

«SOFT POWER» OF EASTERN ORTHODOXY IN KAZAKHSTAN

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ABSTRACT

Religious institutions play an active role in a variety of public activities, including state affairs, in modern times. Religious leaders in particular engage in global affairs, making them key players in intercultural communication and public diplomacy.

This article explores the activities of the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan through the lens of «soft power». It presents contemporary discourses on the actors, foundations, and possibilities of «soft power» as an alternative to traditional diplomacy. It is worth noting that there is debate about which countries, ideologies, and cultures possess the potential for «soft power».

The article analyzes the narratives and messages of the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan as tools of «soft power», influenced by the general attitudes of Russian foreign policy. Additionally, it examines the resource potential of the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan, which is realized through network organization and multi-vector activity. However, despite its significant resource potential, the effectiveness of Orthodox «soft power» in Kazakhstan also depends on other geopolitical factors.

Overall, this topic is relevant because the concept of «soft power» is viewed as a peaceful mechanism for maintaining interstate relations, as well as promoting multiconfessional diversity and intercivilizational dialogue. This study's significance lies in the fact that modern-day partnerships extend beyond mere cooperation, and countries must create an attractive «image». The article concludes that the Orthodox Church possesses several resources and «soft power» potential.

Key words: Religion, Soft Power of the Russian Orthodox Church, Orthodoxy, Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan, Directions of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan.

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Қазақстандағы православиенің «жұмсақ күші»

Аңдатпа. Қазіргі заманда діни институттар қоғамдық қызметтің кең ауқымына, соның ішінде мемлекеттік қызметке де араласады. Атап айтқанда, діни көшбасшылар жаһандық күн тәртібіне үлес қосады, соның арқасында олар мәдениетаралық коммуникация мен қоғамдық дипломатияның акторлары болып табылады.

Мақалада Қазақстан православиесінің шіркеуінің қызметі «жұмсақ күш» призмасы арқылы қарастырылады. Дәстүрлі дипломатияға баламалардың бірі ретінде «жұмсақ күштің» акторлары, негіздері мен мүмкіндіктері туралы заманауи дискурстар беріледі. Қай елдердің, қандай идеология мен мәдениеттің «жұмсақ әсер ету» әлеуеті бар деген сұрақ пікірталас тудыратынын айта кеткен жөн.

Мақалада Қазақстан православиесінің шіркеуінің «жұмсақ күш» құралдарының бірі ретінде Ресейдің сыртқы саясатының жалпы принциптерімен айқындалатын әңгімелер, хабарлар

талданады. Сонымен қатар, ресурстық әлеуетті талдау жүргізіледі, ол желілік ұйым арқылы жүзеге асырылады, Қазақстан православие шіркеуінің көпсалалы қызметі. Сонымен қатар, айтарлықтай ресурстық әлеуетке қарамастан, Қазақстандағы православиелік «жұмсақ күштің» тиімділігі аймақтың геосаяси дамуының басқа компоненттеріне де байланысты.

Жалпы, бұл тақырыптың өзектілігі «жұмсақ күш» конструкциясы бейбіт тұтқа ретінде қабылданатындығымен байланысты, соның арқасында мемлекетаралық байланыстар ғана емес, сонымен қатар поликонфессиялық палитра, өркениетаралық диалог сақталады. Бұл зерттеудің маңыздылығы қазіргі уақытта серіктестік әдеттегі ынтымақтастық шеңберінен шығып, бүгінде елдер үшін тартымды «имиджді» құру маңызды болып табылады. Мақалада православие шіркеуінің бірқатар ресурстары мен «жұмсақ күш» әлеуеті бар деп қорытындыланады.

Түйін сөздер: дін, ОПШ жұмсақ күші, православие, Қазақстан Православие шіркеуі, Қазақстандағы Орыс православие шіркеуінің бағыттары.

«Мягкая сила» православия в Казахстане

Аннотация. Религиозные институты в современности вовлечены в широкий спектр общественных активностей, в том числе в государственную деятельность. В частности, религиозные лидеры участвуют в глобальной повестке, благодаря чему являются акторами межкультурной коммуникации и публичной дипломатии.

В статье рассматривается деятельность Православной Церкви Казахстана через призму «мягкой силы». Приводятся современные дискурсы об акторах, основаниях и возможностях «мягкой силы» как одной из альтернативы традиционной дипломатии. Важно отметить, что вопрос о том, какие страны, какая идеология и культуры обладают потенциалом «мягкого воздействия» является дискуссионным.

В рамках статьи анализируются нарративы, послы Православной Церкви Казахстана в качестве одного из инструментов «мягкой силы», которые детерминируются общими установками внешней политики России. Помимо этого, проводится анализ ресурсного потенциала, который реализуется посредством сетевой организации, многовекторности активности Православной Церкви Казахстана. При этом, несмотря на значительный ресурсный потенциал, эффективность «мягкой силы» православия в Казахстане зависит также от других составляющих геополитического развития региона.

В целом, актуальность данной темы связана с тем, что конструкт «мягкая сила» воспринимается как мирный рычаг, благодаря которому поддерживаются не только межгосударственные связи, но и поликонфессиональная палитра, межцивилизационный диалог. Важность данного исследования заключается в том, что в современности партнерство выходит за рамки привычного сотрудничества и сегодня странам важно сконструировать привлекательный «имидж». В статье делается вывод, что православная церковь обладает рядом ресурсов и потенциалом «мягкой силы».

Ключевые слова: религия, мягкая сила РПЦ, Православие, Православная церковь Казахстана, векторы РПЦ в Казахстане.

Introduction

In the 20th century, international relations underwent significant changes due to the strengthening role of international institutions, globalization, polarization between countries and civilizations, and other challenges. It became clear that new actors, beyond traditional states, were involved in international relations. This realization led to the development of the concept of «soft power» or «smart power» in the theory and practice of international relations, as a way to influence public opinion over the long term.

The concept of «soft power» emerged as

a rejection of traditional, «hard» concepts of influence and a diversification of traditional diplomatic methods. It emphasizes the communicative management of an object's development through predominantly latent, «environmental» forms of influence.

Some researchers believe that countries with illiberal ideologies and priorities, like Russia, possess «soft power». Keating and Kaczmarek argue that Russia's «soft impact» is grouped around moral conservatism, illiberal governance, and strong leadership [1, p. 26]. Laruelle suggests that Russia has a «soft power» niche strategy [2, p. 13]. However, the potential for «soft impact» remains a debatable topic.

The collapse of the Soviet Union led to the emergence of new centers of gravity in the post-Soviet political space, such as China, the US, the European Union, the Islamic world, and Turkey. For Russia, this posed a challenge, as it had considered most of the former Soviet republics as a zone of leadership influence for several centuries. Therefore, Russia is seeking new formats of cooperation with these countries, including through «soft influence» with a focus on economic integration, regional security, and shared cultural, historical, and religious similarities.

In 2013, the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (RF) was developed, which highlighted the relevance of developing «soft power» as an integral part of modern international politics based on the capabilities of civil society [3].

Methodology

As the theoretical framework for this study, the analysis drew on the works of J. Nye, the founder of the theory of «soft power» who conceptualized the discourse of «soft influence» as well as other notable researchers in this field. The construct of «soft power» aims to change the internal codes and archetypes of the object of influence in a latent manner, thereby creating new patterns of international relations by forming the expected motivations and behavioral styles of the object according to the subject's influence. As a result, the analysis of the use of religion as a tool of «soft power» was based on the principle of constructivism, in which «soft power» functions as discursive power, creating a new social reality.

To determine trends in the development of Christianity, this study analyzed statistical data on the dynamics of Christian religious associations in Kazakhstan since 1991. In addition, it utilized open sources from the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan (OCK), and field research was conducted in the form of conversations with the clergy of the Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan. In addition to comparative methods, this article used traditional interpretive analysis, historical description, generalizing methods, and scientific research methods.

Main part

The «soft power» or «smart power» have been one of the most discussed topics by academic and political-diplomatic communities. As a discourse and instrument of international relations, «soft power» was introduced into the political lexicon in the 1980s by J. Nye, who primarily meant by this term «soft authority» or «soft rule».

According to J. Nye, «soft power» acts as the ability to captivate and attract other states to one's side, «achieving support for one's own agenda in international relations by demonstrating cultural and moral values, the attractiveness of the political course and the effectiveness of the country's political institutions». According to the researcher, «soft power» is associated with intangible resources of power, such as culture, ideology, language, various institutions [4, p. 156], and is formed due to their attractiveness among the population of other countries.

The Russian researcher Shtyrkov S. defined the concept of «soft power» as «a specific information policy that affects public mindset», or in other words, «the use of strong images for a kind of indirect influence on the social imagination» [5].

There are various interpretations of «soft power» discourse. The American discourse is dominated by the understanding this term as «soft power», while the European Union prefers the translation of the term as «gathered, coordinated power», China as «wise power» [6, p. 89-91].

Defining the role and significance of «soft power», Yan Xuetong, head of the Institute of International Affairs of Tsinghua University, notes that the country's complex power combines «hard» and «soft power» not as a sum, but as a product of two components. Accordingly, the loss of either «soft» or «hard power» reduces the total national power to zero [7]. This position corresponds to J. Nye's approach that one force cannot work without the other.

Thus, «soft power», in the understanding of a number of researchers, is a relevant tool of modern international relations and unlike traditional diplomacy, uses other mechanisms and other actors. Its absence would affect the outwardly political actions of classical diplomacy and leads to no significant results.

In the Concept of Russian Foreign Policy, «soft power» is presented as a comprehensive toolkit for solving foreign policy problems based on the capabilities of civil society, information and communication, humanitarian and other methods and technologies alternative to classical diplomacy [3, p. 9].

According to Keating and Kaczmarzka Russia's «soft power» resources are grouped around an illiberal ideology. Researchers have identified several key elements of Russia's cultural attractiveness and soft power potential: the Russian language, Russia's ties to existing Russian diasporas, and the Eastern Orthodox religion. The core values of soft power, according to researchers, are moral conservatism, illiberal governance, and strong leadership [1, p. 3-14].

The French researcher Laruelle developed the concept of «niche» soft power, narrowly targeted at certain audiences based on the culture, history and current status of the country. According to Laruelle, Russia's efforts are aimed more at maintaining its influence in a potentially already pro-Russian space - either because of its historical and cultural characteristics, or because of its inherently anti-liberal orientation - rather than to fully win hearts and minds.

The first niche is based on Russian history and culture and is focused on Russian minorities abroad based on the idea of common belonging to the «Russian world». The second level of the first niche is manifested in the cultivation of fraternal religious feelings in order to influence countries and communities that profess Eastern Orthodoxy. Thus, according to the researcher, the preservation of Russian minorities abroad who profess Orthodoxy creates the basis for «soft influence».

The ideological core of «soft power», around which various resources are consolidated, is conservatism: «moral issues and the so-called traditional family, the concept of «sovereignism» and the model of illiberal governance form the central components of the microtargeting strategy used by Russia» [6, p. 29-31]. In this regard, the role of Orthodoxy as a retransmitter of traditional, conservative values is especially significant, articulating

two levels of consolidation: «Russian World» and «Orthodox Solidarity». Interestingly, the organizational structure of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) also reproduces the illiberal authoritarian model of Russian power.

Thus, according to the researchers, the ROC, taken as the focus of the representation of the ideas of conservatism and traditionalism, can be considered as a resource of the «soft power» of the Russian state where the Orthodox religion retains its position.

Foundations and Discourses of «Soft Power» of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan

There are 3,478,287 Russians in Kazakhstan (2021) who are potentially affiliated with Orthodoxy, representing 18.42% of the population of Kazakhstan [8]. Belarusians, Moldovans also traditionally identify themselves with Orthodoxy.

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan (the RK), the Russian language in state organizations and local governments is used on a par with the state language [9].

Adopted in 2011, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On Religious Associations and Religious Activities» declares Islam of the Hanafi madhhab and Eastern Orthodoxy to be the two pillars on which the spirituality of Kazakh society is based (Preamble to the Law), the historical role of Orthodoxy in the development of culture and the spiritual life of the people is affirmed [10]. Thus, the Orthodox Church of Kazakhstan (*another name is the Kazakh Metropolitan District*) is placed on the same level with traditional Islam, which gives it the opportunity to legitimately pursue a policy of «spiritual education» of citizens.

In modern Kazakhstan, Orthodoxy is the second largest confession in terms of the number of believers and the number of religious associations, after Islam. Thus, the majority of Christians in Kazakhstan profess the Russian Orthodox faith. T. Helm's report «On freedom of religion in Kazakhstan» for 2020, indicates that 33% of the population are Orthodox Christians [11, p. 12]. From the historical stand point, this is explained by the Russian colonial policy.

Although Nestorian Christianity

penetrated the territory of Kazakhstan in the 4th-5th centuries, Orthodoxy of the Russian tradition was actively spreading to the territory of Kazakhstan in the second half of the 19th century. In 1871, the Turkestan diocese was formed, which covered the territory on which today Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan are located. Its spiritual and administrative center was the city of Verny (Almaty, Kazakhstan). By the beginning of the 20th century, 391,000 Orthodox Christians lived on the territory of the Turkestan diocese and 301 churches operated [12].

During the Soviet period, Kazakhstan once again becomes the territory of Orthodox expansion, since it became a place of exile for the Orthodox clergy and believers. After the thaw in relation to religion by the Soviet authorities in 1943, Orthodoxy received significant opportunities for activity in Kazakhstan. In 1945, two dioceses were singled out from the Turkestan diocese by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church - Alma-Ata and Kazakhstani, Tashkent and Central Asian ones. Thus, the territory of Kazakhstan began to be governed by one diocese. By 1956, there were 55 parishes of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan [13].

The Russian Orthodox Church broadly interprets the concept of «external» activity. Thus, commenting on the name of the Department for External Church Relations (DECR), Archbishop Kirill (later - Metropolitan, now – Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia), in particular, noted: «When we call the DECR a foreign department, we distort the meaning. What is «external» in relation to the Church? This is not what is separated from the Church by state borders, but what is separated by church borders» [2, p. 142]. This is the advantage of religious actors: ecclesiastical (confessional) boundaries are prioritized, not national ones.

Thus, the historical, legislative, demographic and other factors listed above create a space for the ontologization of the narratives of the Russian Orthodox Church on the land of Kazakhstan.

In the concept of «soft power» of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan, several consistent discourses of the ROC can be distinguished:

– Russian Orthodox Church positions itself as a traditional subject of paradiplomatic activity continuing the policy of the Russian state in the outside world [14, p. 148].

– Broadcasting the ideology of the ROC as a space for the protection of traditional values, the settings of which should become a unifying factor in the consolidation of the post-Soviet republics around Russian politics and their «prevention from closer ties with the West» [15].

– Rooting the image of Orthodoxy as a traditional religion for Kazakhstan and the formation of the Orthodox image of Christianity in Kazakhstan.

– Rooting positions on the fraternal community of Russia and Kazakhstan. In this context, the leaders of the OCK are pursuing an active policy of cooperation with the political, economic, cultural elite of Kazakhstan, discussing issues of strengthening fraternal relations between states, and participating in political and public events.

– The OCK positions itself as a zone of interfaith harmony and dialogue. As Bezborodov notes, in the modern world «the moral strengthening of the authority of religious organizations is presented as a significant element in countering and preventing international terrorism» [16, p. 5].

Features of the Activities of the OCK

The activity of the OCK in Kazakhstan has more focused messages that are aimed at reference groups (the Slavic population of Kazakhstan):

– Considering that in the modern world religion has become one of the main elements of «identity politics» [17, p. 31], Orthodoxy acts as a social force integrating the Russian population. It is no coincidence that Patriarch Alexy II of Moscow and All Russia, in connection with the visit of John Paul II to Kazakhstan in 2001, recalled that «Kazakhstan, like most other republics of the former USSR, is the canonical territory of the Moscow Patriarchate» [18]. In October 2021, Patriarch Kirill, at the 7th World Congress of Russian Compatriots Living Abroad, also noted that «in churches of the Russian Orthodox Church abroad, compatriots often find support in critical

situations, receive shelter, food assistance, moral and spiritual support» [18]. During the interview, the clergy noted that conditions are being created so that every Russian (in general, according to them, they provide assistance to all those in need) can freely turn to the church and receive the necessary help. In this regard, one could agree with the opinion of Burova E., Kosichenko A., that «Eastern Orthodoxy today is the only real form of country-by-country consolidation of the «Russian-speaking population» of the region». Therefore, it can be assumed with high probability that the socio-political «duties» of the OCK to its congregation will increase in the near future.

– *An objective to establish an area of Orthodox and Russian culture influence in Kazakhstan.* The objective is realized by the presence of a significant number of Orthodox temples and churches, Sunday schools, Orthodox and other training courses, an active information presence and coverage of Russian news in them, and the social activities of the Church. Indirectly, this is also aimed at curbing the migratory moods of the Russian population in Kazakhstan.

– Unlike other Christian denominations, there are Orthodox Churches in all regional centers of Kazakhstan and in most local areas. Cathedral churches, as a rule, are located on the main avenues of Kazakhstani cities, they are distinguished by the Orthodox architectural style, the height of buildings. Churches and parishes are located more often in places where the Slavs are concentrated. If we consider that «the environment in which we live is becoming more and more communicative, that is, one where images and symbols play an important role, and not the written word», then the OCK pays considerable attention to the formation of cultural and symbolic space of Orthodox culture in Kazakhstan.

– *Support for Russian culture.* As Bryan notes, religion often functions in the public sphere as «the underlying rationale for nationalism, or it may serve as the main carrier of ethnic identity for minorities in a diasporal, multicultural society» [19, p. 43-45]. In this regard, the Russian Orthodox Church is the initiator and active promoter of the «Russian World» concept [19, p. 60]. Under the patronage of the OCK, the

Orthodox charitable society «Svetoch» is being operated, assisting Kazakhstan in obtaining a Russian education. Since its inception, about 3,000 graduates have had the opportunity to study at prestigious Russian universities: Moscow State University, Tomsk State University, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, etc. [20]. An active work is underway to restore Orthodox churches and build new ones, return monuments to the bosom of the Church, initiate pilgrimages to the holy places of Christianity in Kazakhstan (the OCK project «Golden Ring of Kazakhstan». The project is designed to create a pilgrimage map of holy places associated with the feat of Kazakh confessors and new martyrs. The uniqueness of the project lies not only in the popularization of the historical heritage; some objects included in the pilgrimage map - monasteries, temples, can later be restored) [21], creative educational and educational activities are carried out aimed at broadcasting Russian culture (annual Filaret Readings on the study of Russian Orthodox culture. In 2021, the topic was devoted to the life and work of F. Dostoevsky).

– *Aiming at preserving the positions of Orthodoxy among ethnic groups that traditionally profess it - Russians, Belarusians, Ukrainians and other ethnic groups.* There are 12 confessions of Christianity in Kazakhstan, whose missionary and proselytizing activities are directed, among other things, to the Russian population of Kazakhstan. There is a growth of Protestant and neo-Protestant religious associations. For the period from 1990 to 2021 in Kazakhstan their number increased from 457 to 1241 [22, p. 49-50]. Pentecostal churches stand out with significant growth rates. If in 1990, 42 Pentecostal churches were registered in Kazakhstan, then in 2021 – 228 churches, thus the number has increased by 5 times. The growth of Orthodox churches over the same period has the same indicators. The use of marketing technologies, liberal attitudes towards cult practice, targeted work with each parishioner makes Protestant churches more competitive in the market of religious services. If Orthodox churches, according to the clergy of certain regions, mainly attend the older generation (which threatens to reduce parishioners in

the future), then Protestant churches work with the middle age people and youth, and trying to attract parishioners with whole families. In an interview, a clergyman from the city of Karaganda noted that Orthodoxy is increasingly being called a women's religion. Thus, the actual task of the «soft power» of the OCK is to preserve the Orthodox identity among the Russian population.

Thus, a rather brief analysis shows that the vectors of the «soft power» of the OCK go far beyond the limits of strictly religious tasks, which corresponds with the directives of Russia's foreign policy and, accordingly, are a continuation of the policy of promoting and strengthening its geopolitical position, in which faith and politics have been affiliated with it since time of its occurrence.

Resources of «Soft Power» of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan

Orthodoxy's «soft power» resources are a set of institutional, ideological, functional capabilities, the complementary activity of which represents a significant potential of «soft power».

The following groups of resources that have the potential for «soft impact» can be distinguished.

Institutional resource is a network of parishes, churches, monasteries, governing structures (Metropolitan District, dioceses), schools, medical institutions, etc., which are under a certain hierarchy and subordination to the Kazakhstani Metropolitan District, created in 2003 by the decision of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church. It is important to note that the structure of the ROC includes structural units of various levels of self-governance. However, the districts created in the Central Asian republics - the Kazakh and Central Asian metropolitan districts - have the least autonomy.

The Kazakhstan Metropolitan District includes 9 dioceses that coordinate the activities of churches, parishes, and other organizations affiliated with the Church on their territory. In 1991, the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church divided Orthodoxy into three diocesan administrations (Almaty and Semipalatinsk, Shymkent, Ural); during 2003-2011 the

restructuring took place again and on the basis of 3 dioceses 9 dioceses were created. Undoubtedly, the creation of the Kazakhstan Metropolitan District, the increase in the number of dioceses, contributes to the strengthening of the position of the ROC in Kazakhstan.

Thus, the hierarchical structure is aimed at centralizing and coordinating all parts of the Church, pursuing a unified policy, and efficient and mobile distribution of resources.

There is an increase in the number of Orthodox churches in Kazakhstan. Since the proclamation of the Independence of Kazakhstan, Orthodoxy, unlike other Christian denominations, has shown a steady growth in the number of churches. If in 1990, 62 Orthodox religious associations were registered in Kazakhstan, then in 2021 - 334, thus making it up to 30% of all Christian religious associations (data for the 3rd quarter of 2021). However, against the background of an increase in the number of dioceses, churches and parishes, there is a decrease in the number of Russians in Kazakhstan. During the 30 years of Independence, the number of churches has increased 5 times, despite the fact that the number of potential beneficiaries has halved.

The OCK includes 295 churches, 21 chapels, 9 monasteries, 43 prayer rooms, 392 priests, 91 deacons [23].

Functional resource. The OCK is implementing a multi-vector social work aimed at increasing its public recognition, strengthening the idea of Orthodoxy as a zone of high spirituality, social responsibility, tolerance, the actions of which are devoid of ethnic and confessional isolationism. The functional resource of the OCK consists of the activities of Sunday schools, orphanages, spiritual and educational courses; rehabilitation work with people with deviant behavior who have addictions; assistance to the penitentiary system, charity, etc. [30] The range of activities of the OCK is aimed at various social, age, ethnic, confessional groups of the population of Kazakhstan (orphans, people in prisons, youth, etc.).

Particular attention is paid to the social vector.

In Kazakhstan, most Orthodox churches

have charity groups whose duties include providing spiritual and all possible material assistance to parishioners and those in need. In interviews, the clergy noted that regular assistance is provided to orphanages, missions work at cancer centers, and charity canteens are organized in most parishes. In 2013, an anti-crisis center «House for Mom» was created in Almaty, where mothers with newborn children can come to live.

Under the patronage of the OCK and the Radonezh Foundation, there is an orphanage «Solnyshko» and a nursing home. Currently, 52 elderly people live in the nursing home, 47 children of different ages from 3 to 18 years old live in the orphanage. The educational process is built on the principle of the «Big Family»: in each group, the teacher is a man, and the nanny is a woman [24]. The center accepts everyone who needs help, regardless of nationality and religion. The center is very popular.

Most churches have Sunday schools. There is no information on the exact number of Sunday schools in Kazakhstan, however, according to websites, only two of the nine dioceses (Chimkent and Taraz, Astana and Almaty) have 63 Sunday schools. The main task of Sunday schools is immersion in the world of Christian values and the consolidation of the Orthodox Christians.

The tasks of the Sunday school also include the study of the Russian language and Russian culture, the acquisition of professional life skills - teaching needlework, carpentry, church music and singing, icon painting, the formation of collective communication skills and many other skills that meet the challenges of the modern world.

A school operates in the North Kazakhstan region (Private institution «Secondary school in honor of St. Sergius of Radonezh»). The school has 214 students and works on a half board basis. The director of the school is Mikheykin V.V. - Bishop Vladimir of the Petropavlovsk and Bulaev diocese. The school provides secondary education, works according to the state general educational standard, but has a significant Orthodox component [25].

In general, social, charitable, educational activities contribute to the formation of a positive image of the Church. However, the «Law on Religious Activities and Religious

Associations» adopted in 2011 limited missionary, educational, and social activities within the framework of the church, and now it can be directed only to those who have crossed the church fence. The need to change the legislation in this matter, namely the expansion of opportunities for educational and social activities outside the church, was noted by all interview participants.

Thus, the functional component of the OCK discourse as a «soft power» is aimed at increasing the public recognition of Orthodoxy, positioning it as a zone of social responsibility and partnership, the possibilities of which are reduced by the legislative framework.

Communication resource. Cooperation of the OCK with organizations promoting Russian interests. The OCK interacts with the Coordinating Council of Organizations of Russian Compatriots of the Republic of Kazakhstan (KSORS in Russian). Its mission is the consolidation of the Russian community in the Republic of Kazakhstan and public organizations of Russian-speaking citizens in the country [26]. This organization provides a wide range of services (free legal assistance, educational programs, a variety of cultural events).

Under the patronage of the Russian Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan, the Orthodox charitable foundation «Svetoch» is implementing its work, the purpose of which is «to provide comprehensive support for the historically established educational ties in the field of culture and education in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the Russian Federation» [20]. Assistance programs for compatriots are being implemented: organization of holidays for children from poor families, veterans of the Great Patriotic War in sanatoriums in Kazakhstan and Russia. Under the same program, groups of Kazakh school teachers go to advanced training courses at Russian universities. The OCK actively cooperates with public associations of the Cossacks.

Thus, the involvement of the OCK in the activities of organizations to promote the «Russian World», their combined efforts establish a significant potential for «soft impact». However, the activities of these organizations and cooperation with the OCK are rather of a closed, non-public

nature and are distributed mainly among the Orthodox Christians.

Information Resources of the OCK

Communication is the key mechanism of «soft power». It is a resource through which a country is able to promote its culture, language and values to different audiences beyond space and time constraints. The activities of the OCK are represented in the informational space of Kazakhstan by all types of information coverage. There are more than 30 official websites of organizations, dioceses, churches of the OCK, the social networks are also actively connected: VKontakte, Odnoklassniki, Elitsa, Telegram, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Twitter.

A unique project is the social network «Elitsa» - a platform for communication between Orthodox Christians and those who are interested in the territory of the CIS. The functionality of the Internet project is aimed at creating a platform of Orthodox solidarity, as it provides opportunities for planning and organizing events, meeting and communicating. The number of registered network users in 2019 exceeded 230 thousand people. The core of the network is about 20,000 Orthodox communities of churches and monasteries, united by a single communication platform.

More than 6 newspapers and magazines are published, the Semirechye television studio operates on the YouTube channel (5.47 thousand subscribers), a feature of which is the promotion of Orthodox values in various formats: films, worship, concerts, cartoons, news of Kazakhstan. The Russian Orthodox TV channel Spas broadcasts. It is planned to open the Orthodox News Agency of the Kazakh metropolitan district [27].

Conclusion

Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan possesses significant resources of «soft power» and public diplomacy, which includes various tools such as public relations in the socio-political space, a network organization of churches, parishes, and institutions that engage in non-religious activities, developed infrastructure, cultural, educational, and social activities of the Churches, and more.

The activities of the Orthodox Church

in Kazakhstan are considered a «window of opportunity» through which Russia could implement plans that do not always receive a positive response in the traditional political field among Kazakhstani people. At the same time, the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan is a subject of civil society and actively demonstrates commitment to the spiritual and political values of Kazakhstani society. Therefore, the impact of the Orthodox Church in Kazakhstan goes beyond its religious sphere, and its beneficiaries are not only the Orthodox community but all Kazakhstani people.

The strength of the Orthodox discourse of «soft power» in Kazakhstan lies in the significant number of Russians living in Kazakhstan, the stability of the Church in promoting interfaith harmony and dialogue - an urgent challenge of our time, traditionalism and conservatism, which are in harmony with Islamic and traditional Kazakhstani values, and active cooperation with the political establishment of Kazakhstan.

A potential weakness of the «soft power» of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan is the formal commitment to interfaith dialogue with Protestant Christian denominations, which may come across as an attempt to dominate and shape the image of Christianity in the country. This creates competition rather than partnership with Protestant and Catholic churches.

Given the fact that the institution of the church provides life-affirming guidelines and serves as a sanctuary for those who have lost meaning, it is essential to study religion as a tool for «soft power» in modern society. The church creates a sense of community and mutual support, making it an attractive and essential element in the face of modern-day challenges. However, it is crucial to note that the impact of «soft power» is long-term and more subtle than traditional diplomacy.

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