

# ETHNOCULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS IDENTITY OF RUSSIAN MUSLIMS: CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS

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DOI 10.25128/2304-1222.21.52.06

## ABSTRACT

This research is devoted to the issues of ethnic Russian Muslim identity, which emerges as a non-traditional socio-cultural indication. It is a sign of global processes and incorporates several inherent contradictions, such as significant discrepancies between two civilizational codes occupying a substantial place: Orthodox Christianity and Islam. The relevance of this topic is due to the increase in the number of Muslims among the representatives of the Russian ethnos in the post-Soviet period, as well as the Russification of Islam in the context of the crisis of national languages in the Soviet period. In this regard, the range of questions regarding their self-determination, adaptation to a new religious identity, and integration into society requires a search for scientific, theoretical, and practical answers. This article endeavors to ascertain the primary reasons for the adoption or conversion to Islam by ethnic Russians and to identify the main difficulties faced by converts based on media discourse.

**Key words:** *identity, ethnos, Russian Muslims, religious and cultural characteristics.*

Дане дослідження присвячене питанням російської мусульманської ідентичності, яка постає як нетрадиційна соціокультурна ознака. Вона є ознакою глобальних процесів і містить у собі кілька притаманних протиріч між двома цивілізаційними кодами: православним християнством та ісламом. Актуальність даної теми зумовлена збільшенням кількості мусульман серед представників російського етносу в пострадянський період, а також русифікацією ісламу в умовах кризи національних мов у радянський період. У зв'язку з цим коло питань щодо їх самовизначення, адаптації до нової релігійної ідентичності, інтеграції в суспільство потребує пошуку науково-теоретичних та практичних відповідей. Ця стаття намагається з'ясувати основні причини прийняття або навернення до ісламу етнічними росіянами та визначити основні труднощі, з якими стикаються нововернені на основі медійного дискурсу.

**Ключові слова:** ідентичність, етнос, російські мусульмани, релігійно-культурні особливості.

Niniejsze badanie poświęcone jest zagadnieniom tożsamości etnicznej rosyjskich muzułmanów, która jawi się w postaci nietradycyjnych przejawów społeczno-kulturowych. Jest oznaką procesów globalnych i zawiera w sobie kilka sprzeczności, takich jak znaczne rozbieżności między dwoma kodami cywilizacyjnymi zajmującymi istotne miejsce w tym obszarze kulturowym: prawosławiem i islamem. Aktualność tego tematu wynika ze wzrostu liczby muzułmanów wśród przedstawicieli etnosu rosyjskiego w okresie poradzieckim, a także rusyfikacji islamu w kontekście kryzysu języków narodowych w okresie radzieckim. W związku z tym szereg pytań dotyczących ich samostanowienia, przystosowania do nowej tożsamości religijnej i integracji ze społeczeństwem wymaga poszukiwania odpowiedzi naukowych, teoretycznych i praktycznych. Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu ustalenie podstawowych przyczyn przyjęcia lub konwersji na islam przez etnicznych Rosjan oraz zidentyfikowanie głównych trudności, z jakimi borykają się konwertyci w oparciu o dyskurs medialny.

**Słowa kluczowe:** *tożsamość, etnos, rosyjscy muzułmanie, cechy religijne i kulturowe.*

The Russian civilization can be depicted as a historically formed dynamic system, consisting of a predominance of the Russian-Orthodox ethnos and a multiplicity of ethnocultural and ethnoreligious communities. In the process of active interaction, these societies acquired a new quality that predetermines their significant differences from «foreign compatriots and coreligionists in their socio-psychological type, self-awareness, cultural and everyday life, and spiritual and religious order» [Гаврилов, Шевченко 2008: 289].

The peoples of the Muslim faith that lived in the Eurasian space, having become part of the Russian state, eventually formed as Russian Islam, representing a distinctive cultural and religious community within the Russian civilization.

### **Terminology**

Firstly, the term *Russian Muslims* appeared in Ismail Gasprinsky's research works and denoted representatives of all Muslim peoples - inhabitants of the Russian Empire [Гаспринский 1881: 5]. At that period, there was no concept of nationality; therefore, the only census in the history of the Russian Empire in 1897 signified the religious denomination and native language of the respondents. According to that census, there were 13,906,972 Muslims (about 11 percent of the population), representatives of different nationalities: Azerbaijanis, Bashkirs, Kirghiz, Tatars, Turkmen, Uzbeks, etc.

Turning to modern research, we would like to note the Soviet and Russian ethnologist and historian Yuri Kobishchanov. By the term *Russian Muslims*, he designates representatives of the Russian Federation, like Tatars, Bashkirs, Nogays, etc., who consider Russian as their native language [Кобищанов 2002].

R. Suleimanov, a Russian Islamic scholar, included in this concept ethnic Ukrainians, Belarusians, Chuvashes, Russian Germans, Jews, etc., namely ethnic groups, living in the post-Soviet space and do not traditionally profess Islam, but adopted it for several subjective reasons and use the Russian language as a mean of communication in the Muslim ummah [Сулейманов 2015].

But within the framework of this study, we turn to the term by Renat Bekkin, who denotes a more crucial phenomenon that has already emerged in post-Soviet Russia – ethnic Russians who converted to Islam [Беккин 2012].

### **Previous publications on the topic**

Even though Russian Muslims as an ethnoreligious group has existed for several decades in modern Russia, they are still a poorly studied phenomenon. The total number of articles and scientific works does not fully disclose the main aspects, such as the features of their integration into society and the reasons for converting to Islam.

In the modern scientific space, studies of the features of Islam in Russia and the Russian Muslim community belong to Yu. Kobishchanov [2002], R. Bekkin [2012], M. Bakonina [2013], T. Izluchenko [2013, 2014], R. Suleimanov [2013, 2015], R. Silantyev [2014, 2016], N. Rakityansky [2015], S. Sirazhudinova [2015], A. Malashenko [2010, 2015], H. Sidorov [2014, 2013, 2015].

The main areas of these works are the consideration of Islam as a religious and political movement and the interaction of Islamic organizations with each other and with state structures.

## **Ethnic Russian Muslims**

During the period of the Russian Empire, there were «cases of the adoption of Islam by ethnic Russians», but this did not occur in a conspicuous phenomenon as it happened in the post-Soviet period [Беккин 2012: 157].

For the first time, the problem of Russian Muslims appeared after the war in Afghanistan (1979-1989), when part of «the Soviet captives forcibly converted to Islam». In some cases, representatives of this category continue to profess Islam after release from captivity and returning homeward. According to various estimates, there are no more than «a few dozen of them living in Russia» [Иванов 2014].

However, the most significant event not only for the Russian Muslim community but for all Russian-speaking Muslims took place in 1991, when a Russian translation of the Koran was presented by Valeria (Iman) Porokhova, a Russian Muslim woman. These event attracted particular public attention to ethnic Russians who converted to Islam.

In some cases, interest in Islam and the urge to convert arose from visiting a mosque, communication with Muslims, interest in the Arabic language and culture, and the most common occurrence is marriage with ethnic Muslims. For family reasons, it is women who change their faith most often, while men who converted to Islam through marriage are much less common.

According to the Russian Islamic scholar Alexei Malashenko, Russian Muslims appear due to the fact that Islam is perceived by them as «a universal religion» able to find a solution to any problem «requiring a struggle for justice» [Малашенко 2007]. In addition, in the research by V. Ivanov, along with the above, «social and economic reasons» are also mentioned, which are found among representatives of «the business elite and employees of government bodies in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan» [Иванов, 2014].

It is substantial to point out that a significant factor is the lack of spiritual experience in the confession of Orthodoxy, the traditional religion of the Russian people. According to the Islamic scholar Roman Silantyev, «protest» played an important role among the newly converted youth [Силантьев 2009: 186]. It is often used by recruiters of radical Islam, since the neophyte syndrome, which is characteristic of a Russian Muslim after the adoption of Islam, leads «to harsh judgments, black-and-white perception of reality, a desire to demonstrate through actions and deeds that they belong to Islam» [Сулейманов 2015: 8].

According to R. Suleimanov, the media and Internet communities deliberately create a «negative image of Russians». As a result, they are associated with «alcoholics, lazy people who have lost cultural and family values», and Muslims are positioned as «a healthy patriarchal and often brutal community». This perception of Islam also might encourage Russians to accept it [Сулейманов 2015: 9].

However, for the Russian neophytes it is difficult enough to become part of the ethnic Muslim community, since for Russian society they lose Russian identity. Therefore, accepting Islam, Russian Muslims begin to demonstrate religious zeal, seeking to prove that they are equal to the rest of the Muslim community. For ethnic Muslims, Russian Muslims are undoubtedly solid proof of the truth of their faith. But at the same time, there is a certain distrust of ethnic Muslims towards Russian Muslims, which they often admit, pointing out that Russians are left on the sidelines in the tacit hierarchy within the Islamic community.

### **Distinctive features of Russian Islam**

Russian Islam, as an independent process within Islamic life, has several distinctive features in the understanding and implementation of doctrinal moments, proclaiming one position, in daily life they use another, often non-religious.

One of the distinguishing trace is the intention to create an ideal model of Muslim life in raising their children, they adhere to the methods that their parents raised them. It is happening in our opinion because they are not familiar with a different way of raising children since they have not experienced other Islamic methods. As a result, a new generation of Russian Muslims is growing with a peculiar eclectic consciousness based on secular education and an Islamic way of life.

A striking example of the difference in the approach to raising children between ethnic and Russian Muslims is getting an education. Thus, ethnic Muslims (we are considering living according to Sharia law), send their children to religious educational institutions in Russia and abroad. Whereas Russian Muslims – only to secular institutions to receive compulsory education since religious education is given in the family by parents.

### **The extent of the Russian Muslim community**

There are no exact data on the number of Russian Muslims in the Russian Federation since the All-Russian Population Census does not determine the religious affiliation and its relation to ethnicity.

At the same time, the available records are highly contradictory. Despite the simplicity declared by R.A.Silantyev in the study of Russian Muslims, the main difficulty that any researcher faces is a rare opportunity to have «a frank conversation directly with representatives of this ethnoreligious group» [Силантьев 2019]. It is since, in modern Russia, those Russian Muslims who were involved in committing extremist and terrorist activities are most famous.

In the media, the numbers of Russian Muslims range from several to tens of thousands. Vyacheslav (Ali) Polosin in one of his interviews in 2003 estimates the size of the Russian Muslim community at only 10,000 people [Иванов 2014]. However, it cannot be ruled out that there was an aspiration to exaggerate the popularity of Islam among Russians. In 2015 Mufti Ravil Gainutdin and 63

other functionaries of the Russia Council of Muftis revealed «tens of thousands of Russians converting to Islam» [Русские мусульмане Поволжья].

As Z.M. Abdulagatov notes, the Russian Orthodox Church and some church-related groups expressed their concern over the fact that in the early 2000s, «several thousand Muslims – Russian by origin» appeared in Russia in the Russian Federation [Абдулагатов 2004: 145].

Thus, based on data from researchers, Islam, in modern Russia, is practiced by tens of thousands of newly converted Russians, including a considerable number of those who were born already being ethnic Muslims in the second and third generations of Russian families. In addition, even though there is no statistical data on Russian Muslims in the country, it is officially declared several thousand newly converted Russians, but such data are deliberately underestimated.

### **Attitude towards Russian Muslims by ethnic Muslims**

Since for ethnic Russians, the traditional religion is Orthodoxy, the acceptance of Islam is considered proof of the superiority of Islam over Christianity. However, we note that if an ethnic Muslim (Tatar, Bashkir, Chechen or Azerbaijani) adopts Christianity (and there are such cases), this naturally causes Muslims to regard this as treason or betrayal of the faith.

Religious scholars note that positioning Islam as «a religion without nationality» [Сулейманов 2015: 18], there are several options for the attitude of ethnic Muslims to Russians. The first is evidence of the correctness and truthfulness of Islam. Russians, who become followers of Islam, are perceived by ethnic Muslims as having abandoned their religion «in favor of the true religion». Second, there is «suspicion» due to the transition from one religion to another. A believer who has already changed the religious tradition for some reason, in the minds of ethnic Muslims, may again betray it. The third is a kind of «envy» towards Russians, associated with the philosophical and theological interpretation of sinfulness [Русские мусульмане].

At a meeting of the Advisory Council of the Yamal-Nenets Autonomous Okrug on ethno-confessional relations in 2013, the mufti of the YNAO Khaidar Khafizov, commenting on the transition of the Slavic population of the Okrug to Islam, noted that «this should not be: today one faith, tomorrow another». The mufti of the Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous Okrug considers the adoption of Islam by the Russian people «unacceptable and dangerous for Russia» [Провокация].

In an interview with *Spektr*, Ruslan Gereev, director of the Center for Islamic Studies of the North Caucasus, stressed that the Islamization of Russians is vastly the result of the «poor work of the Russian Orthodox Church and officials» who do not pay due attention to Russian youth. In his opinion, there is no system of the spiritual protection of the Russian population in Russia, which becomes the cause of alcoholism, drug addiction, entry totalitarian sects and, in extreme cases, leads to radical Islamism [ibid].

Akhmet Jafaroglu, a researcher of modern Islam in Russia, declared that «ethnic Muslims feel discomfort in the presence of a Russian Muslim, so they try not to accept him into their circle». Thus, according to the researcher, the only one who is happy to accept a Russian Muslim is «Nurjular, Hizb ut Tahrir, Salafis and other radical Islamists». Ahmet Jafaroglu sums up that for the radical Islamists, the Russian Muslim is «a dough from which it can be baked anything. For example, a suicide bomber» [ibid].

Faced with the nationalism of ethnic Muslims with elements of Anti-Russian sentiment, some Russian Muslims chose the path of creating their separate ethnic associations. An example is the experience of *the National Organization of Muslims of Russia*. In 2004, several Muslim groups united to form the National Organization of Russian Muslims. The leaders of the NORM at a press conference said that only in Islam are the spiritual perspective of the Russians and the salvation of Russia possible. One of its goals, the organization identified the formation of Russian Muslims as a «subethnos». Sociologists conducted a study, as a result of which they found out that the majority of Russian Muslims are not members of this organization [Русский национализм и ислам].

Solely Russian Muslims tried to create ethnoreligious organizations because none of the representatives of those peoples of Russia who traditionally profess Islam tried to create a religious organization based on ethnicity in the post-Soviet period. Neither the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Russia, nor The Russian Council of Muftis, nor the Coordination Center of Muslims of the North Caucasus positions themselves as organizations with a conspicuous ethnic principle.

The small number of associations of Russian Muslims, a series of schisms within them, led to the fact that experiments to create a Russian diaspora within the Russian Ummah were doomed to failure. We may add that one of the reasons for the failure of attempts to organize the community of Russian Muslims is because of belonging to different Islamic schools and branches.

Islamic scholar V. Ivanov noted that Russian Muslims adhere to the following directions of Sunni Islam: «Wahhabism, Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami, Jamaat Tablig, Nurcular, Maliki, traditional for Russia Islam of the Hanafi and Sha-Fii madhhab, Sufi tarikats». There are significantly fewer Russian Muslims adhering to «Shia Islam» [Иванов 2014].

As a result, the only way for Russian Muslims is to integrate into the Russian Ummah without the intention of creating any separate Russian diaspora within it. As a matter of principle, there is one objectively developing phenomenon for this integration, which facilitates this direction for Russian Muslims.

The point is that the Russian language today has already become one of the significant means of communication within the Russian Ummah: sermons in many city mosques in Russia today are only in Russian, Islamic media, and numerous other information resources (websites, forums, blogs, communities in social networks) are developing in this language very successfully, religious literature about Islam is overwhelmingly published in Russian, communication between Muslims of different

nationalities does not take place in Arabic, but in Russian. In the North Caucasus, Russian is not used as the language of preaching only where the population is mono-ethnic. For example, in Chechnya or Ingushetia. In the same places where representatives of different peoples live compactly, as, for example, in the capital of Dagestan Makhachkala in mosques, the Russian language is used as an inevitable means of communication in the conditions of multiethnicity of parishioners.

The problem is that, with the adoption of Islam, a Russian Muslim often changes not only religious identification but also often adopts certain elements of the ethnic identity of those Muslim peoples among whose representatives person lives in and who can act as a role model.

Without a Muslim cultural code, without a spiritual national tradition in Islam, Russian Muslims are often vulnerable in the world outlook to radical ideological concepts. Accepting Islam, a Russian Muslim, as a rule, at the beginning does not have an idea of the entire palette of the ideological diversity of the modern Muslim community in Russia.

This can be easily exploited by radicals (like Wahhabis), as a rule, offering a simplified version of the interpretation of the Muslim doctrine with its black-and-white attitude to the outside world. For peoples traditionally professing Islam, religion is closely intertwined with their national culture, becoming one of the signs of ethnic identity. This process took place throughout the history of these peoples. Russian Muslims do not have this: the adoption of Islam does not take place collectively, but individually. Accordingly, this gave rise to such a diverse ideological palette of the Russian Muslim community: there are both Sunnis (and of different branches) and Shiites.

The question arises: can a separate Russian Muslim culture develop, closely linked to ethnic identity, as, for example, happens among Tatars or Chechens? This question can be answered only if Russian Muslims persist as a community for several generations and live in a relatively limited territorial space, mainly in rural areas. In the meantime, the bulk of Russian Muslims is neophytes in the first generation and for the most part townspeople.

Even if not only their children but also their grandchildren and great-grandchildren are brought up as Muslims, this does not guarantee that Russian Muslims will be able to form a separate sub-confessional group of the Russian people. In our opinion, this will not happen because Russian Muslims live in cities where ethnoreligious differences are transforming the influence of urbanization and globalization. Therefore, in our opinion, under current conditions, Russian Muslims will not be able to form even in the future into a separate sub-confessional group of the Russian people.

If Russian Muslims converted to the new Muslim faith after long spiritual searches, then perhaps they did it for ideological reasons. Acceptance of Islam, in this case, may have anti-state and revolutionary motivations of a person in its origins - before the adoption of Islam, many of these people were members of left-wing radicals and right-wing radical groups.

For several years, Ali Vyacheslav Polosin actively opposed the division of Russian Muslims by nationality, since he believed that communities cannot be created in Islam on a national basis,

therefore there are no Russian communities, just as there should not be Tatar or Arab ones. But on the part of ethnic Muslims, there was a rather restrained reaction to his activities, and as a result, A. V. Polosin concluded that Russian Muslims must have their way.

### **Russian Muslims and the Russian Orthodox Church**

Russian Muslims' identity has been repeatedly discussed by politicians, scientists, and journalists, but the utmost resonance in the consideration of this topic arose in 2014.

At a meeting of the XVIII World Russian People's Council, dedicated to the theme *Unity of history, unity of the people, unity of Russia*, the following definition of Russian identity was proposed: «... a Russian is a person who considers himself Russian; having no other ethnic preferences; speaking and thinking in Russian; recognizing Orthodox Christianity as the basis of national spiritual culture; feeling solidarity with the fate of the Russian people» [Декларация русской идентичности].

This statement was immediately followed by a reaction from the Russian Muslim community. As an example, we can point to the statements of ethnic Russian spiritual leaders. Mufti of the Sverdlovsk Region Nikolai (Abdul Quddus) Asharin noted that «religion and nationality are not very connected» [Известные русские мусульмане поспорили с РПЦ]. Sergei (Musa) Baranov, head of the public relations department of the Union of Muslims of the Volgograd Region remarked that «as a Muslim, he did not lose Russian identity, but felt it more strongly than before the adoption of Islam» [ibid]. According to an employee of the historical mosque in Moscow Vladimir (Mahdi) Zarubin, it is impossible «to deprive people of their national identity by adopting declarations» [ibid].

As can be seen from the examples that were repeatedly quoted by the Russian media, the declaration did not find approval from the Muslim Russian community. The Islamization of a certain part of Russians is a consequence not only of freedom of religion, but also a quality indicator of the missionary work of the Russian Orthodox Church today.

One of the reasons why Russians choose Islam is that the Russian Islamic neophyte often lacks the religious experience of being in the bosom of Orthodoxy, the traditional religion of Russians. Sometimes not having an acquaintance with Orthodoxy or when faced with some example of unworthy behavior of any of the Christians (for example, the priest or the ministers in the church behaved somehow inappropriately), led to the rejection of Orthodoxy in general and a negative attitude towards it. Another reason for the negative attitude towards Orthodoxy and the preference for Islam by Russians is the perception of Christianity as a religion of weaklings, preaching pacifism, and also being fully part of the state system of Russia.

Russian Muslims often explain their rejection of the Russian Orthodox Church and, accordingly, their choice in favor of Islam by the fact that the Church is a «servant of the state», which is identified with «corruption and lawlessness» [Русские мусульмане не склонны доверять РПЦ].



In the same way, they treat the traditional Muslim clergy, considering them the service personnel of the bureaucracy. Islam is seen by them as a religion opposed to the political system.

Often, the rejection of Christianity among Russian Muslims is influenced by individual perceptions. Professor Svetlana Kardinskaya, who conducted a study among Russian Muslims in Izhevsk in 2008-2009, found that by the time of her religious choice «the Christian religion in the XX century has already lost its attractiveness». According to the Russian Muslims, she interviewed, «people have simplified Christianity, adapted it to their selfish interests» [Кардинская 2010]. This religion no longer requires any restrictions from a person, for example, people who consider themselves Christians may not observe fasting, drink alcohol, they may even not believe in God.

Researchers note that Islam is attracted to Russians by the fact that it gives people something traditional, solid, and correct in terms of organizing life in harmony with God.

The post-Soviet period of Russian history was marked by four cases of the adoption of Islam by Christian priests. Archpriest of the Kaluga diocese Vyacheslav Polosin was the first to convert to Islam, in 1999 [Фирсов 2014]. The adoption of Islam by a Christian priest is undoubtedly an extraordinary event for Russia.

All the cases of the adoption of Islam by priests are seen much more in the eyes of ethnic Muslims as a triumph of the truth of the Muslim faith than if just one of the Russians converts to Islam.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it can be noted that Russian Islam as a phenomenon of modern Russian reality has various effects for the believer and the public. Russian Muslims periodically become the object of the discussions. Religious liberty, which allows any person to be an adherent of a religion that is not traditional for their ethnic group, has led to the isolation of Russian Muslims from Russian society.

The participation of Russians in the terrorist groups, the psychological attitude to an extreme and radical interpretation of religious doctrines, as well as the geopolitical situation in which Russia is conducting military operations against ISIS in Syria, in whose ranks there are Russian Muslims, will cause a wary and suspicious attitude towards this ethnic-confessional group. Nevertheless, the surge of media interest in Russian Muslims is often associated with radical manifestations, such as in June 2015, caused by the detention of a Moscow State University student, Varvara Karaulova, on the Syrian border.

Moreover, ethnic Muslims also feel distrust of Russian Muslims, who, on the one hand, welcome the adoption of Islam by Russians, and on the other hand, do not fully treat them as equals. The emergence of Russian Muslims testifies not only to the attractiveness of Islam but also to the weak work of the Russian Orthodox Church among its potential flock, especially among the youth.

Note that not a single centralized Muslim religious organization in Russia conducts distinct missionary activity among Russians: Russians who convert to Islam do it for the most part voluntarily.

But it can be said unequivocally that Russian Muslims, with all the different attitudes towards them, have become a prominent part of the Islamic Ummah of modern Russia: it is no longer possible not to notice them.

First, a change in a person's lifestyle usually entails changes within the personality. Russian Muslims, by their behavior, strive to get rid of their national ideas, abandoning their old way of life, limiting contacts with friends and relatives, and proving their commitment to their new environment. They abandon their previous family traditions, create families following the example of the Prophet Muhammad, that is, family life is governed by an ideal example.

First of all, in a Muslim marriage, these people educate themselves as individuals in Islam, and the partner acts as a controller. They take all the instructions of the Koran literally, not allowing any condescension. However, having lived in an Islamic family, having strengthened their relationship in faith, they can return to observing some of the previous customs without a semantic load while preserving external attributes. So, for example, on Christian Easter, you can meet a woman in a hijab, carrying colored eggs home, or with Easter cakes, which at this time can be found on the table of almost any Russian Muslim family. At the same time, such behavior is explained and justified, in particular, that Jesus is the Prophet Isa, only Christians misinterpret his role.

Secondly, Russian Islam is steadily increasing the number of its adherents, offering an alternative to the generally accepted position. As a result, a situation arises of a change in social orientation by the active part of the young generation of the Russian population and its outflow into a different cultural environment. The percentage of such people is relatively small and cannot influence the public position. However, Russian Muslims are inclined to accept forms of non-traditional Islam, to be carried away by extremist ideas, which leads to the emergence of banned religious organizations, rise in crime, and can negatively affect the development of the region and the state.

However, the former way of life, the knowledge they acquired in various educational institutions, everything that they brought with them to Islam, in turn, creates a kind of national Islam of Russian Muslims that is different from others.

An analysis of the political and religious activities of Russian Muslims allows us to conclude that it was not possible to create a Russian Ummah for both objective and subjective reasons. The Russian Muslims have never represented a single whole to act as an independent power center. The National Organization of Russian Muslims (NORM), which claimed to be the spokesman for the interests of Russian Muslims, was never able to fulfill this task, having turned from a relatively pluralistic structure into a closed, ideologically limited, and right-wing radical association.

A separate problem is the vagueness of the *Russian Muslim* concept. This group can include not only ethnic Russians but also representatives of indigenous peoples of the Russian Federation who traditionally profess Islam: Tatars, Bashkirs, etc., for whom Russian is their native language. Their children, as Y. Kobishchanov notes in his research in 2003, are already Russian by culture and Muslim by religion.

One of the ways for Russian Muslims to become part of the modern Muslim community of Russia is to integrate into it. However, in the eyes of many Russian Muslims, such actions mean a loss of identification and are therefore unacceptable.

At the same time, remarks about Russian Muslims as a lost sect are nowise applicable to Russian followers of Islam, if only because there is no ideological uniformity in their ranks: among Russian Muslims, there are Sunnis, Shiites, and even non-practicing Muslims.

Perhaps, as a result of the intellectual interaction of the internationalist part of the Russian Muslims and the representatives of the Turkic peoples who are in the area of Russian culture, the formation of a genuine intellectual vanguard of the Russian Ummah, capable of speaking on behalf of all Muslims of Russia, is possible.

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