

## DIALOGICAL DISCOURSE OF ISLAM IN A MULTI-CONFESSIONAL SPACE

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### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the possibilities of the dialogical discourse of Islam in a multi-confessional society. This is especially relevant in the context of the increasing number of Muslim believers around the world and in Kazakhstan. Despite the fact that most Kazakhstanis consider themselves Muslims, there is a fairly large confessional palette in the country, in connection with which a secular, democratic state undertakes the obligation to ensure equal rights for representatives of all its citizens, regardless of ethnicity, religious affiliation. Therefore, interfaith dialogue is not only about the relationship between religious representatives, it is also a safe, conscious, tolerant, sustainable civil society. Islam, in this case, as the dominant religion in Kazakhstani society, should be focused on maintaining interfaith dialogue and stability in the country. In general, sociological measurements periodically conducted to determine public opinion in the field of interfaith relations and support for state policy of interfaith dialogue and tolerance, show positive assessments and a high level on the part of the population. However, both radical Islamic views and Islamophobic citizens of Kazakhstani society may display intolerant narratives or behavior, which may negatively affect the stable development of the state. In this regard, the study and popularization of Islamic dialogic discourse is an important mechanism for maintaining harmonious relations in the interfaith sphere.

**Key words:** Islam, Multi-Confessional Space, Kazakhstan, Tolerance, Dialogue of Religions.

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### Поликонфессионалық кеңістіктегі исламның диалогтық дискурсы

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада поликонфессионалық қоғамдағы исламның диалогтық дискурсының мүмкіндіктері талданады. Бұл әсіресе бүкіл әлемде және Қазақстанда мұсылман діндарларының көбеюі жағдайында өзекті. Қазақстандықтардың көпшілігі өздерін мұсылман деп санайтынына қарамастан, елде конфессиялардың алуан түрлі палитрасы бар, осыған байланысты зайырлы, демократиялық мемлекет этникалық, діни қатыстылығына қарамастан барлық азаматтарының өкілдері үшін тең құқықтарды қамтамасыз ету міндетін өзіне алады. Сондықтан конфессияаралық диалог тек діни өкілдер арасындағы қарым-қатынас туралы ғана емес, ол сондай-ақ қауіпсіз, саналы, толерантты, тұрақты азаматтық қоғам туралы. Бұл жағдайда ислам қазақстандық қоғамдағы басым дін ретінде елдегі конфессияаралық диалог пен тұрақтылықты сақтауға бағытталуы тиіс. Жалпы, конфессияаралық қатынастар саласындағы қоғамдық пікірді және конфессияаралық диалог пен толеранттылықтың мемлекеттік саясатын қолдау деңгейін айқындау мақсатында кезең-кезеңімен жүргізілетін әлеуметтанулық зерттеулер халық тарапынан оң бағалар мен жоғары деңгейді көрсетеді. Соған қарамастан, радикалды исламдық көзқарастардың өкілдері тарапынан да, қазақстандық қоғамның исламофобиялық көзқарасы бар азаматтары тарапынан да интолерантты әңгіме немесе әрекет көрсетілуі мүмкін, бұл мемлекеттің тұрақты дамуына теріс әсер етуі мүмкін. Осыған байланысты, ислами диалогтың дискурсын зерделеу және тарату конфессияаралық саладағы үйлесімді қатынастарды сақтаудың маңызды тетігі болып табылады.

**Түйін сөздер:** ислам, поликонфессионалық кеңістік, Қазақстан, толеранттылық, діндер диалогы.

### Диалогический дискурс ислама в поликонфессиональном пространстве

**Аннотация.** В статье анализируются возможности диалогического дискурса ислама в поликонфессиональном обществе. Это особенно актуально в условиях увеличения числа верующих мусульман по всему миру и в Казахстане. Несмотря на то, что большинство казахстанцев относит себя к мусульманам, в стране присутствует достаточно большая конфессиональная палитра, в связи с чем, светское, демократическое государство берет на себя обязанность обеспечить равные права для представителей всех своих граждан вне зависимости от этнической, религиозной принадлежности. Поэтому межконфессиональный диалог – это не только про взаимоотношения между религиозными представителями, это в том числе, и безопасное, сознательное, толерантное, устойчивое гражданское общество. Ислам, в данном случае, как доминирующая религия в казахстанском обществе, должен быть ориентирован на сохранение межконфессионального диалога и стабильности в стране. В целом, социологические замеры, периодически проводимые с целью определения общественного мнения в области межконфессиональных отношений и поддержки государственной политики межконфессионального диалога и толерантности, показывают положительные оценки и высокий уровень со стороны населения. Тем не менее, как со стороны представителей радикальных исламских взглядов, так и со стороны исламофобски настроенных граждан казахстанского общества возможно

проявление интолерантного нарратива или поведения, что может негативно отразиться на стабильном развитии государства. В связи с чем, изучение и популяризация исламского диалогического дискурса является важным механизмом в сохранении гармоничных отношений в межконфессиональной сфере.

**Ключевые слова:** ислам, поликонфессиональное пространство, Казахстан, толерантность, диалог религий.

### **Introduction**

The inclusion of religion in the strategies of civilizational dialogues seems to be a complex process, since religiosity as a model of worldview in them should be preserved as part of the identification code of a particular religion, within which there are intra-confessional and ethno cultural features. Nevertheless, religion also contains an intention to recognize multiculturalism and the paradigm of religious tolerance.

However, in modern conditions, the paradigm of religious tolerance is subject to criticism, since the religious factor is increasingly involved in political technologies for constructing religious and cultural intolerance. The neoliberal discourse promoted by supporters of neoliberal doctrines in the sphere of religion turns out to be not entirely valid due to the "blurriness" of the value resource of neoliberalism in matters of interfaith relations as a condition for dialogue between civilizations.

Religion as an ontological factor of civilizational dialogue directly depends on the religious policy of the state. Such a policy should be dialogic, objective, based on the principles of religious and cultural sovereignty and the principle of pluralism. The modern domestic religious studies discourse needs to introduce and widely discuss the phenomenon of dialogic Islamic identity and the personality of a Muslim, since Kazakhstan is a secular state and at the same time part of the Islamic world. Post-secular Kazakhstani society, striving for a dialogue between the secular and religious, is also forming a new strategy for the co-creation of the individual with God, the world and other cultures.

The Islamic history of Kazakhstan is a multifaceted process that includes the formation and development of the Islamic religion and culture on the territory of the country, as well as mutual enrichment and interpenetration of Islamic values with the values of the Turkic-Kazakh culture and traditions.

Openness in the dialogue of religions is what humanity has been striving for many millennia, but openness should not be understood as the erosion of tradition and the invasion of the sacred sphere, but as involvement in the understanding of another tradition. After all, the process of dialogue is the process of forming dialogic thinking, which is especially relevant in the context of geopolitical and global instability, interethnic and interfaith tensions. It is no coincidence that ideological diversity presupposes the demand for religion and religious institutions, religious education and religious leaders precisely in order to overcome the shadow cast today by manifestations of intolerance, extremism and conflicts. Therefore, dialogic discourse in Islam is not an empty phrase, but a real mechanism for actualizing the peacekeeping and humanistic potential of the Islamic religion. The inclusiveness

of Islamic culture, the dialogic nature of Islamic identity presupposes a discourse of respect for scientific research, understanding the Other as a bearer of knowledge, timeless cross-cultural communication [1. P. 275].

Whereas tolerance is a human virtue, the art of living in a world of different peoples and ideas, the ability to have one's own rights and freedoms, without violating the rights and freedoms of other people. And the ability to conduct a dialogue is one of the important indicators of the consciousness of a human personality.

### **Methodology**

In order to identify the dialogical potential of Islam, both in general and in the space of the multi-confessional Kazakh society, the methods of historical and cultural reconstruction of the Islamic tradition and culture, interpretation of the Koranic text in the context of Islamic humanism and tolerance towards other religions and peoples were used. At the same time, a comparative analysis of sociological studies assessing the religious situation in Kazakh society was carried out with an update on the indicators of support for the policy of interfaith harmony, the level of religious tolerance among the population.

### **Tolerant paradigm of Islam**

It seems important to note here the tolerant paradigm of the Islamic religion itself. Tolerance is a human virtue: the art of living in a world of different peoples and ideas, the ability to have one's own rights and freedoms, without violating the rights and freedoms of others. In Islam, the meaning of tolerance is defined as "forgiveness, leniency, gentleness, patience, disposition to others, compassion", etc.

One of the main provisions of Islam is humanity - "insaniyya". This principle of humanity or Islamic humanism became the defining one in Islamic culture, which was created as a result of the spiritual and practical activities of the peoples inhabiting the Arab Caliphate in the Middle Ages, the second is Islamic universalism, the third is Islamic solidarity. A famous ayat from the Quran - 3:98 (103) states: "And hold firmly together to the rope of Allah<sup>1</sup> and do not be divided. Remember Allah's favour upon you when you were enemies, then He united your hearts, so you - by His grace - became brothers" [2]. This ayat reveals the essence of Islamic culture in the context of its unified understanding that it is created by all Muslims and is a common property.

Also, historical discourse reveals many facts of peaceful coexistence of Muslims and Christians, Muslims and Jews during the time of the Prophet Muhammad (s.a.s.), and under the four righteous

caliphs, and under the Umayyads, and under the Abbasids, and in the Ottoman state. The Ottoman Empire provided political asylum to Sephardic Jews expelled from Spain. Islam not only prescribes respect for other religions, but even obliges Muslim rulers to provide all the necessary conditions for the implementation of religious practice for followers of other faiths. "We have revealed to you 'O Prophet' this Book with the truth, as a confirmation of previous Scriptures and a supreme authority on them.... To each of you We have ordained a code of law and a way of life. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given 'each of' you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return, then He will inform you 'of the truth' regarding your differences. (Al-Maida, ayat 48) [3].

For Islam, multiculturalism is a very long historical and cultural process. Tolerance was the operating principle of the policy of the caliphs of Muslim India, Muslim Spain and the policy of the Abbasid dynasty, who founded the city of peace - Baghdad. The vitality of Islam in the postmodern era is associated with the factor of tawhid, which allowed organically combining secular and religious content. In Muslim society, multiculturalism formed a model of life. In Muslim India, Muslim Spain, and, incidentally, in Maverannahr, Egypt, Baghdad, multiculturalism - multiculturalism was realized in educational practices. The liberal policy of the Caliphates extended to the entire Medieval space, facilitating communication between the "Islamic-Christian world" [4]. Tolerance carries with it respect, the correct perception of other cultures, ways of self-expression of human individuality. Tolerance allows us to achieve peace and is capable of leading from the culture of war to the culture of peace. The beginning of the 2000s was marked on the world agenda by Islamophobic narratives about the violent/non-violent nature of Islam, especially against the backdrop of terrorist activity in European countries. Much has been written and said about Islam, both in the media and in the scientific field. Islamic scholars have a hard time repelling attacks on the religion itself in connection with constant accusations from Western scholars and the media.

To this day, the well-known discussion on the pages of the Boston Review (December 2001), started by Islamic scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl about the place of tolerance in Islam and about reading and misreading the Koran, remains relevant. Appealing to such value categories as "ma'ruf" and "ihsan" (goodness and kindness), justice, El Fadl insists that the Quran must be analyzed in light of the general moral direction of the Quranic message [5]. Regarding the justification of war ("Holy War") in Islam, according to El Fadl, in Islamic theology war is never holy; it is either justified or not, and if it is justified, those who die in battle are considered martyrs. The Quranic text does not recognize the idea of unlimited war and does not consider the mere fact of a fighter's Muslim affiliation sufficient to prove the justice of his

cause [6]. The discussion on tolerance in Islam initiated by El Fadl was also attended by renowned scholars Amina Wadud, John L. Esposito, Sohail H. Hashmi, who, in their discussion with El Fadl, also asked serious questions about the future and past of Islam, about what kind of Islam we need today to avoid wars and intolerance, which are supported by extremists, what problems existed and exist in the Quranic interpretation, etc.

Jocelyn Cesari in her recent article analyzes the features of Islamic tolerance during the Muslim empires, comparing the political and legal aspects with the current state of tolerance in Muslim countries. According to her point of view, tolerance developed in Muslim empires, while modern Muslim states lack it [7].

Religious culture in modern Kazakhstan is represented by all religious traditions, but for Kazakhstani society, Islamic culture is dominant, since it is part of the Islamic world, and the main population of Kazakhstan professes Islam of the Hanafi madhhab - a moderate traditional Sunni direction. This direction is the most liberal and tolerant towards other religions and cultures, and also contains the idea of dialogue, which is very important in secular states when developing cultural and religious policies. In the cultural palette of traditions, the Islamic tradition is one of the main ones, in the mainstream of which the Islamic culture was formed in the territory of Kazakhstan and which today plays an important role in the development of the spiritual world of modern Kazakhstan, linking it with the Islamic world and the Islamic tradition of cultural continuity. The tradition of tolerant attitude towards representatives of other religious and cultural communities has been characteristic of the Kazakh land since ancient times. Having gone through several stages of its development from the Scythian-Saka, Pra-Turkic, Kazakh culture has always been distinguished by its dialogic nature. The dialogic nature of the Turkic culture manifested itself in the development of a cultural paradigm, the basis of which was an amazing tolerance for other cultures and traditions. Self-sufficiency of any culture lies in its openness to other cultural worlds and in the absence of fear of the threat of assimilation by another culture, which is why various cultural and religious traditions peacefully coexisted and were transmitted in the space of Kazakhstan. Turkic tolerance is a special phenomenon, and what is more, its development took place on the basis of Turkic traditions. The territory of ancient and medieval Kazakhstan was the territory of a tolerant culture, in which an unprecedented cultural exchange took place. This feature was a good basis for the entry of the Islamic cultural and religious tradition into the territory of modern Kazakhstan.

### ***Discourse of Unity and Harmony in the Multi-Confessional Society of Kazakhstan***

Interfaith harmony, which in Kazakhstani society throughout the period of independence has

been a model of dialogical interaction and consolidation of various religions, is a unique phenomenon. The model of interfaith harmony itself was formed by the history of Kazakhstan, it included spiritual, cultural, traditional values of religions, which became the main principles of its implementation. Such principles as religious sovereignty, tolerance, humanity, mutual respect allowed various religious identities to exist and interact.

With the acquisition of independence, Kazakhstan guaranteed the secular nature of the state at the legislative level, and at the same time provided equal opportunities for the activities of all religious communities in the country.

Solving the problems associated with the consolidation of Kazakhstani society and the modernization of public consciousness requires a sufficiently high level of social unity. Therefore, the harmonious coexistence of secular and religious values is so important. Many of them are common - spirituality, morality, justice, patriotism, friendship, mutual assistance, solidarity, etc. On their basis, it is possible to achieve agreement between believers and secularly oriented people, and these values should be constantly articulated. And as for differences and even opposing value systems, they should become the subject of constructive dialogue.

The model of secularism should express a consensus of the interests of all subjects of religious life; correspond to the goals, values and ideals of the development of a secular state, ensure the harmonization of the interests of citizens and the state. As for the religions themselves, we should talk about the integration potential of the religious worldview, which has the deepest foundations.

Support for interfaith dialogue is a strategically important direction of state policy. In secular Kazakhstan, religious policy is aimed at interfaith and intrafaith dialogue. Kazakhstan's initiatives aimed at interaction of civilizations are known throughout the world: Kazakhstan's dialogic initiatives have been implemented in the experience of the OSCE, OIC, EAEU, Syrian negotiations in Astana, etc. For the effective promotion of interreligious dialogue, in principle, like any other civilizational initiatives, institutionalization itself is required, the functioning of a permanent international institution, within the framework of which it is possible to implement certain tasks and mechanisms of interaction in this area. In this area, the most unique and no less responsible project is the holding of the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in the capital of Kazakhstan. The history of the Congress and the holding, accompanying preparatory, coordination and substantive work, such as meetings of the Secretariat of the Congress, the Council of Religious Leaders, has already been going on for more than 20 years. Religious leaders and representatives from Islamic countries and organizations, speaking at the Congress, certainly talk about the dialogic and peace-loving potential of Islam, about the consolidation possibilities of Islam in the modern world. Meetings between leaders of world and traditional religions, as

never before, open up broad prospects for mutual cooperation and help overcome such negative manifestations of our time as intolerance, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism.

One of the most important elements of the Kazakhstan model of tolerance is consent, which is based on a certain closeness of cultural traditions and value principles of different strata of the Kazakhstan society, developed by their common history. Its main components are the unity of goals of the country and the state, solidarity, cohesion, socio-political stability, legal order, social partnership, sustainability of social development. The ultimate goal of such consent is to preserve the integrity of the Kazakhstan society [8, p. 7]. A multi-confessional society can present certain challenges, but also enrich the cultural and social experience. Life in such a society requires people to be open, tolerant and respectful of diversity. Today, Kazakhstan has a relatively calm situation with regard to the tolerant component of society. The Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan annually conducts a sociological study to assess the state policy in the religious sphere by the population of Kazakhstan. As part of this study, sociological measurements are taken of citizens' attitudes towards representatives of other religions, towards the state policy of tolerance and interfaith harmony. For example, in 2021, the degree of interfaith harmony, according to the population, was 78.8%. In 2020, the level of support for the state policy of tolerance and interreligious harmony by respondents was as follows: 70.2% of respondents fully supported the state policy on this issue. In turn, 20.0% of survey participants expressed partial support in the main areas. However, according to 6.3% of respondents, the policy of tolerance and interreligious harmony implemented by the state does not evoke in them a feeling of full support (rather, they do not support it). At the same time, 1.9% of respondents did not fully support the implemented tolerance policy.

At the same time, the overwhelming majority of respondents see the main vectors of Kazakhstan's development in building a secular, tolerant state (60.3%), as well as in the development of multi-confessional traditions of different ethnic groups and cultures (27.2%), which together gives a positive picture of the desire of Kazakhstani society for unity and harmony [9].

Meanwhile, such a positive picture of the population's support for the state policy of tolerance was not always. For example, in the sociological monitoring of 2012-2013, conducted by scientists of the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies, the assessment of the state policy of tolerance in relation to religious diversity is far from ambiguous and shows that only 58.8% are supporters of a tolerant attitude towards religious diversity, almost every fifth respondent - 19.8% (including: 9.7% - rather do not support, and 10.1% have a negative attitude) do not support such a vector of state policy and approximately

the same number - 20.6% cannot give an answer [10, p. 134]. In this case, the high percentage of those who found it difficult to answer may indicate that society is not sufficiently informed about the religious situation and the state policy being pursued. In order to determine the attitude of the population towards living in the same society with representatives of other faiths, we compared the results of analytical reports of sociological studies (those that were in the public domain) conducted by the Committee on Religious Affairs of the Ministry of Culture and Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan over the past 5 years (2019-2024, the 2022 study is not in the public domain) [11]. In general, the indicators of a positive attitude towards living together in the same society with

representatives of other religions (to one degree or another) exceed 85% of respondents, which is a reason for positive forecasts (Table 1). In 2024, the answer options to the question about the possibility of living next to representatives of other religions were changed, so we took them outside the comparative table. As a result, 78.7% agree to one degree or another to live in the same country with representatives of other faiths; Just over 40% of respondents agree to live in the same locality, on the same street, and 45.2% of respondents agree to work together. However, 28.4% of the surveyed population do not agree to be members of the same family [12], which in turn may be an indicator not so much of a hostile attitude as of respect for cultural and ethnic traditions.

**Table 1 - Attitude of the population to life in the same society with representatives of other religions**

	Q4 2019.	Q4. 2020.	Q4. 2021.	Q4. 2023.
Yes, I like living next to people of different religions.	32%	10,7%	17,8%	38,3%
Rather yes, I feel quite comfortable with people of different religions / Yes, I believe that living in the same society with people of other religions enriches us	52%	31,9%	23,2%	22,1%
I don't pay attention to people's religious affiliation.	11%	34,9%	41,9%	25,4 %
I feel comfortable living among people of different faiths ( <i>this answer was only in the 2020 study, which is noteworthy because there is no negative answer option in this study at all, or there was a typo in the questionnaire in this question and, in fact, this should have been a negative answer option</i> )		21,3%		
If possible, I try to communicate with people of my religion.			6,5%	8,9 %
No, I don't feel comfortable living next to people of different religions.	3.5%		4,3%	2,7 %
I find it difficult to answer	1,5%	1,9%	6,2%	

It should be noted that, despite the fact that the analysis provides the results of the population's attitude to cohabitation with representatives of other religions in general, without specifying the confessional affiliation of respondents, the dominant part of the population, which is about 70% of Kazakhstanis, considers themselves to be Muslim. In this regard, in our opinion, the results, one way or another, correlate with the real situation in society. Nevertheless, it is impossible to talk about full acceptance or understanding of religious tolerance in modern Kazakhstani society, in which, against the background of an increase in both traditional Islamic identity and radical believers. After all, the number of Muslim believers in the country is growing, there is a fairly active manifestation of religious Islamic identity in everyday practice. In this regard, adherence to the principles of Islamic tolerance is one of the important and priority steps towards the consolidation of Kazakhstan's society. Questions arise in the discrepancy between Islamic and Kazakh traditions, the relationship between Islamic and civil values. In this direction, the importance of timely explanatory and educational activities of representatives of the Islamic clergy, religious educational institutions about the peaceful and tolerant component of Islam is actualized.

**Conclusion**

The unity of the people is a large-scale, multi-level category. And it consists not only in in-

terfaith and interethnic harmony, but also in the unified support of the people for state initiatives, in a constructive dialogue between the state and society for the benefit of the country and each of its citizens. Unity is also manifested in the protection of national interests, the values of statehood in an interconnected and interdependent world. The mobilization of the nation, its consolidation serve as a powerful defense mechanism against manifestations of radicalism, separatism and attempts to destabilize society. A strong national identity implies a balance and complementarity of cultural, ethnic, religious and civil identities.

Balance, prudence, confrontation and intolerance to all extremist ideologies, tolerance and humanism are the necessary principles for the formation of religious policy leading to a dialogue of civilizations. It is necessary to understand that in the conditions of the most complex political and socio-economic world processes, dialogue is not just partnership, solidarity, cooperation, dialogue is a way to realize the communicative potential of universal values, religions, cultures.

The need to develop the tradition of dialogue and civic participation, the cultivation of progressive values that unite Kazakhstan's multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society are determined by the main principle of the development of modern Kazakhstan - unity - in diversity.

The fundamental position of the dialogue of cultures is important, in which religion, including Islam, should play a unifying role, since it con-



tains spirituality and mercy. To promote the idea of the consolidation of humanity, the interaction of civilizations, it is necessary to reveal the humanistic potential of Islam and its significance in the civilizational space.

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