in everything that was in one way or another banned, which also concerned religion as a cultural and world-view phenomenon, emerged.

It is not mere chance that Orthodox Christianity has become a privileged religion for the power. About 80 percent of the population of the Russian Federation is ethnic Russians whose ancestors before the Revolution of 1917 had been adherents of Orthodox faith. At present, according to the statistics, 73<sup>6</sup> percent consider themselves Orthodox believers, with the part of adherents of the structures alternative to the ROC<sup>7</sup> no exceeding 0.5 percent of the number of believers. The Russian Orthodox Church has a strict hierarchical structure owing to which it is possible to efficiently control the activities of its subdivisions. Its ideology, as a rule, is not involved in establishing illegal armed groups, carrying out acts of terror, or separatism. On the contrary, Christianity calls for tolerance, humbleness and obedience to the authorities, which also helps to strengthen the relations between the state and the Church.

The present-day Russia's state system has evolved as an alternative to communism. Even today, after nearly 20 years after the fall of the USSR, the power elite of Russia is inclined to blame the Soviet power of the present-day political, economic, environmental and other problems of the country. Similar attitude to the communist past is among the ROC. The USSR leadership separated the Church from the state, nationalized the church property, repressed up to 90% of the clergymen in 20 – 30s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and deprived the church of the opportunity to influence the society. In the late 80s, the church started to actively speak for the resumption of the those-days church property from the state. This process has not been completed so far. The state favors this process when possible.

Totally different relations have been evolved between the state and Islam. On the one hand the power can not disregard Islam as an independent force capable of influencing the society: today Islam is worshiped by 6 percent of the population of Russia<sup>8</sup>, and according to the statement by Vladimir Putin at the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit the figure is almost 15 percent.<sup>9</sup> On the other hand, there are many more problems with the relations between the power and Islam, than between the government and the ORC.

Since the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the hierarchy of Islam in Russia had been established after the tradition of the Orthodox Church. A mufti was proclaimed a Muslim leader, with the state divided into regions (like a metropolitanate of the church).<sup>10</sup> Such a practice, more or less modified, existed until the late 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Sunni Islam which exists in Russia does not presuppose a hierarchical control structure, and the more so in the absence of a single leader, caliph. For this reason, after the fall of

6 Role of Quadregesima in the Russians' life, All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research Media-issue №938. <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/10035.html> (accessed 21.07.2008).

7 They are Russian Orthodox Autonomy Church, Russian True Orthodox Church, Old believers of different confessions, different priests, only formally adopted by the other hierarchic structures or independent, like Yakov Krotov or Grigory Lurye etc.

8 All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research Media-issue №938. Opus cit.

9 Popov Veniamin. Mini-UN for Muslim World, in: Russia in Global Affairs <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/2235.html> (accessed 01.07.2007).

10 The same structure was adopted in the Ottoman Empire also, they used the example of Constantinople Patriarchy. See Oreshkova Svetlana F., Byzantine Empire and Ottoman Empire: problems of succession, in: Byzantine Empire between the West and the East, Saint-Petersburg, 2001, p. 474-494.

the USSR there have been many independent regional muftiyats as well as structures claiming for nationwide level established in the Russian Federation. By now there have emerged three major structures consolidating Muslims in Russia. Apart from there is a number of independent centers. The relations between those organizations are quite strained, with regular disputes as to the dominance in one or another region run. Smaller and regional structures often criticize the decrees of the central bodies. In fact, we can not state a unified Muslim ummah in Russia. This circumstance to a great extent hampers the dialogue between the power and Islam.

For many regions of the Russian Federation Islam started to be a symbol of separatism and secession from Moscow. We are all familiar with the case of Chechnya which stood in line with such centers of political ambitions under Islamic slogans as Afghanistan, Palestine, Jammu and Kashmir, Kosovo, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>11</sup> It is known that initially the leader of the rebels Dzhokhar Dudaev ignored the Islamic component of Chechen separatism. But later on to involve sources, volunteers and mass media, a banal post-imperial regional and ethnic separatism became one of the fronts of the worldwide jihad against the unbelievers. Serious attention of the government was drawn by the spread separatist and pure Islamic ideology in other republics of the North Caucasus and the Volga region. The government of Russia got especially vigilant in regard to Islam at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in response to the events of the Second Chechen War (1999-2001), acts of terror in Moscow, Volgodonsk and New York.

In fact, the government was facing a dilemma: on the one hand, Islam seemed an unfriendly force, a symbol of separatism, and anti-Russia actions; on the other, it was absolutely clear about what to do with millions of the native Muslims in Russia, who suffered from negative attitude of the authorities as it was. This dilemma has not been resolved so far.

### ***Russian Orthodox Church and the State in Russia***

At present, stable and mutually beneficial relationships have been established between the political elite of Russia and the Russian Orthodox Church. The President Dmitry Medvedev, and especially his wife, regularly go to church and participate in various religious holidays. The Russian Orthodox Church is virtually the only all-Russia independent public organization which enjoys popularity and confidence among the population. Apart from that, the ROC has virtually retained its influence over nearly the entire territory of the former USSR, which is also efficiently used by the government. There has been established an organization named Worldwide Russian People Council<sup>12</sup> whose mission includes the resolution of spiritual issues in Russia as well as working with compatriots abroad. Higher officials of the Kremlin, including Vladimir Putin, take part in the sessions of the Council. Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Kirill is the head of the Council.

Recently, a real political union Between the Kremlin and Orthodox faith has been outlined. This is attributed to serious ideological issues inside the ruling establishment.

11 In detail about the features of Islamic resistance and Islamic separatism in mentioned regions see Kepel Jilles, *Jihad: The Trials of Political Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004.

12 Worldwide Russian people council. <http://www.vrns.ru/>.

The United Russia party virtually lacks political ideology: on the one hand, right liberal views predominate within the party and the government, while on the other, they are vigorously rejected by the population which is why the leaders of the state have to make populist political declarations of patriotic or even socialist nature. In case of the union with the Kremlin, the Orthodox Church due to its authority could spiritualize, sacralize the power, and ensure it with complementary legitimation.

To confirm this thesis, on 8<sup>th</sup> July an announcement was made that further on in accordance with a preliminary accord the United Russia would agree drafts with Moscow patriarchate.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, for quite a long time and not without success, the church has been speaking for the introduction into secondary school curricular of a subject named 'the fundamentals of Orthodox culture'. The church is actively involved into the activities of the army and unit of the Ministry of Internal affairs.

However, there are some issues between the church and the government which have not been solved so far. Among the ruling elite firm position is held by pragmatic liberals who negatively think of initiatives to merge the church and the power and regard the ROC as a competitor for economic assets and another irrational entity to influence the Kremlin policy. Among the Orthodox, the ideas about establishing Russia as a monarchy are quite popular, which would not be right for everybody. There is a serious conflict between the ROC and museums who occupy the premises which had belonged to the church before 1917 and which the church claims for. A number of problems also occurs as to the double function of values, icons first of all: the patriarchate asks a museum to transport an icon to a church for worshipping, but the administration of a museum refuses alleging possible damage inflicted during a transportation or improper storage.<sup>14</sup>

One more fact is concerned with different views on the history of Russia. It is known that Moscow is often criticized from the part of Eastern Europe and a number of international organizations for the Soviet regime crimes. In particular, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe approved of Vilnius Declaration according to which the blame of launching the World War II is laid equally on Hitlerite and Soviet regimes<sup>15</sup>. Such decisions to great extent strain relations between Russia and the West, and Moscow ends to negatively respond to anti-Russia initiatives of such sort.

The church that bitterly suffered from the Soviet rule had always criticized the USSR policy, but never had the criticism been as pressing as at the recent time. In an interview for 'Ekspert' journal, Archbishop Illarion has forestalled the CSCE resolution and compared Hitler to Stalin as to the number of misdeeds.<sup>16</sup> A similar position has been frequently stated by other ROC lower rank clergymen of liberal part Georgy Mitrofanov, farther-superior Petr Mescherinov, and others. Up to the very recent time

---

13 The United Russia will coordinate laws with Moscow Patriarchy. <http://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/58521> (accessed 08.07.2009).

14 The last well known conflict took place between Moscow Patriarchy and Tretyakov Art Gallery. The reason was the request for transportation of Saint Trinity icon by Andrey Rublev to Saint Trinity – Sergy Lavra for the Holy Liturgy. In details see The Church takes icons from the State, *Kommersant*, № 212.21.11.2008.

15 OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopts Vilnius Declaration, in: Official website of OSCE <http://www.osce.org/item/38620.html> (accessed 3.08.2009).

16 The Mission in secular world, Interview with Archbishop Illarion, in: *Expert* №23 (661) 15.06.2009.

the government has not gone into this issue. But on 8<sup>th</sup> July 2009 the governmental TV channel Vesti devoted a special program to the criticism of such views within the church.

### ***Russian State and Islam***

Relations between the State and Islam are extremely complicated and controversial. There are several factors which hamper the relations between the state and Muslims. Islam is not the largest religion in Russia, but referring to the act of freedom of consciousness Muslims criticize the government for their relations with the Orthodox Church. It particularly concerns the issues of distribution of means for celebrating religious holidays, building mosques and educational needs. Muslims demand equality which is guaranteed by the law but hard to achieve owing to the disproportion between Orthodox and Muslim population of Russia.

An important problem in relations between the state and Islam is the lack of a unified Islamic representative body, an organization enjoying authority from worshippers and confidence from the government. At present, there are three major organizations and several smaller, regional ones. The Central Spiritual Authority of Muslims (CSAM) is most loyal as to the state. It is the successor of a unified Muslim organization which formed under the supervision of the power as far back as the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>17</sup> Around 40 percent of mosques within the Russian Federation pertain to that organization, though the authority of its leader, Talgat Tadjuddin, among Muslims, and especially among the youth, is petty. The organization is noted for vigorous criticism of non-conventional Islamic trends in Russia suspected of involvement in terror. This fact favors its cooperation with the government. Nevertheless, in 2003 its leader declared jihad against the USA for unleashing the war in Iraq, which has irreparably undermined the authority of the organization. Despite loyalty and moderateness, the interest of the government as well as Muslims has been steadily waning.

A more rapidly developing entity is the Council of Muftis of Russia (CMR).<sup>18</sup> It emerged after the downfall of the USSR and the consequent collapse of the Central SAM and was established in 1996. Among its supporters are those who criticized the CSAM for collaboration with the godless Soviet power, for inactivity and lack of response to the challenge of the time. CMR may have a little less mosques than their main competitors CSAM, but the central office is in Moscow which facilitates communication with the government. Moscow Congregational Mosque is also under the jurisdiction of CMR. The CMR leader Ravil Gainutdin has often appeared on TV programs lately. He is backed by well-known politicians such as Yuri Luzhkov, the Mayor of Moscow. However, there is a number of reasons for which that organization can not be backed by the government completely and become a single representative of Muslims in Russia.

As early as the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many founders of CMR had close contacts with large Islamic organizations now considered terrorist. Mufti Ravil Gainutdin has more than once changed his position regarding wahhabism, Chechen separatist, and criticized the government. CMR leaders also include such odious individuals like sheikh

17 Official website of Central Spiritual Department of Muslims <http://www.moslem.ru>

18 Official website of Council of Muftis of Russia <http://www.muslim.ru/>

Karachay<sup>19</sup>, Ali-Vyacheslav Polosin<sup>20</sup>, Nafigulla Ashirov<sup>21</sup>, and others. CMR actively criticize ROC which also does not promote cooperation with the state.

There is another problem concerning both organizations of Muslims of Russia. The leadership is mostly made up of Tartars, the Sunni of Khanifite mazkhab, while in the Caucasus Shafiite mazkhab is spread. After the split of Russia's ummah in the early 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Islam in the Caucasus has been developing in its own way. It is now controlled by a unified regional structure, the Coordinating Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus. (CCMNC). The Islam in the Caucasus had to hold up against the non-conventional Islamic trends spread in the South of Russia. One of the leaders of the ummah of the North Caucasus was sheikh Ahmad Kadyrov who became the Chechen leader after the Second Chechen War. His son Ramzan Kadyrov, the president of Chechnya, is very popular in the Caucasus. Some experts predicted Ramzan Kadyrov to lead Muslims of Russia. But the specific features of Islam in that region and ethnic makeup of the majority of Muslims in Russia (Tartars) do not allow making the Caucasus the center of Islam in Russia.

Extremism is one of the major problems in the relations between Islam and the state in Russia. As a result of the expansion of salafites, a big number of Muslims became adherent to new religious trends non-conventional in Russia. According to experts, about 10 percent of Russia's ummah pertain to salafites and in fact can not take part in the dialogue between Islam and the government. Outlawed supporters of pure Islam are put in line with terrorists and doomed to extremism. The government and official Islamic structures actively search and unmask the underground Islamic religious centers. Big amount of religious literature is prohibited. Salafism is closely related to separatist movements in the North Caucasus, so, the majority of those discontented with the actions by central and regional authorities take refuge at salafites. In fact, the whole opposition in The North Caucasus is Islamic and salafite which intensifies the tension between the center and regions.

As separatism in the North Caucasus, closely related to religious extremism, has long ago turned into one of the major domestic problems of Russia, the central power is very mistrustful of Islam. For various reasons the society is marked with the growth of islamophobia which in one way or another affects the power as well.<sup>22</sup> It seems the government is not aware of how to think about Islam, which organizations to collaborate with and what kind of literature should be banned. The policy concerning Islam has not been elaborated yet.

This is especially demonstrative as to Islamic education in Russia. After the collapse of the USSR, the only Islamic university and madrasah left outside Russia is in Uzbekistan. The government failed to control new training centers, thus they were

---

19 Sheikh Karachay (Magomed Bidjiev) – religious figure in the Northern Caucasus. In the beginning of 90s of the XX century stood for several separatist movements in Northern Caucasus and is considered as one of the former ideologists of Karachay separatism.

20 Ali-Vyacheslav Polosin. Former Orthodox priest, converted to Islam. Now councilor of mufti Ravil Gainutdin. Author of several theological books; criticized Christianity.

21 Nafigulla Ashirov – mufti, chairman of Spiritual Department of Muslims of Asian part of Russia. He is well known due to his populist position; criticized the Court of Arms of Russia and other symbols and propagandized polygamia.

22 In details see Sotnichenko Alexander, Islamophobia in Russia. Origins and Modern Situation, in: Bulletin of Saint-Petersburg State University. Ser. 6. Issue 1. Saint-Petersburg, 2008, p. 32-45.

emerging spontaneously and, as a rule, for the money received from foreign sponsors who had their own goals. As a result, it turned out that in the 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century many independent educational centers were propagandizing extremism, terrorism, and separatism. Many teachers came from the Middle East and North Africa, many of whom were hiding from prosecution by their countries' governments. The government had to close down the new madrasahs, which caused discontent and aggravated distrust between the state and the ummah.

It is only now that Moscow has developed a concept of Islamic education in Russia which intends to train Muslims at a number of selected universities. This program is well funded, but the people involved are pessimistic about the results. Up to the recent time, people could not get higher Islamic education in Russia and had to go abroad where they would often fall into the propaganda of non-conventional trends.

### ***Relations between the Russian Orthodox Church and Islam in Russia***

In Russia Orthodox Christianity and Islam coexist over 700 years. Within this scope there were periods of peaceful relations, competition and even confrontation. But we can undoubtedly state that though worshippers of different religions did not enjoy equal rights, but they could freely profess their faith and feel secure for their lives.

In the USSR relations between the Islamic organization SAM and ROC, as well as between Orthodox and Muslim believers, were friendly. In the first place it is attributed to the fact that religious organizations had to show mild resistance to the atheism of the central power. Proselytism was impossible as well as there were no financial or property discords. The collapse of the USSR has radically changed the situation. Many problems have emerged and have not been resolved so far.

First of all, one is to mention negative attitude towards Islam on the part of the church and Orthodox population evolved within the last 20 years. In fact, it is about a phenomenon called 'islamophobia' which is characteristic not only for Orthodox believers but for a significant part of the population of Russia. This phenomenon has emerged very rapidly through a number of subjective and objective reasons and is widely spread at present.<sup>23</sup>

In the 80s the USSR was waging war in Afghanistan where the Soviet army was opposed by Muslim rebels who openly stated the religious nature of their opposition. In Soviet literature and mass media they got a negative stereotype title 'mojahedin', i.e. a person waging jihad. The role of international Islamic organizations in financing and arming the Afghani opposition was great. Heavy casualties and actual defeat of the USSR in Afghanistan have drawn the first negative image of Islam and Muslims in the minds of Soviet people.

The next step in the genesis of anti-islam myth became the anti-russian moods in the republics of Central Asia and Caucasus. The great part of the Russians had to move from their native (from XIX century) places in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, Azerbaijan to Russian Federation. The Russian government didn't prepare anything for them: work or accommodation, didn't protect their property even in the territory of Russia – in the Republics of the Northern Caucasus. Consequently the stereotype of the hungry homeless Russian refugee, victim of militant islamists was formed.

<sup>23</sup> 40% of the Russian population negatively characterized Islam, at the same time in the USA – only 25%. Sotnichenko A. *ibid.*



The war with Chechnya and the next defeat of Russian Federation also has struck a blow for the genesis of islamophobia in the Russian society. Militant Islam (other forms of Islam were not observed by media) became the main enemy of the Russian society, and afterwards Islam was understood as an indispensable attribute of not only all terrorists, but also all immigrants from the South.<sup>24</sup> The culmination of the genesis and consolidation of this stereotype in the Russian's mind occurs in 2001-2007, encouraged with terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda in New York and the increased national migration process, which were described as „Muslim migration“.

Thereby, the stereotype image of Islam in Russia was formed as the aggressive, militant religion, associated with separatism, terrorism and drug-trafficking.<sup>25</sup> This stereotype was adopted by the great part of Orthodox believers and ROC authorities. However, it is not only one problem of the relations. The Church has its own, special claims to Islam, which confirm the well-made stereotypes, but also are based on other issues and suspicions.

ROC has a straight hierarchic structure. But there are several ideological lobby-groups, which compete with each other for the influence inside the organization. The most islamophobic groups are liberal and nationalist. These two groups were very powerful and supervised many publishing houses, websites and radio stations. Priests and laymen from this lobby-groups hold important posts in the church hierarchy. Despite the difference between them, their positions on Islam are very similar.

The first lobby-group – liberals – criticize Islam for disrespect of human rights, several restrictions for women, discrimination of other religions etc. Their arguments are very close to liberal conservatives of the USA and Europe, like Geert Wilders, the leader of Party for Freedom in the Netherlands.<sup>26</sup> They also don't neglect the theological exposures. The main anti-islamic theses of Orthodox liberals are unmasking of secret paganism (anthropomorphism of Allah is proved)<sup>27</sup>, also brutality, bloodthirstiness and sexuality of the Muslim religion. Orthodox religious studies specialist Yuri Maximov wrote a book about the image of Muslim Heaven – profligate and primitive.<sup>28</sup> Fantastic novel by Elena Chudinova, „Notre Dame de Paris Mosque“<sup>29</sup> and false „documentary story“ „Souad. Burned Alive: a Victim of the Law of Men“<sup>30</sup> and other, supporting myths of aggressiveness and brutality of Muslims are also very popular among nationalists and liberals. We have an information that it's possible to buy these books in some Orthodox churches in Moscow region.

The new conception of missionary work, „committed by Patriarch Kirill and his supporters, played an important role in forming the opposition Islam vs. Christianity. The original mission of Christian enlightenment was expected to educate non-practical

---

24 This stereotype is continuously supported by TV and movies where good guys fight against bad guys with expressed Muslim identity.

25 In detail see Malashenko Alexey, Islamic alternative and Islamist Project, Moscow, 2004. Also other publications of the Moscow Carnegie endowment. <http://www.carnegie.ru>

26 Sotnichenko Alexander, The New, Non-Traditional Right, RP Monitor, Analytical online journal. <http://www.rpmonitor.ru/en/en/detail.php?ID=13773> (accessed 17.04.2009)

27 This thesis actively supported by Sergeev S.A. the editor of missionary internet portal Azbuka [www.azbyka.ru](http://www.azbyka.ru)

28 Maximov Yuri, The image of Heaven in Christianity and Islam, Moscow, 2004.

29 Chudinova Elena, Notre Dame de Paris Mosque, Moscow, 2002.

30 Souad. Burned Alive: a Victim of the Law of Men. L., 2006.

Orthodox Russians, who make more than 70% of the population.<sup>31</sup> But the most active priests began to disseminate Christianity among traditionally Muslim peoples of Russia. For example, one of the most offensive missionary priests Daniil Sisoiev came to Tatar holiday Sabantuy (national, non-religious) to convert the guests into Christianity. There was a scandal showed by media from many positions, and the relations between ROC and Islam became more difficult then before.

Christianity and Islam in Russia haven't got equal rights and have been controlled by the state up to nowadays, and it ruled out all possible conflicts. In the Russian Empire the Muslims lived in exclusive circle and resisted the Christian missionary; in the USSR, Islam and Christianity opposed the atheism of the communist state in common. Now in the conditions of a formal equality the two proselyte religions became competitors in their fighting for human souls. And the reality is that the proselyte practice of Islam against the potential Orthodox Christians is now more successful.

Islam attracted numerous followers who do not belong to ethnic groups traditionally practicing Islam from the beginning of the 90s of the XX century. As a rule, salafiyah Islam involved new adherents among Russian, Ukrainians, Belarusian by its radicalism, dynamism and opposition to the central authority. Liberal reforms in Russia did not enjoy wide popularity among the citizens. That's why young men have chosen a way of political resistance to authorities, became members of radical right and left movements, and also accepted Islam. In this case, the negative image of Islam created by mass-media involved the Russian youth disappointed in fascism, radical paganism and the national-Bolshevism conceptions. NORM (the National Organization of Russian – *means ethnically Russians*. A.S. – Moslems) was founded by supporters of nationalist movements.

CSOM as mainly national Tatar organization, has never involved the ethnic Russians, but CMR plays in this question the same role, as radical Orthodox missionaries. The leaders not only encouraged the conversion of the ethnic Russians into Islam, but also involved them in management structures of the organization. Now the former Orthodox priest Ali-Vjacheslav Polosin, known for his Antichristian positions, holds a post of adviser of mufti Ravil Gajnutdin, and, recently converted into Islam, ethnic Russian Iskander Kazakov occupies the post of the interreligious dialogue assistant of mufti.

It is necessary to notice a widespread opinion in Islam law, that it is impossible for new converts to employ the religious posts, but in Russia it is ignored. Certainly, such position of CMR cannot satisfy the ROC leaders and conducts a growing mistrust between Christians and Moslems in Russia and also promotes the popularity of anti-Islamic moods among the Orthodox.

There is also the other position of dialogue between Christianity and Islam in Russia supporters. Among the apologists of peace relations there is a Metropolitan of Tashkent Vladimir (Ikim), the author of the book «Looking for friends in the East».<sup>32</sup> From his point of view, Christianity and Islam as two traditional faiths of Russia and the post-Soviet territory should develop a joint position in relation to the decision of problems of morals, education and formation. In Islamic circles CSOM holds a similar position. Among new religious figures the supporter of co-operation between Islam and Christianity is Muhammad Henni, the head of the Islamic Culture centre in Saint-Petersburg.

31 All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research Media-issue №938. *ibid.*

32 Metropolitan Vladimir (Ikim), *Looking for friends in the East*, Tashkent, 2004.

According to his words, the reasons of accepting Islam by Russians are „looking for God” or image of Islam as the revolutionary political movement directed on radical transformation of a society. That’s why they bring more problems to the organization than public benefits for ummah. Therefore, the non-practicing Moslems have to be the main objects for the Islamic proselytism in Russia.

Russia is a multinational and multiconfessional country, and religious problems were always crossed with political and social contradictions. All revolts against the central power in XV or in XXI century had religious aspect. That’s why the state always tried to maintain the interreligious peace in the country. Now the political elite of the Russian Federation has no strategy of a religious policy, as there is a set of contradictions between the state and the main religious traditions – Orthodox Christianity and Sunni Islam.

Now we can say that the only problems between two of three researched organizations are resolved: the state and ROC. The relations between the state and Islam, and also Islam and Orthodoxy remain very difficult. These problems are extremely difficult to resolve within the limits of the liberal political system assuming secularism, equality between the religions and the equidistance of the state from all the religious organizations. Unfortunately, the state doesn’t attend to the problem of the relations with Islam, operating within the limits of the developed European and American concepts of multiculturalism and tolerances. It causes, on one hand, a negative reaction of the majority of the population of Russia and on another – it forces significant figures of Moslems to go underground.

From our point of view, it is necessary to develop our own Russian concept of the interreligious peace, where the state should be a mediator between Islam and Orthodox Christianity, offer a number of the agreements, regulate mutual relations between the main religions. In particular, it is necessary to pay attention on mutual proselytism in Christianity and Islam as well as to criticize or even restrict the appointment of converts to the significant posts. The practice of interreligious conferences and dialogues where the religious leaders develop joint decisions on moral and social problems have to be borrowed from other countries. In case of insufficient attention of the authorities to the problems of interreligious relations Islam and Orthodox Christianity can become the subject of political opposition like it has already happened all over the world and lead the country up to its disintegration.

## References

- Role of Quadragesima in the Russians' life, All-Russia Center for Public Opinion Research Media-issue №938. <http://wciom.ru/arkhiv/tematicheskii-arkhiv/item/single/10035.html> (accessed 21.07.2008)
- Chudinova Elena, *Notre Dame de Paris Mosque*, Exmo, Moscow, 2004.
- The Church takes icons from the State, *Kommersant*, № 212, 21.11.2008.
- Filatov Sergey, Religious Life in Eurasia: Responses to Globalization (in lieu of an introduction) in: *Religion and Globalization in Eurasia*, Moscow, Carnegie Endowment, 2009.
- Maximov Yuri, *The image of Heaven in Christianity and Islam*, Moscow, 2004.
- Malashenko Alexey, *Islamic alternative and Islamist Project*, Carnegie Endowment Pub., Moscow, 2004.
- Metropolitan Vladimir (Ikim), *Looking for friends in the East*, Tashkent, 2004.
- Kepel Jilles, *Jihad: The Trials of Political Islam*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2004.
- The Mission in secular world, Interview with Archbishop Illarion, in: *Expert* №23 (661) 15.06.2009.
- On Freedom of Conscience and on Religious Associations, the Federal Law №125Ф3. Adopted by the Parliament (Duma) September 19, 1997 and by the Council of Federation September 24, 1997. Signed by the President of Russian Federation B. Yeltsin September 26, 1997.
- OSCE Parliamentary Assembly adopts Vilnius Declaration, in: Official website of OSCE <http://www.osce.org/item/38620.html> (accessed 3.08.2009)
- Oreshkova Svetlana F., Byzantine Empire and Ottoman Empire: problems of succession, in: *Byzantine Empire between the West and the East*, Saint-Petersburg, 2001. p. 474-494.
- Popov Veniamin, Mini-UN for Muslim World, in: *Russia in Global Affairs*. <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/articles/2235.html> (accessed 01.07.2007).
- Sotnichenko Alexander, Islamophobia in Russia. Origins and Modern Situation, in: *Bulletin of Saint-Petersburg State University*, Ser. 6. Issue 1. Saint-Petersburg, 2008. p. 32-45.
- Sotnichenko Alexander, The New, Non-Traditional Right, in: *RP Monitor, Analytical online journal*, <http://www.rpmonitor.ru/en/en/detail.php?ID=13773> (accessed 17.04.2009).
- Souad. Burned Alive: a Victim of the Law of Men, L., 2006.
- The United Russia will coordinate laws with Moscow Patriarchy, <http://www.zaks.ru/new/archive/view/58521> (accessed 08.07.2009).

*Александар Сотниченко*

## **ОДНОСИ ИСЛАМ-РУСКА ПРАВОСЛАВНА ЦРКВА И ДРЖАВА У ПОСТКОМУНИСТИЧКОЈ РУСИЈИ**

### *Резиме*

После пада Совјетског Савеза можемо оценити стање религијског наслеђа у Русији. Оно се не односи само на традиционалне религијске институције, као што је Московска патријаршија, већ, такође, и на хетеродоксне религијске покрете. Сада можемо да оценимо стање религијске политике Москве у изворном облику.

Православно хришћанство у Русији има један универзално признати центар – Московску патријаршију. Њено становиште дели 90 одсто руских хришћана. Међутим, не можемо рећи да вође имају једно усаглашено мишљење о односима ислама и хришћанства. Можемо издвојити две групе и једну назвати „за ислам“, а другу „против ислама“. Њихови следбеници имају различите погледе на проблеме прозелитизма, интеррелигијског дијалога, религијске политике државе и спољне политике Русије.

Иста, мада много сложенија ситуација је у руском исламу. Муслимани у Русији немају ниједан универзално признати ауторитет. Постоји неколико организација, регионалних или са централистичким аспирацијама, ауторитета, шејхова и популарних проповедника са својим сопственим мишљењима. Овде покушавамо да класификујемо главне организације и њихове погледе на дијалог с руским православљем, хришћанством уопште и с регионалном политиком руске државе.

**Кључне речи:** хришћанство, православље, Русија, ислам, Москва.

Примљено: 30.8.2009

Прихваћено: 27.9.2009.