

Youth and modern religious extremism

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Abstract. Representatives of school and student youth, and also experts-religious scholars and the teachers of schools who conduct classes in Religion Studies took part in the sociological research carried out by a method of focus group. Such selection of respondents allowed the authors of the article to investigate a problem in a complex. In the content of the article opinion of participants of discussion concerning modern religious extremism found its reflection; understanding degree by youth of need of cross-cultural dialogue which promote inter-confessional dialogue was revealed; understanding degree by youth of connection between problems of an interethnic consent and problems of inter-confessional tolerance was defined; degree of understanding by youth of the content of a state program on fight against religious extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan was analysed. In discussion it was revealed that modern young people have an idea of methods, forms and preventative measures and counteractions to influence of negative destructive religious associations.

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Introduction

In the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On religious activity and religious associations” the historical role of religions - Islam hanafite Madh'hab and orthodox Christianity in the development of culture and spiritual life of Kazakhstan people is recognized for the first time [1].

The problem of religious (Islamic) extremism at this point represents one of the serious threats of national security of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The problem of counteraction to religious extremism and terrorism gains actual character. Only by joint efforts it is possible to achieve steady and tolerant system of development of the state-public relations, to find ways of liquidation of prerequisites and extension sources in the territory of Kazakhstan of extremist manifestations. Extremists from religion try to involve representatives of youth in their affairs. In this regard it seems necessary to propagandize Kazakhstan patriotism, to promote increase of youth literacy, its professional education and employment, active involvement in the affairs useful to society, the organizations of interesting leisure, promotion of healthy lifestyle, to conduct active ideological, information and propaganda work in society, by means of mass media, educational institutions, cyberspace.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a striking example of the country of an international and inter-confessional consent. The foundation of the multi-religious state is laid by the legislation from the first

years of existence of the independent republic. According to the Constitution, Kazakhstan is a secular state. Article 19 of the Constitution says: “Everyone has the right to define and specify or not to specify the national, party and religious identity”. Article 22 proclaims: “Everyone has the right for a freedom of worship”. In Kazakhstan the freedom of worship is guaranteed and the separation of religion from state is proclaimed [2].

Main part

On January 15, 1992 the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On freedom of worship and religious associations” was adopted which basic provisions is the policy of religious tolerance and respect of religious beliefs of citizens from the state. The law laid the foundation of relationship regulation between the state and the religious organizations and associations. At the same time, the law doesn't ignore also a situation which is new to Kazakhstan - appearance of religious extremism. Article 4 of the law forbids “promotion of religious extremism, and also commission of the actions directed on use of inter-confessional distinctions in political goals” [3].

The Law “On counteraction to extremism” which was adopted on February 18, 2005 became the following step on formation of religious culture of citizens of the state. The law conferred to the government large powers in prevention of religious extremism [4].

The law “On religious activity and religious associations” which came into force on October 25,

2011 is directed on the improvement of the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the sphere of religious associations. The law introduces the mechanisms of regulation activity of religious associations, and also creates a basis for elimination of the gaps which are between rules of law of various standard regulations. In the Law "On religious activity and religious associations" bases of accurate, clear procedures of creation and activity of religious associations in interests of preservation of national security, public consent and religious tolerance are spelled out [1].

Thus, the state policy in the sphere of religion is directed on providing the civil peace, national consent, territorial integrity, unity of legal space, stability of the government and its institutes, law and order and completion of formation process of democratic society, and also in neutralization of reasons and conditions which promote the beginning of the social, international and inter-confessional conflicts, national separatism. Summarizing, it is possible to note that - spiritual education of Kazakhstan youth is under constant attention from the state therefore, forming youth policy, government institutions take into account that youth as one of socially active segments of the population, has an important potential weight in the future of our country. Through the education of spirituality it is possible to achieve patriotism education.

Questions of prevention and fight against manifestations of religious extremism are and in the center of attention of foreign colleagues researchers: religious violence [5, 6]; reasons of sectarian movements prosperity [7]; formation of religious extremism, development trends, destructive force for any public structure [8]; the analysis of literature and researches devoted to political roots of extremism [9]; religious extremism [10].

Thus, we can say that religious extremism is a very actual problem today. Complex research of religious extremism should allow society to find solutions of this problem.

One of the ways of decision, in our opinion, is the formation of religious culture, inter-confessional tolerance of younger generation.

Within realization of youth policy in Kazakhstan and relevance of a problem of formation spiritually, physically and psychologically strong and healthy youth, authors of the article conducted the sociological research by a method of focus group among the representatives of school, student youth, regional department for religions and teachers of history and social science.

During the research studying of youth concepts about the content of religious extremism was planned; to analyse the relation of youth to

manifestations of religious extremism; to reveal the degree of working knowledge of youth skills of counteraction to manifestations of religious extremism; to consider the role of inter-confessional dialogue in formation of religious culture of youth; to define the level of legal culture in questions of a freedom of worship and religious associations. As a result of research it was supposed to reveal positions, opinions, views and relation of youth to manifestations of religious extremism and methods of its prevention.

The first block of research included the questions directed on an assessment of general idea about modern religious extremism among youth.

During a discussion of a focus group subject respondents showed understanding and realization of such social phenomenon as "religious extremism". Respondents understand the danger of this phenomenon for the personality, society and state. As the discussion showed all its participants to some extent have heard a lot about the danger of religious extremism, and realize the need of fight against its manifestations and measures for its prevention.

Is significant that fact that the phenomenon "religious extremism" deeply touches on the souls of each participant of the discussion, the proof of that is negative attitude of participants of discussion to it. Practically all respondents have reflections on a problem "religious extremism", this problem nobody leaves indifferent, everyone mentally looks for the ways and methods of opposition to this problem.

Some participants of the discussion managed to be in a situation when they were tried to involve in these or those religious formations, or to face manifestation of religious opposition. Not each of them knew how to behave himself in this or that case, what he should say or how to answer to addressed to him with a question. All this allows to draw a conclusion that the religious culture isn't yet formed in society, and thus how strong and competent the agents of "religious extremism" are.

The supervision over participants of the discussion also allows to come to the idea that in society there is a certain fear and vigilance in relation to apologists of these or those religious confessions that can be connected with the absence of knowledge of existing confessions and lack of interaction between the representatives of various confessions in fight against manifestations of religious extremism.

In witness thereof the following remarks sounded:

- "Religious extremism assumes violent assumption of the power".

- "Under a sign of religious extremism there is a mixture of religious and political extremism".

- “The formed ideological vacuum became the ground for the formation of religious extremism. The implementation in the formed vacuum of spiritual missionary work”.

- “Planting of religious extremism occurs by means of the use of people’s religious feelings”.

- “For what manifestations of religious extremism are dangerous, that its preachers deeply touch souls of people”.

Thus respondents think that use of the concept “religious extremism” isn’t exactly correct. Respondents consider that the concept “political-religious extremism” is more appropriate as the religion itself has no relation to extremism and terrorism. Participants of focus group were unanimous in opinion that the criminal elements, which initiate religious extremism, use religion as a camouflage. The religion itself has no relation to extremism. For example, it was stated:

- “I am against the concept “religious extremism”, it sounds incorrectly in relation to religion”.

- Instead of the concept “religious extremism” we should use the concept “political-religious extremism”.

- “Pseudo-religious extremism” - religion as a camouflage”.

- “Religious extremism – paradigms, dogmas of religiously painted confession are put in a basis”.

- “Using the concept “religious extremism” we hurt the feelings of believers”.

- “There is a problem of religious identity in society. Formation of religious culture in a family is necessary, the child has to identify himself with a certain confessional group”.

Respondents showed awareness and in the question “What the destructive religious formations are like?”. All participants of the discussion noted that the destructive religious formations constitute danger to the state. During the discussion of this question there sounded the opinion that the increase in number of victims of destructive religious formations is an indicator of absence of youth’s critical thinking. Information going from the outside, is not always critically analyzed, accepted on faith. Preachers use it in their purposes.

Thus, it is possible to draw a conclusion that low level of religious culture, unformed critical thinking of youth, lack of interaction between representatives of various confessions create conditions for formation of religious extremism in society and the state.

- “Getting into the sect happens for a number of reasons. Sectarians are able to persuade. They entice by attention, care, understanding”.

- “People of any social set-up and of any level of culture and education can get into sects”.

- “People who have appeared in sects completely come under the power of sectarians. They become the tool of their propaganda. They lose themselves as the personality”.

- “Destructive religious formations are created for the destruction of state bases”.

- “Destructive religious formations bear negative sides”.

- “Orthodox position”.

- “Dependence on destructive religious formations is an indicator of absence of critical opinion”.

The second block of research included the questions directed on an assessment of manifestations of religious extremism in Kazakhstan.

On questions “Secular character of our state and a freedom of worship and religion – how they can be united by one sociocultural space?”, “Whether in Kazakhstan the expansion of religious extremism was promoted by polyethnicity existence or in Kazakhstan cross-cultural dialogue promotes interfaith dialogue”, and “How great is the connection between the problems of an interethnic consent and problems of inter-confessional tolerance?”, members of discussion group commented in the following way:

- “The question of manifestations of religious extremism in Kazakhstan doesn’t stand so critically, but there is the problem, there are methods of counteraction. Kazakhstan is a multi-religious society”.

- “In Kazakhstan the state has secular character, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan the freedom of worship and religion is observed. State-religious character in Kazakhstan is shown in an integrated space”.

- “Force of Kazakhstan is in polyethnicity. Functioning of the Assembly of Kazakhstan people is an indicator of its unity and competent policy of the state”.

On the question, “Do you agree that extremism and terrorism in Kazakhstan have not ideological, but a criminal basis?” respondents unanimously declared “Yes”.

On the question, “By what methods, forms and means it is necessary to form the ways of optimum behavior of pupils and students in various situations connected with manifestations of religious extremism, how to teach people to protect themselves from negative consequences of influence of destructive religious associations, including extremist associations?” respondents answered:

- “We, for example, say to children that they go to church, and they shouldn’t go anywhere else”.

- "Don't stop and don't listen to those who starts talking to you about religion in the street. Keep away from them".

As a result of discussion of this block of focus group it is hard to escape the following conclusions. Respondents support policy of the state in the religious sphere. All participants of a discussed subject recognized that secular character of the state and a freedom of worship and religion are united by one sociocultural space and don't resist each other. The multiethnic population of Kazakhstan promotes inter-confessional dialogue.

Questions of the third block of research were directed on revealing of the problems of religious extremism prevention in Kazakhstan.

Unanimity of participants of the discussion was shown in the question of need of prevention of religious extremism manifestations. Thus respondents expressed sometimes completely opposite opinions. The leading expert of the Department for religion of the Karaganda region declared the development of a site Islam.kz., whereat young people expressed fears that information which is available on a site, can be used not for designated purpose or can be used as means of designation of people with different from the standard in the society views on questions of religion.

Teachers who conduct classes in Religious Studies expressed the general opinion on today's absence of qualitative educational literature, didactic materials on Religious Studies. Also they expressed the opinion on the frivolous relation to the questions of religious extremism prevention in society, and at school in particular, thus low level of youth's religious culture.

All members of the discussion group were united by the confidence that:

- "The work with youth is necessary. It is necessary to hold various activities for prevention of religious extremism. The work on development of information portal - Islam. kz. is carried out".

- "The new elective course "Religious Studies" is added at schools".

- "There is no good educational literature concerning religion. Generally as preventive measures conversations are used".

- "There are no textbooks at schools, quality of available literature doesn't stand up to scrutiny".

- "Islam. kz. Danger – will destroy people "Witch-hunt" Clergy shows high education and culture level. Site is as a trap".

- "To create didactic material on religion, probably a site, taking into account age features".

- "During the studying of Religious Studies it is necessary to put strong emphasis on history studying, history of tolerance condition".

- "The religion is the weapon capable of preserving the peace. The religion has to be studied from a source. We need theologians explaining religion".

Participants of the discussion expressed opinion that representatives from religion not always have necessary education level. Therefore incorrect expressions often fall from their lips, for example:

- "That the epidemic interest for Islam is a tribute to fashion. And if one comes to religion, paying a tribute to fashion it is good".

The youth which was present on focus group declared that today the religion have ritual character that is fundamentally wrong:

- "The religion has ritual character, instead of spiritual. The religion it not fashion, religion is purity".

- "Theologians have to work on their education".

On the question "Whether the state has to interfere with the activity of religious associations?", respondents unambiguously answered that:

- "The Law itself is intervention. The law assumes management in the religious sphere, law observance".

- "There is the legislative base. It is necessary to improve it taking into account the international experience".

During the discussion of the question of religious extremism prevention, members of the discussion expressed the following opinions:

- "The youth is interested in the questions of religion, but not everyone".

- "The youth is amenable. Rather narrow area of thought".

- "There is not enough education, connection of the theory with practice".

- "It is necessary to form tolerance. It is necessary to go to the other temples".

- "It is necessary to form religious identity in everybody. The religion should be considered as family value".

- "There is an urgent need in video, clips, training of lecturers, to know interests of youth".

On the question "What is necessary for formation of religious culture in society?", respondents noted that the sufficient experience in the question of prevention of religious extremism isn't yet developed in the state. Often there are no qualified experts-religious scholars, carried-out round tables have formal character and aren't interesting to youth, speeches of statesmen have politicized character, propagandized information from mass media hasn't qualitative character and isn't sufficient. During the discussion of the problem it became clear, that not all members of the discussion group have

information about the preventive measures which are held in the region and about the existence of Association of the centers for work with victims of destructive cults.

Summarizing, it is necessary to say that the discussion showed that the preventive measures which are held not always have clear and available character for all. The majority of the attendees has no idea of where one can get professional consultation, advice, help and explanation concerning religion. It is necessary to involve widely the society, mass media, state and educational organizations in formation of youth's religious culture.

Concerning prevention of religious extremism the following opinions sounded:

- "Level of religious culture by means of holding various actions in the territory of the state has increased".

- "Tolerance at congress isn't widespread on the places".

- "In the process of holding the conversations or round tables the youth has no interest to the subject of the discussion. It is a problem of the speaker, who can't provoke the interest".

- "In textbooks and words of religious representatives there is tendentiousness. The scientific Religious Studies are necessary".

- "Censorship, moderators, creation of a journalistic pool, the neutral atmosphere is necessary. The agency on affairs of religion has to form qualitative structure of journalists in the field of religion. Everyone should have civil liability. To toughen measures for penetration of the provocative phenomena into the Internet".

Conclusions

As a result of the conducted sociological research the following conclusions and recommendations were drawn:

1. The youth has an idea of religious extremism, realizes the danger of this social phenomenon for the personality, society and the state, and recognizes the need of fight against its manifestations and approves the state measures for its prevention.

2. Secular character of the state and freedom of worship and religion are united by one sociocultural space and don't resist each other. The multiethnic population of Kazakhstan promotes inter-confessional dialogue.

3. There is a need of systematic and constant informing on danger of "religious extremism", and also teaching of youth to preventive measures in case of meeting the agents of "religious extremism" through mass media and the Internet sources.

4. The main reason of the expansion of "religious extremism" is inability of youth to critical thinking, and also the lack of necessary level of religious literacy. There is a need of training of the qualified experts-religious scholars and representatives from religion for carrying out the work on increasing the level of religious culture and literacy of the population.

5. There is no sufficient and effective experience in the question of prevention of religious extremism in the state. The preventive measures which are held in the region need to have clear and available character.

6. In formation of religious culture of the population it is necessary to have interaction of spiritual representatives of all confessions united by thoughts of joint counteraction to religious extremism.

7. To study and adapt the international experience of prevention of religious extremism, to analyse methods and ways used by religious adherents for their possible inclusion in the preventive activity.

8. To involve youth in preventive measures as volunteers, thereby increasing the level of volunteers' religious culture and the level of youth loyalty to the preventive measures, carried out by volunteers.

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