

There are no visible conflicts on the basis of ethnic-religious hostility in Tajikistan. However, if the problem is not visible, this does not mean that it does not exist, said Aziz Timurov, participant of the CABAR.asia School of Analytics. In his opinion, a well-developed and applicable tolerance policy can mitigate potential ethnic-religious and regional conflicts and be a factor in economic development in Tajikistan.

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Brief overview of the article:

- In most cases, intolerance towards people on any basis is due to a negative view formed in the absence of complete information. At the same time, it is not necessary to have a personal negative experience in order to form an appropriate idea and attitude towards a person. Adopting conventional wisdom is a faster and easier way;
 - Dialogue is capable, if not to make a person tolerant, then at least reduce the degree of tension and minimize the occurrence of conflict situations;
 - A well-designed tolerance policy can prevent future ethnic and religious conflicts;
 - In a modern economy, it is not the products that generate large additional value, but ideas and innovations; Competition encourages governments and businesses to move from discriminatory policies to tolerance and diversity.
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No conflicts? Or they are just not visible

Some experts believe that in Tajik society there are no obvious conflicts between social groups and communities, there are no interethnic and inter-religious or inter-regional clashes, as the most dangerous and destructive. Alternatively, these conflicts may not be visible. This opinion is shared by the Tajik religious expert Rustam Azizi, speaking about inter-confessional conflicts.^[1] However, other experts and representatives of religious minorities themselves say they are increasingly experiencing intolerance.^[2] Violation of rights and freedoms, discrimination of people on any grounds occurs frequently and is mainly of a domestic nature, occurring at the level of horizontal relations between people.

Note that the relationship between the government and the citizen cannot be called tolerant or vice versa, even if there is discrimination on the part of state of individuals or groups, representatives of ethnic or religious minorities. It is rather a problem of applying the principle of the rule of law - a principle that affirms the unconditional equality of citizens in rights and freedoms. Private characteristics of a person, such as property and social status, gender, race, religion, nationality, regional origin should not be considered.

It should be borne in mind that the state is not an impersonal machine, but an organization of political power, which has legitimacy and a monopoly on violence, but nonetheless consists of people. People who are also influenced by the environment with its norms and stereotypes are prone to have their own interests and may also make mistakes. One example is the conflict between the head of one of the village administrations in Tajikistan and his fellow villagers, representatives of the Uzbek community, whom the court sentenced to imprisonment on charges of inciting ethnic hatred.[\[3\]](#)

According to a 2007-2017 study by the Pew Research Center, the problem of religious oppression by governments, private individuals, and groups is growing in the world. A similar trend is also observed in Central Asia and, particularly in Tajikistan. According to the Pew Research Center, despite the fact that the index of social and religious hatred in Central Asian countries indicates "the dominant tolerance of society towards religious diversity, government policies regarding religion are disproportionately tightened from year to year,"[\[4\]](#)

Thus, in the category of "government discrimination of religious groups", Tajikistan, together with Uzbekistan, is among the violating countries with 7.3 points out of 10 possible. For ten years, according to the study, Tajikistan has made a sharp negative jump in this category.[\[5\]](#)

Some authorities say that measures to limit religious freedoms are dictated by considerations of public safety and the inadmissibility of "propaganda of religious ideas."[\[6\]](#)

The concern of secular authorities and the expert community over the growing popularity of orthodox or even extremist views among some groups of the population has prompted the government to use the entire arsenal of means to combat this trend: from power/military to ideological.

Losing to the state in numbers, in military power and in the amount of financial resources, the adherents of extremist views managed to intimidate the governments of the countries,

the media and the expert community that this problem was included in the current obligatory political agenda. However, let us note that it is not entirely clear whether the threat from small marginal groups and supporters of radical religious views is so great? Or, are we being asked to look through the lens of the media, government and independent experts?



In Tajikistan, youth perceive atheists as enemies of religion

Among poverty, lack of rights and religious ignorance, there is one point that is not paid much attention to, as the reason for the growing popularity of ultra-conservative ideas in Islam - the problem of poor communication between people - representatives of ethnic-religious groups, communities and subcultures. People have little contact with each other outside their narrow social groups and even do not strive for this.

In most cases, intolerance towards people on any basis is due to a negative view formed in the absence of complete information. At the same time, it is not necessary to have a personal negative experience in order to form an appropriate idea and attitude towards a person from another social group. Sometimes, adopting conventional wisdom is a faster and easier way.

It can be assumed that most conflicts arise from the belief that we have enough information to evaluate and make a decision, even if this information is nothing more than a widespread stereotype, myth or phobia. Hence the incorrect assessments, incorrect conclusions and the corresponding attitude, followed by building a model of behavior appear.

The good news is that communication is capable, if not to make a person tolerant, then at least reduce the degree of tension and reduce the likelihood of conflict situations. Live communication is crucial here. The bad news is that in a context where distrust and intolerance are growing in society, it is more difficult to engage in dialogue. This is a dilemma that should be addressed by the government through a coherent policy of tolerance.

Tolerance policy as a preventive measure against possible conflicts

Tolerance initially implied religious tolerance, but over time this concept incorporated other meanings. Tolerance is an active ethical position, and not, contrary to popular belief, connivance or indifference, “not ready to “leave alone” or “so be it,” with little reflection on the motives that underlie such a position.”[\[7\]](#)



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This is the ability to recognize the right of another individual to be different, to act and think differently, and to keep oneself from actions and words that can be regarded as an infringement on the rights, freedoms, honor and dignity of another person or group of people.

Tolerance as a state policy can prevent future social, interethnic and inter-religious conflicts, the beginnings of which are being laid now. Often the cause of conflicts lies in the plane of economic and power relations, the struggle for resources and influence between different interest groups. During a period of crisis, the visible basis of the conflict is often the factors that lie on the surface, but nonetheless are not a key cause. Anything can serve as a trigger: trampled dignity, historical resentment, the desire to restore justice, the search for the guilty, the call of a charismatic leader, and even ordinary everyday conflict.



Representatives of various religions in Dushanbe at the [interfaith festival - "Tajikistan is our common home"](#) , organized by the Representative Office of the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in partnership with the Committee for Religion, Regulation of Traditions, Celebrations and Rites under the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan. Photo: CABAR.asia

There are no visible conflicts on the basis of ethno-religious hostility in Tajikistan. However, if the problem is not visible, this does not mean that it does not exist. The principle of solving problems as they arise is not effective in the long-term perspective, because it involves resolving symptoms, eliminating the consequences, limiting the growth of the conflict and, if possible, restoring the previous status quo, but not finding the key cause of the conflict. Implementation of the tolerance policies as a set of preventive measures at the horizontal level (the relationship between people) and at the vertical level (power - society) will reduce the likelihood of such conflicts. An important condition: the right to access a public pie (pork barrel) and to the resource of power, will satisfy, if not all interest groups, then most of them.

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Another part of this policy may be a combination of measures and regular practices that demonstrate the authorities' commitment to consider the citizens Tajikistan -

representatives of ethnic and religious minorities as equal participants in the political process. In order to achieve this goal, it is possible to apply elements of positive discrimination, social elevators for representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, quotas and representations in government institutions, a regular platform for dialogue, a demonstration of the public commitment of the authorities to position themselves as equal partners and to encourage initiatives and contributions of minorities to development of the country.

Using the method of constructing possible development scenarios, it can be assumed that while maintaining the status quo in religious and ethnic politics, hotbeds of tension of various durations and intensities may arise. In other words, what may happen if one does not make any differences. The method for constructing development scenarios is not an attempt to predict the future, but rather modeling multiple options for the future.

The perception of ethnic and religious issues as the sphere of the most susceptible to discrimination and stigma, as well as the lack of a holistic anti-discrimination and ethno-religious state policy may indicate that the government has insufficiently studied this problem. Speaking about ethnic politics, “the expert community and government structures quite possibly do not see the relevance in this problem, and perhaps do not perceive it as a problem. However, at the moment there is no clearly formulated ethnic policies in the country, it is replaced only by separate decrees, statements and projects.”^[8] Omissions in working with ethno-religious minorities can create conditions for new conflicts, for example, in Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO).

The territorial dispute with Kyrgyzstan may spur the growth of anti-Kyrgyz and anti-Tajik sentiments on both sides of the borders. The unresolved cross-border issue, as well as the competition of the local population for limited water and land resources in the region, creates a favorable environment for the growth of intolerance and hatred between the citizens of the two countries. This situation may prompt some politicians and experts to make populist and jingoistic statements, which will not help to reduce the tension.

The recent rise in Sinophobia attitudes that has been observed in Central Asia is also a source of serious concern. Currently, the anti-Chinese sentiment is not as strong in Tajikistan as in neighboring Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan.^[9] There are several factors that can contribute to the development of such xenophobia. Among them are the concern of the population and the academic community of the growing economic, and possibly political dependence on China,^[10] the growth of religious identity among young citizens of the Central Asian republics and their indignation at the cases of oppression of Muslims in the Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region (XUAR), and the degree of entry of the PRC into the

region. Even fake news can contribute to the growth of anti-Chinese and alarmist moods.

The economic dimension of tolerance policy

Tolerance is one of the liberal values alongside with a market economy, free trade, entrepreneurship and private property. In the past, classical liberalism, having become the political value of the West, exalted it. Not even the western countries - modern Japan, the Republic of Korea, with their collectivist, hierarchical culture, have achieved prosperity thanks to liberal, market-based policies.

Authoritarian China became the second economy in the world thanks to liberal reforms in the economy that began in the late 1970s.[\[11\]](#) The history of the last 200 years of development of the most economically developed societies is associated with liberalism, with periodically arising deviations towards socialist ideas. However, “one should not have illusions - this is not humanity that has changed, it is the economy that has required liberal changes in order to become effective, and humanity has reluctantly and slowly succumbed to its demands.”[\[12\]](#)

Nowadays, technology and science allow the production of economic benefits without the use of a large number of workers. The production of services brings more profit than the production of products, and the sketch of the sneakers is more expensive than the sneakers themselves. For a modern economy, ideas are more important than workers. In the future, this trend will only increase.

Ideas and innovations are key factors of a person’s competitiveness in the labor market. However, “talent is evenly distributed across nationalities, religions, sexual orientations, and political preferences. Discrimination of any group deprives the economy of a share of talent - and it is tolerance that took place of discrimination in the ideology of the recent conservative Europe and the USA.”[\[13\]](#)

In the global economy, tolerance creates the conditions for the efficient use of human capital. To be tolerant in the international labor market means to have a skill that helps you to be competitive and allows you to effectively and without conflict interact with many people and their identities.

Smart and creative people who experience discrimination or intolerance can either migrate or not realize their potential. A less tolerant society will lose to a more tolerant one, which will gain a valuable human resource.

Brief conclusions

- Violation of rights and freedoms, discrimination of people on any grounds often occurs and is mainly of a domestic nature, taking place at the level of horizontal relations between people.
- Weak communication between people - representatives of various ethnic and religious groups, communities and subcultures, is a favorable environment for the growth of an intolerant attitude in society. People do not know each other well enough.
- In Tajikistan, the successful application of a tolerance policy will be able to, if not prevent, at least alleviate tensions and conflicts between people, between ethnic-religious and regional groups.
- Tolerance is a necessary skill in a globalizing world for competitive and conflict-free coexistence and cooperation at home and abroad.

Recommendations

- It is necessary to get rid of the prejudice that tolerance is alien to the traditional values which represents the Western liberal idea. This is an effective tool for the prevention of conflicts in society.
- It is necessary to promote rapprochement and lively communication between regional, ethnic and religious groups.
- As technical measures to achieve results, it is possible to apply elements of positive discrimination, include social elevators for representatives of ethnic and religious minorities, provide quotas and representations in government institutions.
- Create a regular platform for dialogue on a horizontal level.
- The state should position itself as an equal partner who supports the initiatives and contributions of citizens of the republic - representatives of ethnic and religious minorities in the development of the country.

This publication was produced under IWPR project «Forging links and raising voices to combat radicalization in Central Asia».

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