

A conclusion is made that under conditions of informational civilization the main battle field is sphere of popular consciousness, including historical memory and the weapon are mass media, social networks, arts, education, and manipulation technologies.

Key words: empire, metropolis, colony, occupation, legitimation, historical memory, manipulation.

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ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM AND ITS INFLUENCE ON YOUTH IN GEORGIA

Summary

Spread of Islamic fundamentalism is one of the threats for regional security in the Black Sea region. The article is devoted to the problem of Islamic fundamentalism, radicalism and terrorism in Georgia as part of Black Sea region.

Military operations in Syria, situation in the nearest neighborhood – in Turkey, Russia creates additional tension in the region. It could be observed expansion of radical fundamentalism in different regions of Georgia especially among young part of population of Georgia.

The policy brief is analyzing general situation of Muslim community in Georgia and situation with the spread of radical Islamism in the regions of Georgia (Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, Adjara). Specific attention is given to youth. Policy brief includes recommendation for governmental structures and CSOs.

Keywords: Islamic fundamentalism, youth, Georgia, youth policy.

Description of the Muslim community in Georgia

Based on the population census of 2014, number of Muslims in Georgia was 398 700 people or 10.7% of the total population of Georgia (according to certain sources, quoting leaders of the Muslim community the number is about 900,000 people). According to statistical data and to the data from research organizations, Islam is the largest and important religion in Georgia. Main living locations of Islam followers are Kvemo Kartli, Kakheti (Pankisi, Dedoplistskaro and Lagodekhi regions) and Adjara (mainly its mountainous areas of Khulo and Khelvachauri). Muslims also live in Guria, Samtskhe-Javakheti and Shida Kartli regions.

Specificity of Georgia is that representatives of different ethnic groups profess Islam here: ethnic Georgians from Adjara (~115.000 people), Azerbaijanis (~233.000 people), Kists (~7.000 people) and Chechens (1000 people). Other smaller groups live in Guria and Samtkhe-Javakheti regions.

As result of the policy practiced by previous government several thousand Turks with Georgian origins received Georgian passports. During the last several years to Georgia have moved hundreds of Iranian Georgian Muslim-Shiites or the so called “Fereydanians». Small groups of Georgian Muslims have also moved from Azerbaijan to Georgia – the so called “Ingiloians», who have traditionally been living in the number of western regions of the neighboring country.

We must also consider the presence of foreign citizens, who are either studying or working in Georgia. Along with that, number of tourists from Islamic countries has also rapidly increased during last few years. According to the National Tourism Administration, number of tourists from Islamic countries of Eastern Asia and Near East has totaled 99,115 people in 2014, 106,433 people in 2015 and 234,987 people during 9 months of 2016.

Directions of Islam in Georgia: absolute majority of Muslims of Adjara and Kakheti are followers of Sunni Islam (Hanafi School); majority of Azerbaijani population of Kvemo Kartli region profess Shiism. There is a problem of relations inside the Muslim community; if earlier there have been no radical opposition between separate directions of Islam, the tension of situation promotes more and more escalation of conflict between Shiite and Sunni communities.

According to different sources, there are up to 300 active mosques and praying houses in Georgia and their number is increasing. Muslim communities in Georgia are generally characterized with high level of closeness. The most open in this view are Adjarians. Turkey, Iran and Azerbaijan are conducting covert

struggle for the control over Muslim community in Georgia by means of cultural-educational policy, construction of mosques, creation of educational institutions and organization of cultural-religious events.

Problem of spreading of radical forms of Islam

Before we start analyzing the problem of spreading of radical forms of Islam in Georgia we must first emphasize the problem of radicalization of population in the country in general. Considering the general geopolitical situation in the Caucasus, spreading of radical attitudes, increase of activity of ultra-right groups, may be in the interests of certain outside forces. These groups become the convenient tool for manipulation, provoking tension and the given issue is in need of serious monitoring and research. Practice shows that use of force by police or intelligence services is not enough for solving all the problems and in certain cases may promote escalation of conflicts.

Regardless of religious direction, fundamentalism is the reaction of separate community groups to the processes of globalization, modernization and secularization.

Of particular concern is the spreading in Georgia of the radical Islam – Wahhabism. This threat has appeared in the second part of 1990's, when in 1995 the first Arab Mullah appeared in Pankisi Gorge; and if before that group of radical Islam followers was located only in Pankisi Gorge, today they can be found throughout Georgia. Wahhabi mosque, although not fully constructed, is in one of the districts of Georgian capital – Ponichala, although, nobody can say exactly how many mosques of the given direction are in Georgia in total.

Wahhabism found support mainly among local youth. It is also highly concerning that according to different data, in the military operations in the Near East, in support to ISIS (al-Dawla al-Islamiya al-Iraq al-Sham) take part up to 200-300 Georgian citizens. Experts and representatives of communities from Pankisi Gorge and Kvemo Kartli region claim that there were 50-100 people fighting in the Near East. It must be stressed that along with men there go women also, although there is no precise information about their number.

First killed from those who have departed to fight in the Near East appeared in August 2012. Last information about the decease of a 21 year-old resident of Pankisi Gorge was circulated by media in August 2016. According to the Kakheti Information Center, 21 citizens of Georgia have already been killed in Syria. Those are mainly young men of age of 16, 18, 22, 25. Last shocking fact was the runaway of two school students from Pankisi, who intended to involve in military actions; it happened in April 2015.

Measures taken at the State level

Government of Georgia has taken number of measures for preventing participation of Georgian citizens, especially youth in the military operations on the side of terrorist organizations. Special measures are being taken at control-border checkpoints for identifying persons/networks connected to terrorist organizations. Amendments have been made to the following laws: namely, those who have joined terrorist organizations are prohibited from entering the country. Those who do come back to Georgia are charged based on the coinciding Article of the Criminal Code of Georgia. Several persons, including Pankisi residents have already been arrested for connection with terrorism.

Along with these steps, number of measures has been taken for improving social-economic situation (this mainly concerns Pankisi Gorge). Namely, Defense Ministry has developed and is implementing the program ensuring “higher involvement of Pankisi Gorge representatives», who are being offered profitable contracts in armed forces, education in military academy and etc. Locals have for two years been participating in the State Program for the Development of Small Business. Work with representatives of traditional Islam is also in process.

Thanks to these measures, number of those willing to fight in the Near East has rapidly decreased, although, the problem of spreading of radical Islam in Georgia still remains acute.

Aggressive actions of the Christian community, mainly taking place in Adjara only promote radicalization and negative attitudes towards even the representatives of traditional Islam. Young generation is the most vulnerable and easily controllable group. Despite the measures being taken by the State, it is apparent that there is no well-planned and coordinated strategy for preventing incidents, extremist actions and provoking of interethnic, inter-national and inter-confessional tension at the national level.

Problem of self-realization of youth locally

When analyzing areas of spreading of radical Islam it becomes apparent that it spreads more actively in separate regions with problems with access to education, high level of unemployment and disappointment. According to Meka Khangoshvili, in Pankisi region only 1-2 families send children for education in higher education institutions, as others cannot afford the cost of education not to mention additional income for living and food. There is no factory in the Gorge and sports industry is not developed. Analogous situation is in the villages of Kvemo Kartli and highland regions of Adjara. Aside from that, in certain villages of Kvemo Kartli

there is the language problem – not knowing and/or weak level of knowledge of the State language influences the process of self-realization of youth locally.

In such cases, it is easy to take the attention of young people. Non-usage of internal resources by representatives of the given group promote development of complexes of “the unused person» or the outcast. They are unable to develop their carrier as they lack all the resources necessary for it. The given problem is directly related to the realization of their civil, political and social rights. As result, radical ideas find the fertile grounds for growing.

One of the motivating factors (maybe not the main one, but the one creating background) for those who have already become followers of radical Islam and are now part of ISIS was the fact of disappointment and being non-used. If we speak about the biography of Batirashvili – former leader of one of the ISIS groups in Syria, who was killed in summer 2016, we can see that he was a former professional military officer dismissed from Georgian armed forces due to health problems and who has not found any function for himself after return to the home village.

Orientation on an armed man

Aside from the local ideological situation, the promoting element for young people deciding to become followers of radical form if Islam is the fact that leaders of one of the ISIS groups in Syria were Georgian citizens – two Chechens born in Pankisi Gorge in the north of Georgia and the aforementioned Abu Umar al-Shishani (Tarkhan Batirashvili) and Muslim Abu Valid ash-Shishani (Murad Margoshvili). In September 2014 they were both included in the list most wanted terrorists by the USA.

Process of education in the youth (students of senior high school classes and graduates of secondary schools) is apprehended critically and in a nihilist way. This category of youth can be conditionally divided into 3 groups. The survey conducted among secondary school students in Kvemo Kartli in February 2016 showed that senior students are not planning to continue studying and majority of them is oriented at migrating from Georgia to abroad. Main countries which the youth plans to leave for are Azerbaijan, Russia and Turkey.

Second group of youth is openly integrated or is on the way to integrating with criminal and extremist groups of religious of other type. Some villages in the researched regions are characterized with high level of criminality and aggressiveness. In the beginning of January 2016, in Ponichala (Soganlugi district), Wahhabis murdered a young man for cooperation with media (this is the second murder since September 2015 by religious reasons in the given district of Tbilisi!). There are other examples of activities of criminal groups, which creates the fear background and creates barriers in communication with representatives of communities.

Third group of youth is oriented at working in police and intelligence services. In both last groups there is an orientation of identifying themselves with an armed person. Thus, they understand the problem of personal security and maybe security of their families. It can be concluded that young people do not see alternative mechanisms for security of citizens.

Negative attitudes towards the civil society institutes

Young men do not trust NGOs and civil institutions in general. For many of them participation in trainings, seminars and civil activities is identified with disparagement and such attitude is defined by criminal and extremist religious settings. Another problem is the conflict between CSOs of ethnic Azerbaijanis. The situation is the same with Kists living in Pankisi, which further discredits the civil institutions in general and causes isolation.

Thus, these regions and communities are characterized with low level of development of civil society institutions, by means of which local youth would be able to engage in the resolution of local problems. It is noteworthy that in Muslim communities very active are women, although they are restricted in freedom of movement from their families and their communities in general.

Foreign students

Number of foreign students studying in Georgia (even despite the number of problems caused by the tightening of visa policy of Georgia) has been continuously increasing during last several years. It must be stressed that majority of them are students from countries in which Muslim communities are in majority – Azerbaijan, Turkey, Iraq, Syria, Bangladesh and etc. Problematic of relations inside the groups of these students, their communication with Georgian citizens, integration with educational sphere and the society in general are the special subjects for research.

Separately must be analyzed the case of Ponichala. Here operates the branch of the Free University which teaches in Azerbaijani language and as result there is the high concentration of both students and lecturers from Azerbaijan. There is the problem of relations inside the student sphere: “bullying» – aggressive behavior from older students towards younger ones.

Students from Azerbaijan have identified following problems which they are facing when being in Georgia:

- No knowledge of Georgian language creates for them the problem not only of integration but also of full-scale comprehension of received knowledge and as result becoming professionals in the future;
- Problematic issues with solving procedural issues related to their education (documentation);
- Solving of problems with finding accommodation in Georgia;
- Issues of employment as additional source of income;
- Non-involvement in student life of university; isolation from other students – citizens of Georgia.

Media coverage

Very important role in the process of development of negative tendencies related to expression of extremism, activity of aggressive fundamental groups is given to media and their approaches towards the process of coverage of religious and political extremism.

Quite often it happens that media factually promotes popularization of threats from extremists, which promotes threatening of ordinary citizens, increase of panic among population, provocation of address for help to alternative radical groups, which generally only activates tension.

Main problems – low level of competence of journalists, struggle of mass media sources (TV, printed and Internet media) for high ratings and as result the striving towards creating scandals by using their materials and giving ethnic or religious context to household and/or criminal situations. Responsibility of media and certain journalists for circulation of misinformation and defamation still remains a problem. Along with that, it needs to be emphasized that media is not the only source of popularization; higher role in the given process is played by social networks, in which representatives of young generation are highly active.

Recommendations

Implementation of the permanent monitoring of the problematic of religious extremism both at the State level and the level of public organizations with the aim of preventing possible incidents and/or timely response. Giving attention to all the regions with potential threat for spreading of radical forms of Islam.

At the State level it is necessary to continue empowering measures directed against terrorism and radicalism based on the Resolution of the UN Security Council №2178 and the OSCE Program - United CVE. Development of the inter-confessional dialogue and strengthening of the role of the State Agency for Religious Issues in the given process.

Support to the process of formation of civil society institutions in the regions with potential threat and engagement in the process of community leaders, representing Muslim community, including women and students of higher education institutions. Creation of conditions for engaging youth in the process of informal education, including the foreign youth studying in Georgia.

Conducting and popularization of historic researches on positive coexistence of representatives of different ethnic and confessional groups. Important is the integration of youth in the practical component of the process of historic researches, namely in the process of archaeological diggings and cleaning of historic monuments of religious and cultural heritage.

Implementation of the program directed at the increase of qualification of journalists, empowerment of the role of social media in the popularization of nonviolence, nonviolent methods of conflict resolution, positive examples – success stories of representatives of local communities in different fields.

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ИСЛАМСЬКИЙ ФУНДАМЕНТАЛІЗМ ТА ЙОГО ВПЛИВ НА МОЛОДІ ГРУЗІЇ

Анотація

Розповсюдження ісламського фундаменталізму є однією з загроз регіональної безпеки в Чорноморському регіоні. Саме тому метою статті є проблема ісламського фундаменталізму, радикалізму та тероризму в Грузії як частини Чорноморського регіону.

Військові операції в Сирії, ситуація в найближчому сусідстві - в Туреччині, Росія створює додаткову напругу в регіоні. Можна спостерігати розширення радикального фундаменталізму в різних регіонах Грузії, особливо серед молоді в Грузії.

Короткий опис політики - це аналіз загальної ситуації мусульманського співтовариства в Грузії та ситуація з поширенням радикалізму в регіонах Грузії (Кахеті, Квемо Картлі, Аджара). Особлива увага приділяється молоді. Політичний звіт містить рекомендації для державних структур та ГО.

Ключові слова: ісламський фундаменталізм, молодь, Грузія, молодіжна політика.