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Religion and Religious Education in Kazakhstan¹

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ABSTRACT

A large majority of Kazakh people lived as Muslim people for centuries and tried to maintain their connection with Islam during the period of the Communist era. Obtaining independence in 1991 became the turning point in Kazakhstan's history. Religious education started to be given in the country after liberation. The study of religious education in Kazakhstan over the last 25 years is significant and meaningful regarding revealing the development of the process of collaboration between the Religion and the State. This article aims to offer a closer look at the processes of understanding of religion, religious education and realization of the necessity of institutions which facilitate collaboration between the State and religion. In this context, the process of independence of Kazakhstan, economic, social and cultural structures, ethnic and religious groups, and the process of institutionalization of religious education were examined and evaluated.

Keywords: Kazakhstan, Religious Education, Religious Organizations, Teaching Religion, Religious Education in Kazakhstan.

¹ This article is derived from a master thesis of "Religion, Religious Institutions and Religious Education in Kazakhstan".

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Kazakistan'da Din ve Din Eğitimi¹

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ÖZET

Kazak halkının büyük bir çoğunluğu asırlar boyunca Müslüman bir halk olarak yaşamış ve komünizm döneminde de İslam ile olan irtibatını muhafaza etmeye çalışmıştır. 1991 yılında Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği'nden ayrılarak bağımsız bir devlet olması, Kazakistan tarihinde yeni bir dönüm noktası olmuştur. Bu tarihten sonra ülkede din eğitimi verilmeye başlanmıştır. Son 25 yılda din eğitiminin Kazakistan'daki serüveninin incelenmesi, bu süreçte yaşanan gelişmeleri ortaya koyması yönüyle önemli ve anlamlıdır. Bu çalışma, Kazakistan'daki din ve din eğitimi ile ilgili süreçleri incelemeyi hedeflemektedir. Bu kapsamda çalışmada Kazakistan'ın bağımsızlık süreci, ülkenin ekonomik, sosyal ve kültürel yapısı, ülkedeki etnik ve dini gruplar ile din eğitiminin kurumsallaşma süreci ele alınmış, yaygın ve örgün din eğitimi uygulamaları değerlendirilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Kazakistan Tarihi, Eğitim, Dini Kurumlar, Din Öğretimi, Kazakistan'da Din Eğitimi.

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1. Introduction

Kazakhstan is the second largest country of the former Soviet republics, after Russia, with a population of 17.01 million in 2014 (Committee on Statistics of Kazakhstan, 2014, 12). Kazakhstan shares borders with China, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Russia ("Kazakhstan Creates Favorable Investment Climate," 2010). According to official numbers of the 2009 census, the share of the major ethnic groups as it stands today: Kazakhs 60,47 % of the population (9.540.806), Russians 24,5 % (3.869.661), Uzbeks 2.9 % (463.381), Ukrainians 2.68 % (422.680), Uighurs 1.53 % (241. 946), Tatars 1.4 % (226.803), Germans 1.1 % (220.975), other nationalities 4.5 % (790.240).

On October 25, 1990, the "Declaration on State Sovereignty" was adopted and on December 16, 1991, the Supreme Council adopted the Law "On State Independence of the Republic of Kazakhstan" which designated the status of Kazakhstan as an independent, democratic and constitutional state.

As of August, 8th, 2016 in Republic of Kazakhstan religious groups operate religious activities in 3.621 religious organizations. Muslim religious communities make the majority 2.517 (11.237.000) of all religious organizations. In Kazakhstan there are 229 religious associations of Orthodox (3.200.000), 88 religious associations of the Catholic Church (184.000), 5 Judaic (5.300), 4 Buddhist (14.000), 12 associations of Krishanits, 27 religious associations of nonconventional religions (Bakhai, Ahmadiya, munits, etc.) in number of 30.000, 219 Pentecostal Churches, 181 Evangelical Christians-Baptists organizations, 106 Presbyterian Churches, 60 organizations of Witnesses of Jehovah, 42 Seventh Day Adventists Churches, 26 New Apostolic Churches, the total number of them is 1.200.000 (Committee on Statistics of Kazakhstan, 2014, 12).

Religious organizations in Kazakhstan are officially registered as a non-profit and non-governmental organization and obeyed to meet established registration requirements and restrictions on distribution of religious materials, and new rules for opening places of worship according to the Law on Religion. As it stated in The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Religious Activity and Religious Associations (2011), religious denominations should be implemented their activities with the cooperation of Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs. Officially religious activities are controlled and approved by Ministry. Moreover, all religious associations by certain deadlines need to pass re-registration. Only those denominations which were given licenses and approvals have rights to operate legally in Kazakhstan. Otherwise, unregistered religious organizations are to be liquidated and reported at the request of Ministry of Justice.

In Kazakhstan, religious education was commenced in 2009 for 9th-grade students at secondary schools. In this framework, "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" subject started to be taught in public schools to prevent the destructive activity of suspicious religious groups. Moreover, the subject will support and maintain comprehension of the concept of unity among students (Kosichenko, 2012). Religious literacy confronts the fallible ideology and practice of extremity. The main aim of the paper is to provide sufficient information about religious institutions and education in Kazakhstan.

1.1. *History of Religion and Religious Groups in Kazakhstan*

Religious diversity of Kazakhstan resulted in complexity of political and historical events. In this part we will give general insights in historical processes of Kazakhstan's religions, their genesis, role and development over time.

Soucek (2000) in his work "Inner Asia" mentioned Central Asian region was ruled by several suzerains and had exercised several beliefs such as Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism, Buddhism, Christianity and Shamanistic cults during the early medieval time. Like this, Soucek stresses the importance of accepting the territorial location of Kazakh steppes which played a crucial role in spreading world religions in Central Asian countries.

Beyond doubt, tengrianism dominated for a long time in Central Asia before arriving in the region of world religions. Tengrianism based on the belief in a Creator and believers worshiped "sky" as the God of Universe. Probably first appeared in the second century and dominated for a long period in the steppes.

In actual fact, Christianity arrived earlier in the steppes. In vast compendium of Catholic history, the chief-editor Vian (2001) mentions medieval historian Biruni refers to the beginning of the III century A.D as the date when first Christians appeared in the territory of Central Asia. Also, historical sources

reference to the existence of churches in III–IV centuries. In the early fourth century, the Archdiocese of Nestorian Christians was established in the city of Merv.

Despite the arrival of numerous religions and movements, the dominant religion in the steppes remained Islam. The process of converting people to Islam was not even and flawless, but with time due to specific reasons Islam took control over Kazakhstan's steppes. In the XIV century Islam was spread in Altyn Orda Empire, which was preceded by Mongol Empire. Safargaliev (1960) in his work "The collapse of the Golden Horde" observes the roots of Kazakhs came from Altyn Orda. Berke Khan, as one of the most powerful emperor, during his rule mostly used Islam as a useful tool to emerge an internal and external organizational structure to fulfill his political ambitions to control Altyn Orda. In his research Mussabekov (2012) advocates that later the situation of acceptance Islam has changed when the entrance of Kazakh lands in the sphere of Russian influence in XVIII – XIX centuries strengthened Islam's positions because Kazakh tribes experienced necessity to stand apart from foreign invasion in a daily life of the steppes.

Besides Islam, new religions came with the settlers and refugees of Tsarist Russia (officially known as the Russian Empire, was a state existed from 1721 until it was dismissed in 1917). The Russian Empires territories gradually annexed parts of East European countries, Persia and the Ottoman Empire. Thus, Johnstone and Mandryk (2001) conclude the subjects of conquered countries were obliged to serve in peripheral parts of the Russian empire. So, Protestants had served in the Russian army and settled in military garrisons by the end of the XX century. Also, many exiled people came from East Europe to Kazakhstan as Poles, Finns, and Swedes who were Protestants or Catholics. Suchwise, in the steppes, started to appear new religions, which representatives still live in Kazakhstan's present society.

As previously stated, a political and societal life of Kazakh people closely interrelated with a history of the Russian Empire. The October Revolution, which brought entirely new understanding in the relationship between the Church and the State after the breakdown of Tsarist Russia, became a wholly new stage in the life of the Kazakh. In 1920, under the Soviet decree, Kazakhstan for the first time received its state system. The country was included as an autonomous national entity into the Russian Federation.

After comprising fifteen countries in the Soviet Union, the Bolsheviks with the leader Joseph Stalin started effective and extensive liquidation campaign of all mosques, churches or all religious schools in 1920. Materialistic outlook and ideology of the Party implied holding atheistic attitude and eradication of all religious beliefs. In the case of Protestants, for instance, Shlymova et. al (2013 in their research "Religious organizations of Kazakhstan") state the fact of the early years of the Soviet regime (1921-28), Kazakhstan Protestants suffered massive repression. For instance, during the period of repressions, only three pastors of the Lutheran Church survived of almost two thousand pastors.

As regards Islam, due to the particular place of Islam within citizens, the Bolsheviks were obliged to defuse measures to prevent an ardent reaction from Central Asian nationalities. In the 1940s, during a temporary religious melt due to effects of the Second World War, the Kremlin allowed a limited restoration of 'official' Islam in the form of the Kazakhstani branch of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Central Asia and Kazakhstan (SADUM) with its center in Tashkent. At this point, Khalid (2008) emphasizes the organization of SADUM implemented the new way to observe and control the religious situation in the region.

Despite the fervent confrontation of the Bolsheviks with the Orthodox Church in the earliest periods of the establishment of the Soviet Union, nevertheless, the restoration of the Orthodox life in Kazakhstan according to Abdakimov (1994) began in 1945. Almaty diocese was established and ruled by Metropolitan Nicholas, which marked the new stage of the Orthodox Church developing in Kazakhstan territories. The activity of the Orthodox Church steadily started to expand.

Regarding the Catholic Church, which along with other religions has experienced severe persecution during first decades of the establishment of the Soviet Union, the Church passed through the toughest period in its history. There was the almost complete destruction of the Catholic Church and its administrative structures in the Soviet Union. As Tulsy (2003) mentions in his work, by the end of 1970 the Catholic Church recovered most of its parishes.

1.1.1. Islam

For a long time, the majority of old Turkic tribes in Kazakhstan somehow opposed Islam and integration period of Islamization of the steppes was ambiguous and muddled. The only real contact most Kazakhs had with Islam states Olcott (2010) in her book about Kazakh people seems to have been through the Sufi holy men who moved around the steppe. For the Kazakhs' nomadism which hindered settlement to practice mosque-based devotion, Sufism was more suitable to the tribal environment. Indeed, Sufism itself has roots in pre-Islamic times since people still influenced by mystique beliefs and worships.

The acceptance of Islam local conditions was simplified in Central Asia by Hanafite School which law is the most flexible of the Sunni schools. Thereby, Naumkin (2005) in his paper about Kazakh steppes emphasizes the traditional customary law "adat" would go along with the Islamic sharia for many centuries, inclusively during Russian colonial rule and would end after the formation of the Soviet Union.

The October Revolution according to Allabergen (2009) indicated a new stage in political development and relationship between the State and the Church. In the mid-1920s religious activities of Muslim people were outlawed, and Islamic education was disrupted and reduced to a few hujras (educational groups) which continued to function illegally only in southern Kazakhstan. In her continuous study about Kazakhstan Yemeliyanova (2014) points out the fact ethnic Uzbeks in the official Islamic institutions of Soviet Kazakhstan enjoyed supremacy over the native population. Subsequently, Uzbek domination also accounted for Kazakh Muslims very restricted access to only two centers of formal Islamic education, Mir-i Arab Madrasa in Bukhara and the Islamic Institute in Tashkent which was reopened in the 1970s.

As states the representative of the State Committee for Religious Affairs Karashulakov (2015) in his report a growing number of Muslim communities, so if in 1991 the number was 68-70 (mosques, madrasas); in the early 2000s has reached more than 1500; then in April 2010 there were already 2383 Islamic religious organizations (mosques, madrasas). Many historical and cultural monuments and mosques were restored and renovated. Currently, in the country, there are 2,517 Muslim organizations. Today, some there are 44 Muslim charitable centers in Kazakhstan.

In 1990, SADUM collapsed, and SAMK was established as an independent association, the first of which was elected chairman Ratbek Haji Nysanbayuly. The chairman of SAMK is Supreme Mufti who elected at the general meeting. His candidacy for Supreme Mufti unofficially should be agreed with the Akorda (the official workplace of the President of Kazakhstan). Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan (SAMK) is the biggest and most influential in the country religious non-governmental organization, which brings together most of the Muslims of Kazakhstan.

1.1.2. Orthodoxy

The story of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan is associated initially with military settlements have arisen as a result of the annexation of Kazakhstan to Russia. In the south, the first military parables (small churches, houses of worship) appear in 1866 in Shymkent settlement and Turkestan.

The Russian Orthodox Church, despite the records which included information about relevantly friendly relationships between Orthodox and Muslim in the 19th century, continually attempted to persuade Tsarist Government to announce Islam as a threat to the Russian Empire. The Church foresaw ways to convert the Kazakhs to Christianity. Even during the period of severe persecution in the Soviet Union, the Russian Orthodox Church remains its dominance within other Christian Churches.

Today, the Orthodox faith is the second largest religion in Kazakhstan (about 28 percent of the population). By 1 January 2003, the Russian Orthodox Church had 222 parishes in the Republic (the number for 1989 was 62) and eight monasteries. In 1991, they were divided into three eparchies (Almaty and Semipalatinsk, Shymkent, and the Urals) by a decision of the Holy Synod. In 1999, the Almaty and Semipalatinsk eparchy were transformed into the Astana and Almaty eparchy that also included the Christian Orthodox structures of Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan. For a long time, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia Alexei II (is the official title of the primate of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is often preceded by the honorific "His Holiness") refused to unite the Orthodox Churches into the single Kazakhstani Exarchate. In 1995, he visited the Republic; it was as late as May 2003 when the Holy Synod

passed a decision about a Metropolitan See in Kazakhstan; Metropolitan Methodius (Nemtsov) was appointed as its head.

In recent years, the structural betterment of Orthodoxy in the country was carried out. Since 2010, the Metropolitan of Astana and Kazakhstan is Alexander Mogilev. According to official numbers in Kazakhstan, there are 229 religious organizations. Also in the country, there are Armenian Apostolic Churches and eight Old Believer churches ("Christianity in Kazakhstan," 2015).

Nowadays the Russian Orthodox Church holds many activities to educate youth and provide them sufficient help. It should be noted that a specially fixed-head priest has taught the current youth groups working in each of the Orthodox Church (in addition to Sunday schools). In February 2012, he held the Congress of Orthodox Youth of the Republic of Kazakhstan, where it was decided to establish Orthodox Youth Movement of Kazakhstan.

1.1.3. Catholicism

As it was mentioned above in the Kazakh steppes new religions started to spread with arriving of the settlers and refugees of Tsarist Russia. The second wave of exiled people who held different religious positions was during the First World War, when considerable number of prisoners of war and refugees who were Catholics arrived in Kazakhstan. Some Catholic parishes in Kazakhstan were quite numerous. In his extensive study, Tserokh (2005) exposes related data on the past events on real numbers of believers settled in Kazakhstan's steppes. For example in 1917 in a Catholic religious institution in the city of Petropavlovsk, there were about 5,000 believers of the Polish, German and Lithuanian descent. Kustanaisky parish had a remarkable number of houses of worship and about 6,000 Catholics.

The Stalinist repressions also have known as the Great Purge (1936-1938) has led to the exile of a vast number of Catholics, mostly Germans, Ukrainians and Poles by nationality to Kazakhstan and camps where many of them died. Many of the priests who have served their sentence in the camps after their release continued to serve in local Catholics in Kazakhstan.

The Relationship Agreement between Kazakhstan and the Holy See was signed on 24 September 1998, during the official visit of the Head of the State Nursultan Nazarbayev to the Vatican. Starting May 19, 2003, Chairman of the Bishops' Conference of Kazakhstan is Archbishop-Metropolitan Archdiocese of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the city of Astana is Tomasz Peta Bernard. Today there are 88 Catholic organizations in the Republic which instructed by priests from Poland, Italy, Germany, America, and Korea.

Followers of the Uniate (Greco-Catholic) Church attend Catholic churches, all of them being either settlers from Western Ukraine or their descendants. So far, there are three Uniate organizations in Kazakhstan (in Pavlodar, Astana, and Karaganda). In 1997, the Karaganda Uniate organizations acquired a church of its own, the first in the Republic (Karashulakov and Ibrayev, 2014).

Kazakhstan has the Catholic Church province (Archdiocese), the center of which is the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Maria Santissima in Astana. 88 Catholic communities are functioning, five of which are branches of the Greek Catholic Church of Kazakhstan.

1.1.4. Protestantism

Like Catholics Protestant arrived to the Kazakh steppes for military service. In the early years of the Socialist regime, Kazakhstan Protestants suffered massive repression. However, the prominent researcher of Soviet archives Tulsy (2003) mentioned the mass deportation of the Volga Germans which remarkably increased the number of Lutherans. Only since the 1960s, there was a gradual legalization of Lutheranism. If in 1966 in Kazakh the Soviet Socialist Republic was registered only one (Akmola) Lutheran congregation with 480 parishioners (another 88 organizations with 2957 operated without registration), then in 1986 there were 101 organizations, without registration - 44 organizations with 1,404 followers.

Union Baptist Church of Kazakhstan was established in October 1992 at the Founding Congress of Baptist Churches in the city of Almaty. Previously, Kazakhstan's Baptist Church was a member of AUCECB (All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians-Baptists) with the center in Moscow, which united many of the former Soviet Union Baptist Church.

In Kazakhstan, Protestants arose in the early 1990s and gave rise to an enormous group of charismatic churches, the largest of which are “New Life” with 38 organizations, “Agape” with 22 organizations and “Source of Life” with 28 organizations.

In his compendium, Danilenko (2009) gives the following data on the groups of Protestants in Kazakhstan. According to official numbers, the largest Protestant religious unity is Evangelical Christians-Baptists with 105 organizations. Among them, there are centralized structures as Churches of the Union of Evangelical Christians-Baptists with only 68 organizations and 27 independent Baptist churches function autonomously. The greatest number of Evangelical Christians-Baptists presented in Almaty Oblast with 24 organizations, Almaty with 15 organizations, South Kazakhstan with 13 organizations and in Karaganda regions with 53 organizations.

Active religious association “Jehovah's Witnesses” with 60 organizations which local religious organization is “Seventh-day Adventists” (42 associations) and 11 organizations “of the New Apostolic Church” have arisen in XIX-XX centuries in Kazakhstan.

1.1.5. Judaism

Likewise, other religious groups, the first Jews arrived in the steppes with Russian settlers long before the 1940s when thousands of Jews families were exiled to Central Asia. In his report about Jewish history in Kazakhstan Praisman (2005) mentions the existence of resources about first arrivals referred to Jewish settlers in the city of Verny (Almaty today) after giving the fortress town status in 1867. By the end of 1870 in Verny was formed Jewish community of the town. On the territory of Kazakhstan settled only those Jews who had the right to live outside of sedentary settlements. There were many doctors among the Jews who lived in the territory of Kazakhstan in the early XX century; also pharmacists, owners of industrial and commercial enterprises.

Oreck (2016) mentions in his study about approximately 8,500 Holocaust-fleeing Jews settlers who were exiled during World War Two to Kazakhstan. The first synagogue in Kazakhstan appeared before the revolution, the oldest of which is preserved in Semipalatinsk. At present, there are synagogues in the cities of Astana, Almaty, Aktobe, Petropavlovsk, Pavlodar and others.

The religious life of Jewish community was rehabilitated after obtaining independence. Researcher of the religious life of Kazakhstan's denominations Trofimov (2003) remarks in the last few decades there was the outflow of Jews from Kazakhstan to Israel. Nevertheless, despite the outflow of the Jewish population, the number of Judaic communities increased by the end of 2010. Early in 2003, there were Judaic communities practically in all regional centers (before 1998 there were four of them: two in Almaty, one in Shymkent and one in Kzyl-Orda). Since 1996, Yeshayah Cohen became the Chief Rabbi of Kazakhstan. In 1998, a Jewish cultural center was opened in Almaty. It was named after Menahem Shneerson, the Seventh Lubavitch Rabbi. The synagogue, the first newly built one in the post-Soviet period, is named after his father, Levi Itzhak. Since 2002 the newspaper “Shalom” is published in Kazakhstan. At the beginning of 2011, there were 26 Jewish religious associations. According to the re-registration outcomes, today, all Jewish organizations emerged into four local Jewish religious associations.

1.1.6. Other religions or religious movements

Besides traditional beliefs, in Kazakhstan nowadays there are a lot of religious organizations which represent new religious movements. The spread of these religious movements concurred with the turning-point in Kazakhstan society's life in the 1990s when the breakdown of the Soviet Union broke all fundamental ideological and religious mindsets.

In Kazakhstan, there are such religious organizations as Seventh-day Adventists, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormons), Baha'i Community, Moon's Unification Church (Moonies), Society for Krishna Consciousness, etc.

Today the Society for Krishna Consciousness has spread around the world, namely the United States and Europe. Before re-registration, there was 14 religious association of Krishna. As a result of re-registration, currently, in Kazakhstan, operate eight local religious associations Society of Krishna Consciousness.

Another steadily increasing in the number movement is spiritual center of National Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Kazakhstan, which is located in Almaty, considered as one of the most populous in Central Asia. The most influential preachers are descendants from Iran the Gulf States, and Malaysia. At the beginning of 2011, there were 20 religious organizations of the Baha'i denomination. Currently, in Kazakhstan, there are six local religious communities of the Baha'i Faith in Almaty, Akmola, Karaganda and South Kazakhstan oblasts and Astana and Almaty cities.

In his paper about history and development of Buddhism in modern Kazakhstan Azilhanov (2014) mentions "Almaty Won Buddhist Church" which operates in Almaty with the head of which is Palagina Larisa Lvovna. Local Religious Organization (LRO), created in 1997, has its specialized religious building actively attended by followers. The founder of Won Buddhism is Pak Chong Bing, better known under the name Sothesan Tedzhonsa (1891-1943), and was venerated by Buddhists as the "Buddha of a New Era". "Local Buddhist religious association of West Kazakhstan region" is headed Lyudmila Bykov, who actively proselytizes the basis of Won Buddhism. Today, Kazakhstan has two Buddhist religious organizations, which are located in Almaty and West Kazakhstan region.

Buddhists set up their community in Almaty in 1999. It is a multinational religion, and it unites Buriats, Mongols, and Kalmyks for whom Buddhism is a traditional religion. There are followers of Nipponzan Myohoji Buddhist Order founded in Japan in the 20th century. A monk of the order Junsei Terasawa visited Almaty twice (in 1994 and 1998) where he met his followers. In 2002, Terasawa organized a peace march across Pakistan and India which also attracted Buddhists from Kazakhstan to join the campaign.

1.2. Religious Education in Kazakhstan

In the present day, citizens of Kazakhstan are acutely aware of the significance of religious literacy, but the process of solving the problem still does not meet satisfactory level (Nadirova et al., 2015). Religions were presented in Kazakhstan's history long before the Soviet period and had deep roots in the past. This way, religious education was an intrinsic part of socio-cultural developments and changes. As distinct from the world, Post-Soviet Union countries in the early 1990s experienced more difficult processes of managing the profound changes in the society. Moreover, a long-lasting deterring anti-religious ideology of Communist Regime deeply deteriorated people's conscious and overall perception of religion. Therefore, the formation of religious instruction in Kazakhstan lacks consistent and continuous character. In this part, we will discuss main stages of the establishment and the development of religious education as the subject and the matter in Kazakhstan's society. Subsequently, official and non-official religious education in Kazakhstan, their history, initial points and the process of formation will be considered.

1.2.1. Religious Education in Public Schools, National Universities

From the first days of independence, uncontrolled religious education was opened to all comers in a significant number of private and missionary activities. Negligence and a belated reaction to the religious education in Kazakhstan inevitably have led to internal issues which, in the next place, nowadays have generated incompatibilities within society. In the light of recent socio-cultural changes and realities Kazakhstan's Government recognized the necessity of institutions in order to regulate relationship and collaboration between religion and public society. Also, the head of the Office of The Ministry of Culture and Sports Myrzayev (2015) emphasized in his report numerous attempts to solve the issue already were taken by the Government ever since religious radicalism imposed the threat on political order in Central Asian countries and Kazakhstan.

For a long time, there was no appropriate institution responsible for religious education in Kazakhstan in the 1990s, besides "Ahmet Yesevi University" which started teaching "Religion and Freedom of Thought" program in 1991. Starting from 1999 in "Al-Farabi Kazakh National University" and from 2002 in "Eurasian National University" prepared religion experts in the sphere of world religions. In 2002, "Buketov Karaganda State University" also offered courses in Religious Studies both for bachelor and master programs. In universities for students, the course was offered as a main course (Religious Studies) or elective course (History of Religions, World Religions, etc.). There were attempts to implement a broad range of courses to prepare specialists in the different field. Nevertheless, due to lack of Teaching Staff and materials, these attempts failed in a short term. Today in six universities there is only "Religious Studies" course, and two of them offer "Theology" course for students.

There are only six official universities which offer appropriate secular religious education: two on the national level are "Eurasian National University" and "Kazakh National University"; two on the state level are "Karaganda State University" and "Kazakh-Turkish University", which mutually operates in Kazakhstan and Turkey; two private universities "Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture" and "The University of Foreign Languages and Professional Career".

In their study Kartabayeva, Soltyeva and Beisegulova (2015) emphasize the importance of religious education, which a new subject for Kazakhstan and the fundamental problem of the subject arises from the fact that university courses mostly focused on research rather than pedagogical aspects of "Religious Studies". Poor initial presentation of the subject and the ambiguity of the definition of specialty deters prospective students from choosing "Religious Studies". According to official numbers annually there are only 530 graduate students.

Nevertheless, in Kazakhstan until 2011 there was neither standardized religious education training for teachers nor unified curriculum for public schools. Also, only couple years ago "Ahmet Yesevi University" and "Al-Farabi University" offered courses for teachers of religious education that would prepare qualified teachers for public schools to provide appropriate comprehension of religious diversity for pupils.

Kazakhstan holds the strict interpretation of secularism, which is also reflected in school instruction. The Ministry introduced religious studies — regarding knowledge about religions — only in 2009. "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies", as particular subject, is taught only for one year, in grade 9th. The Ministry currently does not aim to lengthen tuition period.

School education plays a crucial role in promoting a climate of religious tolerance when addressing the situation in schools with teachers of religious education. The topic of religion appears to meet with high interest from students who are curious to learn more about other people believes. The class takes place within the premises of schools and does not include visiting places of devotion or religious sites located in the proximity of the schools.

After the two-year pilot experiment in 2011, the Government officially put Religious Education under control and started to manage curriculum and allocation processes. Due to the ambiguity of the subject learning about religions and specialty there were contentious debates within specialists, educational agencies and in societal level and within academic circles in Kazakhstan. Many other problems as lack of examined methodology, lack of a clear consensus or the large variety of unrelated textbooks, etc. severely hinder the improvement of the overall development of the subject.

The "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" subject covers the range of topics and knowledge. In the teaching of the subject non-confessional approach was approved as compulsory according to the Decree of the Ministry (Podoprighora, 2012). The "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" subject is focused on giving students a systematic knowledge of the importance of religion, its history and role in the society; forming an idea of religion from the position of secularism; teaching tolerance skills in the comparing of the basics of different religious faiths and religious knowledge; explaining to students the meanings of world outlook, cultural and moral religions. Approximately 8 hours are dedicated to forming healthy religious perspective of students; the rest is distributed between teaching world religions, new religious movements and religious situation in Kazakhstan. The course is aimed to provide adequate and profound knowledge about beliefs, rituals, holy leaders, places, moral values, etc. in the past and nowadays of every world religion (as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism). Notable, more hours were allocated for Islamic culture and influence of Islam on Kazakh philosophers and Kazakh history. The non-confessional approach in teaching and curriculum are meant to reflect the reality of Kazakhstan and its religious peculiarities.

Above all the challenges concern about teaching the "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" subject, researchers denoted professional training teachers above all the challenges. This resulted in the shortage of teachers, whose social needs should be fulfilled. A minimum working hour (34 for a year) hinders professionals who hold a diploma in this field from starting a career at school. As for today reality, the subject of "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" in public schools are taught by teachers of social sciences (history, cultural studies, and basics of law). Minimum of working hours becomes the biggest obstacle in the dilemma of teaching religions at school. Since the subject is taught once per week (one hour) there are 34 hours allotted to the "Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies" subject. Respectively,

even a teacher (graduated with “Religious Studies” diploma) who has 2-3 year experience receives a monthly salary of 55.000 tenges. As it was mentioned above, annually some graduate students hardly reach 550, and respectively alumni prefer to enroll to more well-paid structures as prisons, ministries, intelligence agencies.

The Offices of Education in each administrative division organizes workshops and seminars to support teachers to widen their knowledge and share experience in teaching religious education and presentation of educational materials. Moreover, pluralistic approach, the multicultural content of students demand comprehensive and objective works in teaching religion help students constructively understand the history of world religions and promote peaceful co-existence. Initial and in-service training activity of “Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies” teachers demands operative actions from education administrators. Therefore, “Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies” subject’s teachers training still endangers various discussions and controversies among scholars and observers (Lebedev, 2013; Smagulov, 2009; Erpay and Jandarbek, 2015).

Another important aspect of teaching religion is creating of an appropriate textbook for students. The writing and of new textbooks is one of the fundamental issues in religious education in Kazakhstan since there was no the practice of preparing materials in this field by present instructors and educators. As Rymarz and Engebretson (2005) sum up in their study about the importance of the textbook in teaching religion: “A good religious education textbook can certainly help to improve the work of less qualified and experienced teachers; it cannot substitute for academic knowledge, experience and teaching expertise (p.59)”.

To provide appropriate religious education, yet having inextricable difficulties and lack of Teaching Staff at schools, it is crucial to concentrate on preparing comprehensive textbooks. As Erpay and Jandarbek (2015) stress in their research there were many attempts on the part of different writers to offer an appropriate book for schools. Writers as Dosym Omarov or Artur Artemiev offered books about the history of religions which eventually were rejected after examinations due to lack of the objectivity of religious knowledge and lack of non-confessional perspectives.

This way, the first textbook introduced to schools was “Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies” in January 2010, and at that time it was the only textbook available to teach the “Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies” subject introduced for the 9th class, with the leader author G. Esim. Eventually, Ministry of Education and Science refused to accept the textbook. The failure of the former manual presented by G. Esim is caused by many reasons. Nevertheless, *petra scandali* of the textbook was its objectivity – it supposed to inform 9th-grade students different world religions in a neutral way but the chapter on “New Religious Movements” – had slightly deviate tone. Instead of assuming a warning for pupils this section was interpreted as overly alerting and nontraditional.

According to Myrzayev (2015) textbooks of D. Kenzhetay will be used for teaching in 2016-2017 academic years. In comparison with G. Esim's textbook, new textbook has some advantages. There were presented exact notes concerning materials allowed learners to form real religious ideas. Therefore, National Instruction on the “Secularity and Basics of Religious Studies” subject in schools started the second phase of implementation in September 2016 with newly introduced Curriculum. The Ministry is responsible for creating National Curriculum which all public schools are obliged to follow. Nevertheless, some corrections and suggestions are accepted from the Office of Education of each oblast (administrative division). Secondary education is the responsibility of oblast and district administrators.

1.2.2. Religious Education in Institutions, Seminaries, Colleges, Madrasas

Non-secular educational institutions in Kazakhstan make a substantial part of the school system. Currently, in the country, there are only 15 religious, educational institutions: two Christian (Orthodox Theological Seminary in Almaty and Catholic Seminary of Mary, Mother of the Church) and 13 Islamic educational institutions (9 madrasas which maintained college status, 2 High Schools, and two educational centers). As for 2013, the total number of introductory courses and Sunday schools was 397 (334 of them are Islamic, 44 of Orthodox, 15 of Protestant, and 4 Catholic schools). Unlike National Universities, these educational institutions offer the confessional approach to learning religion. Only four of them are obtained status of official Universities: “Orthodox Theological Seminary” in Almaty and “Catholic Seminary of Mary, Mother of the Church”, “Nur-Mubarak Egyptian University of Islamic Culture”

controlled by Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs and “Higher Education Islamic Institution” controlled by DUMK (Духовное управление мусульман Казахстана) (Ministry for Religious and Civil Society Affairs [MRCSA], 2013).

1.2.3. *Islamic Institutions for Religious Education*

In 1990s, SAMK founded “Higher Education Islamic Institution” (Исламский институт повышения квалификации имамов Республики Казахстан) with a two-year education in Almaty which distributed imams in mosques of the country. However, official registration of the institution was approved only in 2002. In some mosques were held training courses for lower-ranking clergy, religious enlightenment engaged in circles and Sunday schools. The Spiritual Administration of the Muslims (SAMK) actively address issues of religious training of highly qualified workers.

In the 1990s three madrassas of 9 (“Ushkonyr,” “Shymkent,” “Saryagash”) received the status of the college. Today all of them recognized as official colleges. The Madrasa College, along with religious subjects also teaches secular subjects. Students who have graduated from the Madrasa College may work not only in religion but also in the public sphere. These vocational schools are similar to Turkish Imam Hatip Schools.

At Higher Education Islamic Institution, as of January 1, 1997, at first and second courses students were learning the basis of Islam and Arabic Language. Note that the training is four years, but the entire 3rd and 4th years were the practice in mosques. Naturally, at that time a little number of graduate students was insufficient for the high number of mosques. Therefore, many mullahs know little Arabic, and the Koran is practically not read the text but scam surah from Quran (“The spread of Islam in Kazakhstan,” 2015).

The decision on construction of the institution “Nur-Mubarak,” which was adopted at the meeting of the two presidents during the visit of President of Kazakhstan N. Nazarbayev to Egypt, laid the foundation of qualified Islamic education. As for higher Islamic education, the first official University which offered qualified education was “Nur-Mubarak University” in 2001. The agreement on the establishment of the “Egyptian University of Islamic Culture Nur-Mubarak” was ratified by the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on July 2, 2003.

The University was granted a license of the Ministry of Education and Science. Today, “Nur-Mubarak University” is a school that trains qualified imams, Islamic studies, religious studies, teachers of Arabic language and literature, translators and scientists. Since its commencement to the present day, more than 300 people came out of the walls of the “Nur-Mubarak University” graduates.

Kazakhstan prepared the state standard on specialty “Islamic Studies” and in June 2011 it was officially introduced in the classifier of Higher and Postgraduate Education Specialties of the country. It is believed by Kazakh authorities the approach makes it possible for Islam on the ideological level, to prevent and neutralize the arguments are based on generating manifestations of religious radicalism. At the same time, it is for Islam in Kazakhstan is recognized as “an increasing role in the consolidation of society”, which development is impossible without the active support of political power.

1.2.4. *Catholic Institutions for Religious Education*

In 1991, in Karaganda was established an official center of “Apostol Administration of Kazakhstan and Central Asia” which had the responsibility of all Central Asian countries which had Catholic followers. Catholic Churches of Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan were controlled from Karaganda. In 2015 the construction of the Main Church in Karaganda was completed. It is one of the largest dioceses of Kazakhstan. With time Karaganda is becoming the religious and cultural center of the Catholic Church of Kazakhstan. “Theological Seminary Mary - Mother of the Church” in Karaganda is so far the only institution in the whole of Central Asia. It began its existence in 1997 and was called “Redemptoris Mater”.

However, the official date of the birth of educational center was July 16, 1998, when his Holiness John Paul Lenga inaugurated the seminary, entrusting it under a special maternal care Virgin Mary - Mother of the Church (Karashulakov and Ibrayev, 2014). A full course of studies in the seminary lasts six years. The study is organized as follows: 4 years of Theology, two years of Philosophy (graduated school), and

another year of the practice in example course (elective course), during which the seminarians more intimately acquainted with the life of the community and the activities of parish priests. Educational programs combine undergraduate subjects approved by the Training Committee of the Catholic Church and discipline taught-specific educational standards of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Seminary offers the next courses as Liturgy, Bible Studies, History of Catholic Church and Theology.

1.2.5. Orthodox Institutions for Religious Education

According to Trofimov (2003), Almaty Orthodox Theological Seminary was established as the higher religious, educational institution for training clergy, choir directors and psalmists to the parishes of the Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan. The history of the seminary begins in 1991, when the decision of the Holy Synod on January 29 the Diocesan Seminary was opened in Almaty. Initially, the school was located at Holy Nicholas Cathedral, Almaty, and at the beginning assumes only a two-year training period.

From 2001 until 2010 the Seminary had the status of Academy. Lately, in September 2010 were held first entrance exams in the newly established Seminary. In the first year of full-time and correspondence department of thirty-eight students were admitted from different cities and dioceses of the Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan. The term of study at the seminary on the pastoral office has changed, and educational tuition was extended up to 5 years (preparatory course and 4-year bachelor courses).

As Rysbekova (2015) acknowledges in her study of the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan, educational programs combine undergraduate subjects approved by the Training Committee of the Russian Orthodox Church and discipline taught-specific educational standards of the Republic of Kazakhstan. During the entire period of study, students study the main body of theological sciences, including Doctrinal Discipline, Biblical Studies, Church History, Ancient and Modern Languages.

1.2.6. Protestant Institutions for Religious Education

Protestant and New Protestant movements do not have any official religion establishments in the level of higher education. Religious organizations conduct Sunday schools in the body of The Union of Baptist Churches of Kazakhstan or their parishes.

As Danilenko (2009) states in his extensive research, Union of Baptist Churches of Kazakhstan was established in October 1992 at the Founding Congress of Baptist Churches in the city of Almaty up to nowadays functioned as official Institution which responsible for Pedagogy and Methodology of Christian education. Union Baptist Church of Kazakhstan was organized to coordinate, to assist the churches in matters of missionary work, spiritual education, publications, and acquisition of religious literature, social service, as an aid in issues of spiritual care for the representation to external and society.

According to recent reports, despite the strict constraints cast by State, The Union of Baptist Churches of Kazakhstan managed to register the educational institution which is still needed to comply educational standards of the Republic of Kazakhstan since it has no official accreditation. Basic theological subjects are taught at "Bible High School" (Библейский Институт): Overview of Old and New Testament, Dogmatic, History of Christianity, Counseling, Psalms, Acts of the Apostles, Christian ethics, principles of the gospel. All departments of Institute are working in part-time courses. It means the student must arrive at the Institute 4 times a year, musicians three times a year or for a 2-week session. So, the program allows the student to complete the course of training on the job in the service of the Church and production. Terms of training on the training received brothers and sisters.

Other less populous religious organizations also lead Sunday Schools in their parishes. For example, there are few Judaic schools and educational centers as "Ohel Levi Yizkhok" or "Or Avner", which provide youth programs and teach basics of Jewish belief. There are more religious educational programs (as "Foundation" program provided Society for Krishna Consciousness to learn basics of sacral texts) in other religious organizations which give people profound details and knowledge about their beliefs.

2. Conclusion

Over the last few years, religious education in Kazakhstan has become one of the most discussed and conflicting topics. From the first days of independence, uncontrolled religious education brought the

country to the critical situation when lack of religious literacy threatens the security of the State. Undoubtedly, the Government of Kazakhstan had the flawed and imperfect policy on the matter of religion in the sphere of education: the Ministry had included religious studies in school Curriculum only in 2009. At the same time, despite its prevalence, unlicensed religious, educational activity, as well as other forms of confessional religious education such as Sunday schools, is not welcomed by the state bodies. And for a long time, secular schools in Kazakhstan were not offering the religious education which, subsequently, brought many issues in society. In 2011 learning about religion from secular perspectives in high schools became compulsory and put in place a new foundation for collaboration between the State and the religion when the religion entered the educational sphere.

Nevertheless, in the light of recent socio-cultural changes and realities Kazakhstan's Government faced the necessity of institutions responsible for regulation relationship and collaboration between religion and public society. So there were raised heated disputes from societal level to academic circles throughout the country. So, teaching religion and solving the issues related to implementation of the "Secularity and Basics of Religious Education" subject became a critical point demanded comprehensive and agile action plan.

The scope of the study was limited regarding mixed data and appropriate resources on the topic of learning and teaching religion since there is no official database for religious education in Kazakhstan and scarce of academic research in the joint field of religion and education. Nevertheless, the paper extends our knowledge of the religious situation in Kazakhstan since its formation.

The processes of implementing official curricula and courses for teaching religious education and the opening of training centers and institutions of specialists of religion were passive and stagnant. Partly it was culpability of the State, which holds a strict position in controlling the activity of religious organizations. Nowadays there are still a little number of High Educational Institutions to provide practical knowledge for theologians and specialists. Only 6 Public Universities offer "Religious Studies" course which is critically insufficient to satisfy the realities of the State. The research has also shown that, besides Islamic educational institutions, there are a relatively little number of high schools of other denominations.

The situation of implementing the "Secularity and Basics of Religious Education" subject in the 9th grade in public schools brought new opposition and aversion within educators and observers of the religious situation in Kazakhstan. The government has developed a new curriculum, program which was tested in some schools. As follows, more comprehensive initiatives were done in the last few years.

Consequently, for Kazakhstan the issue of religious education is critical. In this case, religious education at schools is significant for the younger generation, regarding their cultural and normative integrations. Religious education will highly benefit from the improvement of the issue. Moreover, the transfer of fundamental values is essential to guarantee a minimum level of social consistency.

We believe that comprehensive initiatives of the Government would foster present critical situation of the subject. There are still some difficulties as the important competence of teachers in public schools, inferring SBRS in the curriculum, its modification of resources and textbooks implementation of holistic approaches. Further investigation and experimentation into developing an appropriate program for training teachers of religious education are strongly recommended. Also, despite of the implementation of final draft on National Instruction on the "Secularity and Basics of Religious Education" subject in 2016, curricula reforms need constant revision and renewal of resources. New textbooks are supposed to highlight the new premises of education which correspond with educational and political paradigms of Kazakhstan.

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