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The Religion Faith of the Kyrgyzs

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Abstract. Kyrgyzstan is a multiethnic and multi faith society. This study highlights the role of religion in development of Kyrgyz society in the XXth Century and revival of it in the XXIst Century. In former USSR (Soviet Union) countries, these periods called “pre-Soviet era”, “Soviet era” and “post-Soviet era”. The whole period during which the Kyrgyzs were exposed to Islam and adopted the faith divided into the following stages: i) from 9th to 14th centuries, ii) from 15th century to the second half of the 18th century, iii) from end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, iv) from 1918 to 1991 (Soviet era, atheism period), v) from 31 August 1991 (the date of the Independence Day and collapse of the Soviet Era) to 2000, vi) from 2000 to present (Revival of Islam and other sects). The study discusses development of islam in Kyrgyzstan at the above periods. Also, the development of post-Soviet democratic reforms in the Kyrgyz Republic has enabled the provision of many Islamic literature, basic human rights, including the right to religious freedom. A democratic and open atmosphere in post-Soviet time had increased faith of true believers, however, is also attracted all kinds of non-traditional religious sects and groups. Thus, religion policy is used for various strategic and ideological dimensions and the role of religion in politics and in the life of society must be considered as one of the most important topic.

Keywords. Kyrgyzstan, Christian and Islam religions

Introduction

The events that took place over many years and related with the Kyrgyz people took place over a vast territory from the Tien Shan to the Yenisei and Altai. Especially, this topic has become relevant since Kyrgyzstan got independence. There was a need for new research and finding more accurate and specific answers to questions about the origin of the Kyrgyz nation.

Back in Soviet times, a group of historians pointed out that the Kyrgyzs have an ancient origin, but since these questions did not coincide with the interests of the Party in those days, these studies did not receive any Governmental support. Mostly, their developments were based on the works of famous orientalists, such as Abramzon S.M. (1990), Bernshtam A.N. (1956, 1997), Aristov N.A. (2001, 2003), Bartold V.V. (1963). But, after gaining independence in Kyrgyzstan, this topic became relevant and historians began an active search for publications and facts on the origin of the Kyrgyz people

The results of the 10th July 2005 snap presidential elections in Kyrgyzstan quite convincingly demonstrated the qualitative changes that have occurred in the ideological preferences of the citizens of Kyrgyzstan in recent years. This primarily is a clear shift of political and ideological

preferences of the bulk of the inhabitants towards religiosity. It is obvious that the July elections by themselves do not have caused the rise of religious people. Elections only drew that accumulated in society over the last 15 years.

1. The Religious History of Kyrgyzstan

1.1. Pre-Soviet Era and religion

By the Middle Ages Central Asia had already been converted to Islam. However, the Kyrgyz were last to adopt Islam. Ethnographers note there are ancient ethno-cultural links between the Kyrgyz and the indigenous people of Siberia (Aidaraliev, 2015). The ethnic roots of the Kyrgyz lie in north-western Mongolia and eastern Siberia. Both the Kyrgyz and the peoples of the Sayan and Altai regions followed pagan, pre-Islamic religions before adopting Islam in the eighth century (Ashymov, 2003). A religion cult of this period was “*umai ene*” (which means “mother-recoverer”) (Moldobayev, 1999). Kyrgyz tribes used to revere the animal whose name they bore.

Along with all the Turkic-Mongol nationalities of Siberia and Central Asia, the Kyrgyz were familiar with Tengrianism, a cult of the sky. The Kyrgyz also honoured and worshipped natural objects such as healing springs, holy sites, graves and mazars. The Kyrgyz also had links with *Zoroastrianism*, which is preserved in the cult of the worship of fire.

Shamanism, the cult of the dead and ancestors, like Zoroastrianism was survived among the Kyrgyz as other pre-Islamic pagan faiths. The Kyrgyz were also acquainted with Buddhism, or more accurately with its modified form, Lamaism. Some Buddhist terminology used in the famous Kyrgyz epic poem “*Manas*” (Ashymov, 2001; Sarygulov, 2004; Bayalieva, 1972), (Mokrynin et.al. 2002). The Kyrgyz were of course also acquainted with Islam. The Silk Road (*Figure 1*) led to an influx of many new religious beliefs. These ideas and beliefs were brought into Central Asia via interactions and exchange of people. Although the Arab conquest of Central Asia began in seventh and eighth centuries it took two centuries before Islam became entrenched in this region (Goryacheva, 2010).

From middle of tenth century nomadic tribes of Central Asia, among which were Kyrgyz people, generally began embracing Islam. Sufi orders were travelling along the Silk Road; being mobile these Islam preachers were active and effective in their missionary efforts among the nomadic tribes, such as the Kyrgyz people (Abu Hasan, 2002). Sufi school and philosophy helped to found the output to remain the legacy of Kyrgyz shamanistic past. Therefore, Sufi ideas and philosophy that —God and the human soul are the same were popular in Central Asia (Kadyrov, 2003); whereas the dogmatic and traditional forms of Islam with mosques were not available and useful for the nomadic Kyrgyz (Kadyrov, 2003). This gradual adaptation was effective, and the majority of Central Asian people became Muslims.



Figure 1: Silk Road Map of Central Asia, Caucasus, and China (source: INT-1).

Within the Mongolian state, almost most Kyrgyz had converted to Islam by the fifteenth century. Since that time the Kyrgyz have been *Muslims* (Umetalieva-Bayalieva, 2008; Akerov, 2005, 2012).

In the 18th and 19th centuries the Fergana valley was the heart of the Khanate of Kokand. Being a neighbor, the south of Kyrgyzstan was affected by this historical development of the ethnic groups populating the valley. Thus, in the south the Kyrgyz people were more religious than in the north of the country. Another, the Fergana valley was a region with a strong political interest that was traced even during the Soviet era.

In the second half of nineteenth - early twentieth centuries, when Kyrgyz tribes entered Russian Empire, the overwhelming number of Kyrgyz people classified themselves as *Sunni Muslims* (Myrzabekova, 2014).

The period during which the Kyrgyz were exposed to Islam and adopted the faith may be divided into the following stages (changed after Ashymov, 2001):

- From the 9th to the 14th centuries.
- From the 15th century to the second half of the 18th century.
- From the end of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century.
- From 1918 to 1991 (Soviet era, atheism period)
- From 31 August 1991 (the date of the Independence Day and collapse of the Soviet Era) to 2000
- From 2000 to present (Revival of Islam and other sects)



Ethnos, migration, resettlement	Chronology	Cultural and historical periods	Integrated System				Geographical environment	Religion taken		
			Conditional typology of commonalities							
			General historical	Linguistic	Ethnic	Anthropological				
			A	B	C	D				
Kyrgyzs (Central Asia)	2 nd Millennium	Our Era	12	Modern (starting from the 20th century)	Modern Century	Kyrgyz	Kyrgyz	Islam, Christianity, Judaism		
Kyrgyzs (Central Asia)			11	Modern (17th-19th century)				Turkic	Turkic	Nestorianism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam
Ga-gun Gyang-Gun Hirhiz Dig'lin' (Minusin's basin, Altai Republic, South East Russia)	1st Millennium	Our Era	10	Later Middle Ages (12 th - 16th century)	Middle Century	Turkic	Turkic	Monotheis, Tengrianism, Shamanism, zoroastrianism		
			9	Middle of the Middle Ages (6-12th century)						
	1st thousand	8	Early stage of the Middle Ages (II B.C. - V B.C.)	Ancient	Indo-Iranian	Indo-Iranian	Indo-Iranian	Unified territorial province		
2 nd thous.	7	Early Iron Age (VII - 3rd century BC)	Law history	Indo-Iranian	Indo-European	Indo-European	European			
Protokyrzyzs (Frontal Asia (old name), Geoxyur Oasis (Central and Northern Iran))	4 th th.	6						The Bronze Age (16th - 9th century BC)	Pre-history	Indo-European
	8 th th.	5	Eneolith							
		4	Neolith							
Protokyrzyzs migration from Africa to Asia)	10-40 th.	3	Mesolit							Animism

Table 1: Panoramic history of religious faiths on development of the Kyrgyz civilization in different historical periods

1.2. Soviet Era and religion

In 1876 Kyrgyz territories were brought under the control of the Russian Empire and for about 40 years Kyrgyz people were ruled by the Russian Empire. This ended in 1917 when the October Russian Revolution brought to power a new government and a new Communist regime. The Russian Empire died, and its territories and possessions came under the Soviet Rule. The Soviet Era lasted for 70 years. During this period the rule of atheism became the official doctrine for all Soviet people as well as for Kyrgyz. Religious practices were restricted and access to religious knowledge was denied. In addition to the lack of access to religion, Kyrgyz people were isolated in the Soviet Union's antagonism towards the values and ideas of the non-socialist block. By the end of the Soviet Era Kyrgyz were under a strong cultural influence from Russia, they were Russified; many western values and policies were introduced and adopted (Myrzabekova, 2014).

1.3. Post-Soviet Era and religion

Since the beginning of democratic reforms in Kyrgyzstan, the state and religious relations are developed in essentially new political conditions. They are under construction on the basis of democratic standards of public life, providing a freedom of worship of the person and citizen. The novelty of a situation demands the adequate, answering to modern political realities approaches in implementation of interaction of the state and its bodies with (i) the religious organizations, (ii) believers, and (iii) update of the standard and legal base, based on the principles and norms of international law, international agreements and the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic.

In last twenty years, among the Kyrgyz Muslims began to appear many representatives of the new sects and groups, which are missionaries from different countries. According to the data of National Administration for Muslim Religious Affairs (DUMK, 2014), there are in Kyrgyzstan exists:

- **Ahmadis or Kadianits.** This organization, which is considered by many Muslim scholars came out of Islam, it takes its origin from the Indian village Kadian, a small number of followers in Kyrgyzstan, but as his teaching repel other Muslims, they have their own mosque. The founder of this sect was Mirza Gulam Ahmad Kadiani on behalf of whom however, and there was a name. This sect is supported by Britain and its doctrine has many principles, emphasizing loyalty to the English crown.
- **Bakhayi.** Pseudo Islamic sect that arose in the late 19th century in Iran. Its founder is Baha'u'llah (Shine of God), the head of the revolutionary movement Babi. Calls to unite all religions, especially the Abrahamic into a single. The headquarters of this movement is in Israel, in Haifa. The doctrine of the sect has many similarities with the Masons.
- **Hizbut Tahrir.** This organization emerged in 1953 in Palestine and aims to revive the Caliphate, in this case the Ottoman Empire. It broke away from the organization "Ihvan- al Muslimeen", but the methodology of both movements are virtually identical.
- **Ikhwan al Muslimeen (Muslim Brotherhood).** Organization established in 1928 in Egypt, and later became the World. Sets as the purpose to seize power in the Muslim countries by elections. The Prime Minister of Turkey Mr. Recep Tayip Erdogan, Egyptian ex-President Mr. Mohamed Morsi, Afghan ex-President Burhanuddin Rabbani and fellow warlord Mr. Ahmad Shah Massoud and the "Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan" belong to this party. In Kyrgyzstan, the Muslim Brotherhood party is presented by the organization Hizbut-Tahrir, which is one of its affiliates.

- **Gyulenists**, the groups of **Fetkhullakh Gülen** from Turkey, which calls for a westernized Islam. Often, in the rhetoric of the current hidden pantyurkist calls and it is one of the branches of Sufism.
- **Madkhalis**. This current has followers among small part of the Salafists also known as Wahhabites. But as the Wahhabism is used as the negative term, it replace with the term Salafism. Founders of madkhalis sect are Mahomed Aman al Jami and Rabi al Madkhali was from Saudi Arabia. During the operation Storm in the Desert in the Saudi society there was a split, people argued on legitimacy of that the royal dynasty called the American army for reflection of the Iraqi aggression. Madkhalis were used as loyal to a crown community, for discredit of opponents. The methodology of their sect includes denigration and discredit of the Muslims who aren't entering into their sect including other Salafists whom they unfairly call: harijites and Ikhwans. Madkhalis inherited a lot of things from court mullahs who served east despots, urging the dissatisfied people to reconcile to a difficult situation. In a consequence of a madkhalis began to be used by intelligence services and the governments of many countries of the world.
- **Shiites**, in Kyrgyzstan are presented only among the Azerbaijani diaspora, but the Iranian government conduct they promotion through building the cultural centers and language faculties at Kyrgyz Universities. Also besides Iran, promotion of Shia Islam of Ismaili sense, conducted by the “Aga-Han” foundation in Central Asia.
- **Suleymanists**, Sufi order of Bulgarian origin, has taken root in Turkey. The dogma of the sect, in principle, doesn't differ from the teachings of gyulenists. The only difference is that tariqahs arose in different places.
- **Tablighs** or known as *Tablighi Jamaat or Da'waat Tabligh*. International Muslim missionary unpolitical organization, leading its origin from the Indian subcontinent. Its founder Maulana Ilyas Kandehlavi founded his movement in 1927. There is a moderate Sufi Deobandi movement.
- **Takfirists or haridjits**. This sect has thousand-year history. Her representatives took out takfirists to Muslims. Takfir-accusation of unbelief and an exit from Islam or apostasy, one of resolutions of Shariah, decision about which is taken out by authoritative theologians. Using tactics such abuse of Takfir, haridjits allowed to kill and rob other Muslims, among dissidents or unsupported. Nowadays, many haridjits takfirists are supporters of Islamic State (Isis) in the Middle East.

In general, Islam in Kyrgyzstan is presented by **Sunnites of Hanafit mazkhab**, and maturid belief. This interpretation of Islam is the main ideology of National Administration of Muslim of Kyrgyzstan (DUMK). Along with this, there is a small part of the Sufis, tarikats of local origin: Naqshbandi and yassauyya.

Another Muslim community, existing in Kyrgyzstan already whole centuries is Ahli Hadith (people of Hadith) or on another word Salafis who are also Sunnites. Generally they adhere to a Hanbal mazkhab. Salafists are derived from the Arab word Salyaf that is literally translated as the predecessor. The Salafism is understood as a movement which presents doctrine of Islam which was existed at the time of the first three generations of this religion, thus without denying achievement of scientific and technological progress which were made over the past one and a half thousand years. That is, the first three generations of Muslims who lived after Prophet Muhammad, as they understand the religion better than anyone.

The Table 2 shows significant increase of “Muslim” sects and groups after collapse of ex-Soviet Union. After the independence of Kyrgyzstan, there various sects claiming to be Islam to the

country flooded. Began an explosive growth in the number of mosques, for instance in 1990 there were 39 mosques, but by 2015 their number had risen to 2618, which means, the number of mosques has increased almost in 100 times. Also, this period actively start to act sects of other world religions.

Muslim communities in Kyrgyzstan existed until 1991 (Soviet Era)	1.Hanafit-maturidits 2.Hanbalit-Salafits 3.Sufii-Naqshbandis.
Sects and current Islamic groups after 1991 (post-Soviet Era) to 2020	1. Hizbuttakhir 2. Gyulenists (Adep Bashaty) 3. Suleymanists 4. Bakha 5. Akhmadit-kadinats 6. Tabligi-Dzhamaat-daavatists 7. Madkhalits 8. Takfrist-haridzhits (Isis) 9. Muslim Brotherhood 10. Shiites (Ismailits and imamits)

Table 2: Growth of Islam communities and sects in Kyrgyzstan (Source: updated after DUMK, 2020)

Christian in Kyrgyzstan till 1991	1. Russian Orthodox Church 2. Lutheran Protestants 3. Catholics 4. Conservatives 5. Baptist-evangelists 6. Seventh-day Adventist Church
Christian in Kyrgyzstan after 1991	1. Russian Orthodox Church 2. Jehovah's witnesses 3. Christian Novoapostolzy

Table 3: Christian religious organizations in Kyrgyzstan (Source: updated after Galkina et.al (2006), & after the data of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs (2020).

After 1991, in Kyrgyzstan starts increase of the people, taking Christian faiths, so by 2015 their number increased from 29 to 378 (source: Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2013). In result, during the last 24 years the number of churches increased up to 16 times.

Index	2010		2020			2030		
	Number	%	Number	%	Gain	Number	%	Gain
Total	547.76	100.0	615.33	100.0	67.57	685.03	100.0	69.71
Urban	186.17	34.0	209.07	34.0	22.90	240.23	35.1	31.15
Rural	361.59	66.0	406.25	66.0	44.66	444.81	64.9	38.56

Table 4: Population number in Kyrgyzstan with prognosis up to 2030 (Source: National Statistic Committee of the Kyrgyz Republic, 2019).

Relation of Religious organization and population growth

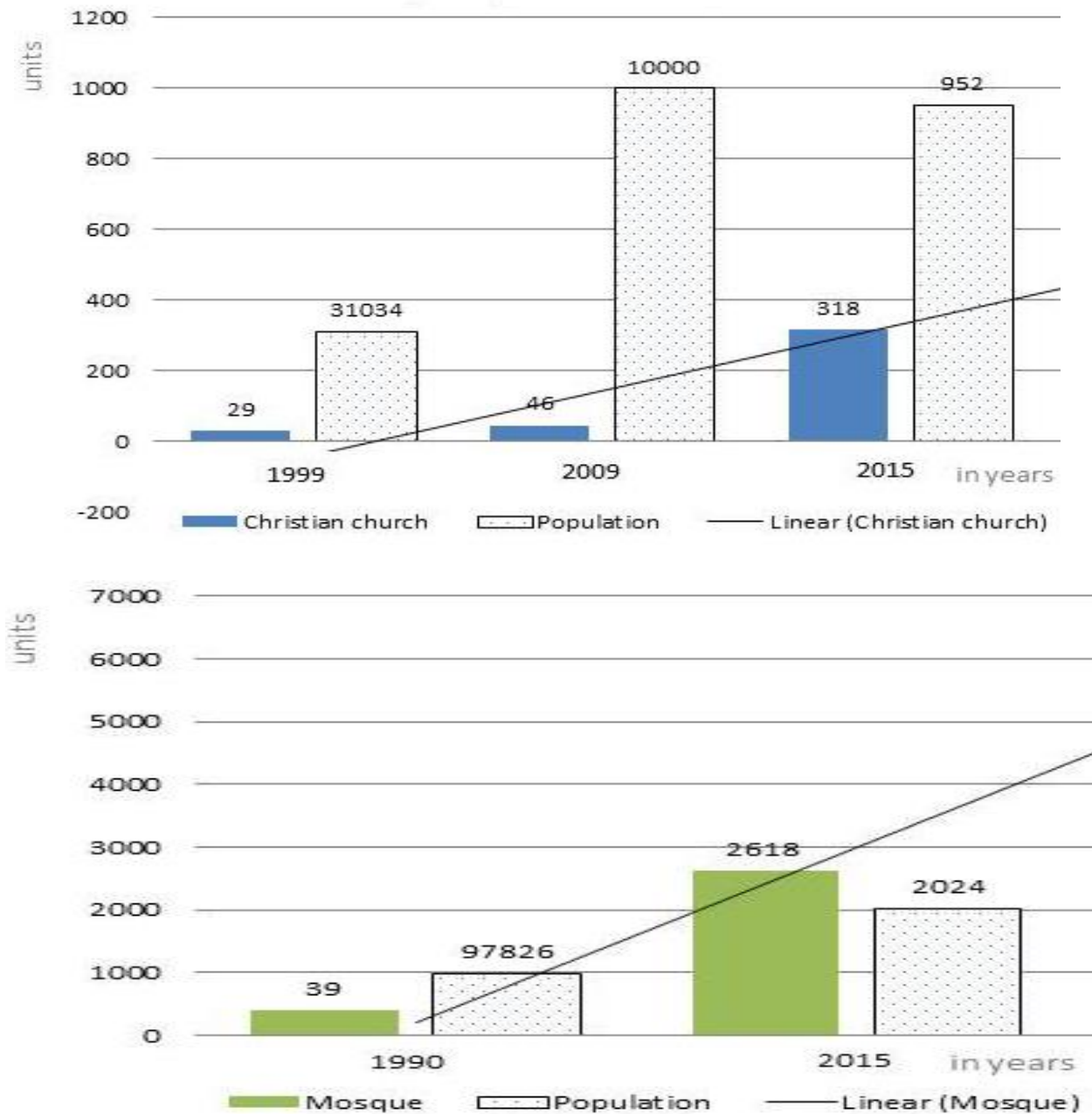


Figure 2: Growth of population number, churches and mosques in post-Soviet time
(Source: updated after Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs , 2014)

Correlation between Christian churches, mosques and population number shown in the Figure 2. Thus, in 1999 only 29 Christian churches come for 31,034 people, but in 2015 it increased up to 318 organizations for 952 people. Here, the data also states, the decrease of populations, visiting churches in 2009: 49 churches came for 10,000 people. In 2015, the number of visitors decreased, but an increase of churches observed, so for 952 visitors counts 318 churches. This increase can be explained by the influx of different missionaries and sect in post-Soviet

Kyrgyzstan, where they offer charity and financial support to socially poor peoples and young generation.

Kyrgyz Government do not support poor people and young generation with a social packet or similar as in developed European, Asian, and American countries. The same doing the Islamic sects and groups, where they use lack of knowledge about Islam of people, interpret a wrong ideology about islam and financial support is promised near future (example, recruitment for Syria). The Figure 2 also shows increase of mosques from 39 organizations in 1990 up to 2618 units in 2015 (means in 67 times) for last 25 years. Here, the financial supports come from Turkey and Saudi Arabia, but nevertheless people of the both religions visit church and mosques very seldom, but only on Fridays and holidays they are full occupied (Toktosunova., Asymov, 2001).

Distribution of religious institutions for 2014 in Central Asia is presented in Table 5. The Table shows, the greatest number of mosques was built in Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan; however recalculation of population number for one mosque shows the following results: in Kyrgyzstan, one mosque shares 2,102 persons, in Tajikistan – 2,720 persons, in Kazakhstan - 7,386 persons, in Turkmenistan-12,999, in Uzbekistan – 15,134 persons.

The data on GDP per capita shows that in countries with a low level of economic development there much more mosques. A large number of mosques in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are probable due to liberal legislation in the field of religion, which is far different from the other countries of Central Asia, where the autocratic modes which strictly control religious life of citizens are in power. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the legislation on religion in Tajikistan more severe, particularly in recent years, there has been closed several mosques as they couldn't pass the registration. It should be noted also that in Tajikistan collisions on the religious soil proceed so far between supporters of Islam and followers of the secular way of life, many of whom are former Communists.

Countries	Population	GDP per capita	Muslim institutions	Christian institutions	Years
Kyrgyzstan	5.919,700	1269	2816	378	2014
Kazakhstan	17.498,145	12276	2369	299	2014
Tajikistan	8.161,100	1114	3000	80	2009
Turkmenistan	5.173,943	9032	398	133	2010
Uzbekistan	31.025,500	2038	2050	175	2010

Table 5: Distribution of Muslim and Christian Institutions in Central Asia, 2014 (Source: Kyrgyz Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2014).

2. Discussions and Conclusion

The present analysis shows that in Kyrgyzstan there are significant problems in the registration and functioning of religious institutions, problems with religious education, which need to be solved in a complex with involvement of theologian scholars, social activists and government representatives. The decision of religious issues should be included in the category of the most important strategic objectives of the state, and for that must be given the current process of revival of Islam creative direction for the good of society in the country's national interests.

The government should develop a step-concept for a consistent and long-term state policy towards Islam, as well as clearly and rigidly define the basic principles for cooperation between the state and religious organizations, the criteria for identifying "undesirable" sects and religious organizations. It is necessary to reform and modernize the structure of the Muslim Board in

order to become efficient and competitive - meets the requirements of modern times, as an alternative to new radical currents.

Should be conducted in-depth reformation of the Institute of Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the republic, a change in personnel policy. Introduce uniform standards of religious ceremonies throughout the territory of the Kyrgyz Republic (a single "khutba"). Also, raise the level of education of the clergy, to help in the training of specialists meeting the modern needs of the time to research, a deep knowledge of religion and secular sciences, increase cultural, intellectual and educational level of the clergy. Develop a program of public education, as the prevention of religious extremism ideas and stereotypes about Islam, to develop a program of subjects on Islamic culture in schools, secular universities (Malikov, 2007).

To be an effective instrument for regulating relations between the state and religious organizations, the Agency for Religious Affairs should act as a "referee" to have a long-term strategy of a general nature, which does not change its course and direction of the identity of the new Chairman.

That it should involve the clergy in educational work with young people, give meaning to the problems of the community and those most interested in the very community in dealing with government. Actively involve the clergy in the state work together to address the spiritual and moral problems of society. Involve the "Arab" sponsors who build mosques and social projects, namely the construction and repair of schools. The Kyrgyz Government needs to make forecast for 2030 as the last events in the Middle East shows, that religion cannot be put on the second place as before. Nowadays, it has a relation with politics and social life of people in Kyrgyzstan.

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