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# THE ASSOCIATION OF RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS OF KAZAKHSTAN

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Alexandr KLYUSHEV

*Andreykin Igor Valeryevich.*  
*Religious scholar.*

Article on Topic:

**The activity of the centers for assistance to victims of destructive sects as the factor destabilizing the religious stability in The Republic of Kazakhstan.**

The strong are always powerless to blame:  
The history examples myriads we have of that,  
But why we hesitate to learn ...  
... "Oh, what for I am to blame?" - "Shut up! I'm tired of listening.  
The there is no sense for me to judge your case!  
You are to blame, because I'm hungry and I want to eat",  
Said Wolf, and dragged the Lamb in to the wood.  
*Ivan Andreevich Krylov, «Wolf and Lamb»*  
*(Extraction from book "Fables of Krylov").*

In the year of Kazakhstan chairmanship in OSCE, we can see the number of human rights violations in the sphere of freedom of conscience. For example, the constant fines of representatives of Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of Churches who do not have state registration; closure of Scientology Church, with the sentencing that is according to the opinion of human rights defenders is far from the truth, and the nomination of the unfocused accusations; closure of three Jehovah's Witnesses communities in South Kazakhstan, and also the half year suspension of the activity of two Full Gospel Churches "New Life" in Aktau and Kokshetau due to the fact that religious activities took place outside the address of legal although this activity is not the violation of the law; obscuration of registration of Jehovah's Witnesses in Atyrau region for seven years. In this article, I want to draw public attention to the propaganda war is unfolding in the media against religious minorities in Kazakhstan. Few years ago invited papers were made, discrediting the church, immediately after a phone call or fax from the National Security Committee to the editor of the newspaper, for example, the case of slander against the Evangelical church "New Life", published in the newspaper "Liter"

on 15.04.2008; the article by Kanat Balatbaev "Svyatie ugodniki" ("Saints") in "Stepnoy Mayak" newspaper on 15.04.2008, an anonymous article entitled "Caution! The Sects" with the reference on the information published online by the employee General Prosecution Office, Saparbek Nurpeisov, in which he states: "The General Prosecution Office has defined the source of threat to national security and social stability in face of two churches – "Scientology" and "New Life" To the date the entire clamp-down in a media through the help of series of public associations, which are virtually unpunished, distribute huge amount of negativity and lies, creating a negative image in the eyes of Kazakhstanians towards evangelical churches and other religious minorities. According to the representative of the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan, the results of the monitoring in the press on October 1, 2008 to February 20, 2009 showed that 332 articles among 1,845 articles written on religious theme were devoted to religious groups that society decided to refer as non-traditional." In 91 of 332 articles were headlines with alarming names" – said the representative of the Association of Religious Organizations of Kazakhstan, Viktor Ovsyannikov. "Religious extremism changes guise", "Get out of the temple, merchants", "No, to sectarianism", "Judgment for sectarian", "The judgment on Krishna", "Imported faith is an akin to advertising", "Not going to surrender", "The House of God or The Shopping Mall", "High price of liberalism", "Terrorist attack won't work", "A well-healed", "Protection against false prophets", "Sectarians saw the light", "Imperceptible danger", "The new law on religion should be tougher" – are the names of some articles about non-traditional religious organizations, presented by Viktor Ovsyannikov<sup>2</sup>.

In 2009, in Kazakhstan were opened 10 new Social Organizations (hereinafter referred as - SO), that deal with problems of "destructive sects". For the current year in Kazakhstan, 10 new centers that work with victims of destructive cults were established. Last year there were only three of these organizations active. The centers are stuffed with psychologist, lawyers, social workers, ready to help every person, caught in the hands of pseudo-religious organizations. The first center was created in 2001 in Kostanay region. It's founder was Yulia Denisenko, by now she is the president of the Association of the Centers working with the victims of destructive cults<sup>3</sup>. Here, for example, some of the names of newly registered organizations: Kostanay Region – SF "Centre for assistance to victims of destructive religious movements", the head is Yulia Denisenko, Zhambyl Region – SO "Research of aggressive cults", the head Tarzhanov B.M., Aqmola Region – SF "Centre of assistance to the victims of destructive religious movements", the head Orazbaeva G.K., at al<sup>4</sup>.

What you can see in the warning signs of these organizations?

First of all, their very appearance suggests that someone benefits of eroding religious stability in society. One gets impression that for the state is not enough to have widely prescript Criminal Code and Administrative Code, which provides a clear framework of criminal and administrative violations and stipulates the degrees of punishments for their deeds. But the dissent in the religious spheres is placed in a rank of a dangerous phenomenon in the society, with which society must fight and these public organization and funds are the catalysts for the fight with the dissent – with "non-traditional pseudo-religious movements"

In second, in the names of these associations lies immediate promise of intolerance and aggression, but also it brings "anti-sectarian" phobia to society. In all media there is a massive propaganda, such as: "Warning – the sect", and information is given: "If your relative or a friend started to attend a religious meeting – please, call us..." That automatically

creates the unhealthy background in the society towards any religious group, which is not part of religious systems such as: Spiritual Board of Muslims of Kazakhstan, The Russian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchy, The Roman Catholic Church, and Jewish Synagogue. Phobias, suspiciousness, unwholesome talk, are developed, which clearly have a negative impact on the religious minorities in their social field of life. Names, such as "Centre of Assistance to Victim of Destructive Sects", are applied to the moral humiliation of believers of Evangelical churches in case if the center participates in the analysis of some kind, perhaps the simplest everyday complaints of the individual citizen to the activity of the church. Indeed the field of legal activity of the above mentioned SO is just helping the victims of destructive cults, and this means, that the law of Kazakhstan should have carefully considered list of "so-called" destructive sects by name. And this organization has to have no right to exist legally in the legal field of the Country. And what it turns on the fact? Centers for assistance to victims of destructive cults are "investigating" the officially registered in the Ministry of Justice religious associations. Moreover, from theological, scientific point of view, these churches did not even fall under the category of new religious movements, such as "Moon's Unification Church", and are in fact Christian Protestant, evangelical communities. It turns that from legal point of view, the Centers for assistance to victims of destructive sects has serious violations, engaging in hazing activities. Let us imagine this example: someone from "Centre for Assistance to a Schizophrenics" comes to you and offers you their generous assistance. And that is good, but only for those indeed having schizophrenia, but not for the person who does not suffer from this disease. In this situation, like a healthy person, I can say: "Sorry but you were wrong address; you have to go to the sick and help them instead." But when Centers for assistance to victims of destructive sects actually gets involved in investigating of certain case, that took place in Christian evangelical church, they automatically generate adversarial atmosphere on few different levels. First – on public eyes, as they are dealing with the destructive sects, it means, that the church they are dealing with is actually not a church, but a dangerous sect. So the mark of dangerous sectarianism is put on church and the seed of phobia of the church is sown in the society. Second – for the representative of the church, to work, to oppose, and to protect their point of view before the organizations, means automatically acknowledge themselves as a destructive sect, which in this case is nothing but lies and an insult. In another words, by the names of the organizations – "anti-sectarian" is an act of a serious destabilization in the religious harmony of the society.

Third - the concept of "destructive" and "sect" in the legal debates of Kazakhstan is very abstract and are often used not to those who deserve this title. For example, the paper edited by Doszhanov N.A., Karabaev M.S., "Practical Guide on Religious Youth, Committee on Religious Affairs. - Astana: LLP Agroizdat, 2008 - 208 sec. © Ministry of Justice of Kazakhstan, on page 135 provides a definition of destructive religious organizations (hereinafter – the DRO): *DRO – is a totalitarian organization, showing: a great or excessive devotion or loyalty to a particular person, idea or subject.* This definition raises a number of complaints. Namely: that means "great or excessive devotion"? How to measure it? What is their criterion? What is the measure which shows the moderate devotion to religious ideals?

Any "traditional" religion can get under such a definition. For example, to which we assign the monastic movement in the ROC (more than 600 monasteries) under the above-mentioned definition? After all, the monks are once ordinary citizens, who renounced all

worldly things, family, music, literature, family members, "normal life" and a lifetime devoted themselves to prayer in the cell because of their religious ideals. Let me give an example to quote one of the statutes regulating the life of an Orthodox monk: *Holy Trinity Alexander Svirsky monastery - the coenobitic monastery, employing 50 people in brethren. The monastery itself is the subject to a ruling diocesan bishop, who called the Metropolitan of St. Petersburg and Ladoga, Holy Trinity-Alexander Nevsky Lavra Svyaschennoarhimandrit in paragraph 1.6. Obedience is a constant voluntary humble submission to the will of another with a decisive rejection of your own will and self-understanding. True novice does obedience exactly as it was stated to him, never taking away from it or adding to it*<sup>5</sup>. can we say, that this is not a great or excessive devotion to a person, idea, etc. based on this statute? But here comes the Russian Orthodox Church and against her, the above stated rules do not regard as religious fanaticism, but rather as a great feat of faith. Or what about devotion of Muslims from SAMK (Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kazakhstan), holding 4 times daily prayer, reverence for all the holidays and will never accepting the change in his mind considering this religious beliefs, as well as with deep conviction relating to those who for one reason or another, comes out from Islam. Being out of Islam, people can experience the brunt of rejection by their family and friends, and maybe even direct threats and beatings. Is that "official" position excessive or not excessive? Any religious views are subject to these detentions in the same extent.

*Implementation of activities aimed at destroying of the mental and physical condition of the individual as well as traditions and norms established in a particular society.*

None of the RO's has the destruction of mental and physical condition, intended in its statutory activities.

*The use of manipulative or coercive techniques of persuasion and control over the mind, behavior and lives of other individuals designed to promote the goals of the leaders of the group, leading to dependence and obedience to the doctrine and the leaders seeking to illicit enrichment and illegal authority.*

We can bring any prayer and any religious revelation under the term "manipulative" techniques as for a believer of every religion his or her scriptures are of the supreme authority, for example, the Bible and the Koran. But from the standpoint of an atheist, any religious beliefs are uniquely harmful to humans and are a display of psychosis, or limited vision, retardness, inadequacy, coupled with the manipulation of consciousness of adherents. Every religion is a danger to society from the standpoint of an atheist. How strongly does the representatives of "traditional" religions are influencing on or manipulation with the minds of their followers? The above-mentioned definitions emphasize the destructiveness of the commitment to totalitarianism or SO thereof, to the same extent, and perhaps more can be safely attributed to one or another "traditional" form of religiosity. Similar problems arise with the definition of the word "sect". And if, in a strictly theological sense, the word sect has a purely scientific meaning, as an offshoot of the main religious movement, but in the domestic format, the word becomes repulsive-negative connotation, which is helpful in the fight "anti-sectarians" with religious minorities. So, there are serious problems in the formulation of concepts that are appealed by the "sects" fighters.

In - fourth, the existence of these centers - is discrimination on religious grounds. If you try to disengage them from abusive language and name all in right words, then how could we see the names of stated associations in accordance with the scientific and legal terminology? Maybe it would like this, Center for assistance to victims of evangelical churches and new religious movements. Then there is precedent for the separation of some religious groups over others. Under the Constitution, no religious group has more rights than another. Citizens who profess a particular religion are equal before the law. If the activities of several religious communities, has a destructive impact on citizens and these facts are not regulated by the existing administrative and criminal codes, and it makes sense to occur a number of SO's that are to monitor and help citizens affected by religious organizations, then it would be better to register the names of the centers, such as "Center of Assistance to Victims of Acts of Religious Organizations". At least, this SO is not excluded from being legitimate to the legal field. In this existing reality, the fact of discrimination is evident.

In fifth, this kind of SO's are using the direct access to the mass media, regularly sowing the seeds of hatred in the society towards religious minorities. They use vilified and repulsive collection of words such as: "sect", "sectarians", "strange prayer meetings", "howls", "zombies", "the destruction of the psyche", "danger", "origin of obscurantism", "fanatics" and many others. There is one of hundreds examples. Title of the article: "The Word of Life or the center of obscurantism. Karaganda groans from the domination of various sects"<sup>6</sup>. Imagine what can be going on in the heads of ordinary laymen, when they read this kind of headlines. What, people are groaning from the domination of various sects? Where authorities are doing with that? Where are these sectarians? And the newspapers clearly indicate the names of these "terrible sects." The atmosphere of rejection has been injected and precedent for the violence and persecution of religious minorities has been created. In fact, these associations are subversive in their activities and they are destroying the peaceful coexistence of Kazakhstan's citizens who have different religious viewpoints. The question arises, what is a purpose of everything being done?

News speaks for themselves. For example: "Kazakhstan - the leader among the CIS countries to combat destructive cults", says Zarina Nokrabekova. "Kazakhstan, known for its tolerance and interfaith tolerance, attaches great importance to prevention and spiritual "vaccination", preventing pseudo-religious movements and trends", - said E. Volkov<sup>7</sup>. Let's try to analyze with what they want to impress credulous reader through the information. Is it the fact, that Kazakhstan is known for its tolerance? But tolerance is tolerance for another one's point of view. And at the same time, Kazakhstan is the leader among the CIS countries on spiritual "vaccination" of the population from pseudo-religious movements and trends. It is very difficult to understand how in the same vein can be the religious tolerance and leadership in the fight against "pseudo" movements. But list of description of these movements Kazakhstan struggle with and is leader among the CIS countries was not given. And maybe the reason is that even the easiest man in the street can see absolutely peaceful and healthy society religious associations in them, but they are just not the titular religions. And let's look up at the words they came up with ..."spiritual vaccination." The only pity is that the vaccine is dominated by major number of lies that makes it not useful for the society. How can I fight evil using a lie? Isn't a lie an evil itself?

Head of Resource Centre Arlan Haziz Tortbaev as regards to the religious situation in the country: *"Look how they live and what they do, some imams, representatives of SAMK (especially in the regions) at work and outside work? Look what they have done to religion! They've made of it the sphere of money and trade. How and who will want to have faith after that? Who will listen to them and what power will they have then in the society?"* After such an unflattering assessment of SAMK, Mr. Tortbaev suggest: *"...it is high time to create a Special Committee on the state ideology and moral relations (rather than the banal Agency*

for Religious Affairs) – the state body directly subordinated and accountable to the Head of State”<sup>8</sup>. That is, to make religion into the sphere of state ideology and to register everyone, as they think about God, afterlife, prayer, etc. That also means to identify and agree a number of true religions, and give the rest, the status of wrong religions, that for the believer means a kind of blasphemy, when somebody regulates the spiritual life, as if establishing a monopoly on "what God is a right God to believe in". Such appeals are heard in our society today.

We don't want to forget a number of classical examples of history, for example, persecution of Christians in the Roman Empire during the first three centuries A. D. and the Holocaust in Nazi Germany.

There are examples from the first centuries. In order to slander Christians, the Roman authorities have resorted to various kinds of propaganda. We know this from the remaining written records of persecutors and apologists of the new faith. You can see the main flares, with which the Church was branded from many sources. This is the orgy at the Last Supper, killing babies for ritual of the Eucharist, stupidity, narrow-mindedness, social insecurity, betrayal of the state. One example, known to modern world, is the work of the philosopher Celsus - "The True Word"<sup>9</sup>. In this "The True Word" philosopher conducts "investigation" and reveals to the Roman socium "whole truth" about the pernicious, destructive and dangerous to the state cult of followers of Jesus Christ or Christians. On many of the allegations, we can learn from the protections of teachers of the church, such as Origen, which was published in his book "Contra Celsus"<sup>10</sup>. Origen refutes the lies and slander by contrasting the true position of the Church. Slander and lies were the basis of attacks on Christians, which was the basis for the triumph of the Church in the aftermath. But this lie caused wave of hostility and hatred, phobias, persecution and harassment of Christians. Anyone who uses lies in his arguments, and worse, misleads society, always loses in a historical perspective.

This is an example from the recent past. How had happened that the cultural, educated nation of Europe decided to implement the idea of the Holocaust? In this complex situation the Nazi propaganda has played its major role. Hitler and his associates had to enlist the support of their own people against the European Jews due to his radical anti-Semitic attitudes. In 1933 the Ministry of Propaganda and Public Education was established, headed by Joseph Goebbels. This state body was created to implement Nazi ideas to the masses through cinema, theatres, books, radio, music, textbooks and newspapers. The lion's share of the promotional activities of the state apparatus has held so-called "Jewish Problem". At the time when Nazis came to power, the attitude toward Jews was not threatening the lives of millions. For example, in the "Neue Wiener Journal" for March 31, 1933, the honorary chairman of the "Union of National German Jews" Max Naumann, clearly describes the situation of the Jewish minority, indicating that the person had only a few anti-Semitic antics of hooligans, against which the new regime has made every actions - "Of course there were some tricks, but only... And I know that in these cases the authorities had acted immediately. We, the German Jews, at least, are convinced that the government and the NSGWP leadership really want to maintain peace and order"<sup>11</sup>. But the attitude of the Germans gradually changed. The propaganda started to work. Jews were called "subhuman", the worst enemies of the nation, they were subhuman creatures infiltrating in Aryan society, frightened Jewish communist threat. For example, the film "The Eternal Jew", filmed in the 1940 by Fritz Hippler, presents the image of Jews as a wandering culture of parasites sequestered sex and money. German newspapers, such as "Der Stürmer" were

constantly published caricatures of Jews, calling them "nonhumans" and the enemies of the Reich. Thousands of Jews staying in the camps had to write letters home about good treatment towards them, the films were also made of this to explain the to the German population the reasonableness of the deportations of Jews in the ghetto, after which millions were gassed to death in gas chambers. But no one noticed it. Hitler's propaganda has done its job. The German people got terrible ideological vaccine, consequence which was the unimpeded extermination of six million people and almost the full support of the population. Even the most sensible people start to believe any lie if it is to talk constantly and vigorously.

*"Propaganda must always refer only to the masses of ... In fact, propaganda is a tool and therefore should not be viewed otherwise than in terms of goals"* (Adolf Hitler, "Mein Kampf".) What is the purpose of those who are currently "rocking the boat" and generate adversarial atmosphere in the field of religion in our country?

According to information based on data from the Religious Affairs Committee in the Republic of Kazakhstan, we can draw the following conclusions regarding diversity of religious associations in the country:

As of April 1, 2009 the Republic of Kazakhstan has 4,221 active religious associations and groups, of which 3,577 are registered as legal entities or branches, and 559 put on the account in local executive bodies as a minority religious group. 3,179 mosques, cathedrals, churches, prayer houses belong to the religious organizations. 2120 Islamic religious associations are registered as a legal person or branch, 336 as a small group from the 2506 ones. There are 2,267 places of worship at the disposal of Muslim believers. 279 Orthodox religious groups are registered as a legal entity or a branch and 11 are registered as small group from 292 ones. 262 religious buildings are at their disposal. Kazakhstan also has 84 religious associations of the Roman Catholic Church, 1261 Protestant religious associations, 28 Jewish, 4 Buddhist and 46 other religious associations of non-traditional religions (Baha'i, Hare Krishna, Scientology, etc.)<sup>12</sup>.

The scope of religious liberty - is one of the most important areas for the conscience of man. Statistics show the real picture on the religious arena of the country. In our age of globalization it is difficult to keep the country sealed up in an information vacuum, or behind the Iron Curtain. The flow of religious information gets into our society like in any other open society. People of our country have right to draw conclusions about their religious position, despite the growing media propaganda directed against religious minorities. A free society requires freedom of choice of religion. Even a country with the position of militant atheism as the Soviet Union, could not hold the iron hand of the mindset of its citizens. People choose what was stirred in their heart and prompted by their conscience. We would not want to go back to our recent past, such as in 1937. I would not want a similar sweep of events. When such slogans as - "We have sects", "warning" and "the dominance of sects", "what do you do" and so on are constantly heard in the media and that just as casually calls for violence or expulsion of "sectarian". Society begins to believe all this. And why not to, if all this is so seriously! Need something to do with these "sects".

So, I will try to summarize the written and briefly identify the problem. Social associations that help the victims of actions of the destructive sects are seriously glowing religious atmosphere and sowing religious discord and enmity in Kazakhstan. They are distributing one-sided information about the religious minorities. They are the tools for the formation of negative public attitudes towards religious minorities which contributes to an

atmosphere of intolerance and can lead to physical attacks against religious minorities or an amendment of the law, which severely infringe the rights of citizens to term freedom of conscience with all the ensuing consequences.

Propaganda war of overriding majority over minority is not on an equal footing and in the short they pursuing their objectives. It's sad, because of this policy affects thousands, millions of people from both the persecuted, and from the persecutors. These wounds are closed up painfully slow and can affect the lives of several generations. Evangelical believers, as well as everyone who is a minority, and many free-thinking people are very disquieting by the prospect of this untwisting machine. Can we really fear of where this all will lead to despite the dozens of examples in the past, examples of different countries and peoples? What are the next steps of the authorities? How far it can go? Would there be repeated flagrant violations of human rights to freedom of conscience? Will people put in jail, harassed, fined, scared, thrown mud, or worse - genocide because of their religious viewpoint does not coincide with the official, the state selected course? Hope not. As for now, such fears do exist among people.

We want to live in a free, law-based society. In a society where there is no separation of people on right and wrong, trustworthy and untrustworthy, on our own and others, friends and enemies. Because each of us is a citizen of Kazakhstan and wishes his country only the best, just as it wishes to himself and his family.

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