

«Today, a certain number of local experts believe that banning Tablighi Jamaat in the country will be extremely unwise. Since for Kyrgyzstan it represents no threat, but, on the contrary, ideologically opposes the Wahhabi and Salafi movements», Roza Duisheeva, a PhD in Political sciences, and participant of the School of Analytics CABAR.asia, writes in her article.

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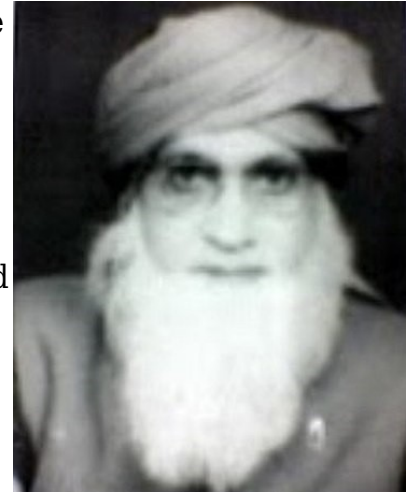
Brief review of the article:

- On the territory of Kyrgyzstan, the first missionaries of Tablighi Jamaat appeared in the early 1990s;
 - At first glance, proceeding from the ideological components of Tablighi Jamaat's activity, it looks very apolitical;
 - In all the CSTO countries, as well as those countries that have joined the SCO Convention on Countering Extremism, Tablighi Jamaat movement was outlawed, except in Kyrgyzstan;
 - According to experts from Kyrgyzstan, Tablighi Jamaat, as a distributor of the Hanafi *madhhab* (school of thought), today is almost the only powerful counterweight to the radical Salafi currents.
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In connection with fast growth of the population's religiosity within republic, the activity of religious movement "Tablighi Jamaat" is of a great interest among experts and scientific researchers. This article analyzes the main views and assessments of international and domestic experts, religious scholars and researchers regarding the activities of this movement.

History

“Tablighi Jamaat” movement [1] was established in the 20s of the last century in India. The founder is known as Muhammad Ilyas Kandehlevi. Since then, Tablighi Jamaat has spread throughout the world and is now present in almost all countries. The main centers of the movement are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. To date, representatives of Tablighi Jamaat work in 150 countries, and their offices are located in 120 states. Tablighi Jamaat turned into an international movement, which over time has actively engaged in spreading Islam and addressing Muslims around the world regardless of their social and economic status, reviving religion among the people who traditionally practice Islam. By the end of 1960s, its representatives were already operating in most countries of Western Europe, North America, Asia, some Arab and North African countries - mainly where the South Asian diaspora had settled. By 1990, the branches of Tablighi Jamaat had already existed in 90 states [2].



Muhammad Ilyas Kandehlevi. Photo: cevaplar.org

However, in the territory of Kyrgyzstan, the first people who did *dawah* (issuing summons), i.e. the missionaries of Tablighi Jamaat appeared in the early 90s of the 20th century [3] and began to conduct propaganda activities. Currently, Kyrgyzstan has become one of the major centers of Tablighi Jamaat. The number of people who follow this movement is increasing every year, the bulk of which is mainly occupied by young people. It is also observed that students, teachers and entrepreneurs are joining the movement.

According to the results of a sociological study: “The Impact of Religious Factors on the Socio-Political Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic”, conducted on the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic’s request, today the most active community is Tablighi Jamaat (64.5% (759) out of 1,200 respondents) [4]. It should be noted that no other mass Muslim movements in Kyrgyzstan can compare the scope of its activity with Tablighi Jamaat.

To date, the activities of this organization are periodically discussed in the society of Kyrgyzstan, in particular, within the walls of Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic, as well in expert and religious circles. However, public opinion and evaluation of Tablighi Jamaat’s activities are highly ambiguous.

Is Tablighi Jamaat apolitical?

The active growth of religiousness among the population of the country to some extent began contributing to the formation of religion politicization elements, which under certain conditions could contribute to increase the radicalization and extremism risks. Some politicization elements have appeared in the country, which are manifested in the attempts of interfering some religious leaders and organizations into political processes. In this

regard, the question of apolitical nature of the Tablighi Jamaat movement, occupies a central place in the study of its activities.



Kyrgyzstan is currently the only country in Central Asia where the movement is not considered as extremist. Photo: gov.kg

At first glance, proceeding from the ideological components of Tablighi Jamaat's activity, it looks very apolitical. Such a statement is common both among ordinary Muslims and within the expert community. Famous French specialist in Islamic studies, Professor Oliver Roy considers "Tablighi Jamaat" as completely apolitical and law-abiding organization [5]. Experts of the State Commission for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic (SCRA) also note that "Tablighi Jamaat" is an apolitical religious movement. The positive feature of this movement is that their activity is not of a radical or extremist nature, but is pacifist (peaceful) [6].

Religious security expert Emil Nasritdinov notes that in Kyrgyzstan the principle of non-interference in politics is an important part of the *dawah* practice. Given that the society as a whole is much politicized, in this regard, the leaders of the Tablighi Jamaat movement place special emphasis on this principle. Each Jamaat (muslim community) receives at least an hour-long instruction, including a reminder of non-interference in politics, before going to *dawah* (sermon). [7] However, as noted by Russian political analyst and independent researcher E. Egorov, in the long run, the influence of this movement on the religio-political situation should not be underestimated. It is the democratic system of governance and simple language of sermons that attract all segments of the population to this organization. The movement defiantly refuses to participate in politics, but there are reasons to believe that the strategic goals of its activities are connected precisely with politics and power [8]. There is an opinion that the movement does not call for a change in the social system or creating caliphate. However, the expert who investigated the activities of this organization, K. Murzakhaliyov, notes that the organization is imposing their demands, claiming that the

decisions made on the mashfar (meeting) are distributed to supporters and defenders of Tablighi Jamaat around the world, where they are locally customized by the leaders of *dahwachi* (proselytizers) under our laws and mentality.

Meanwhile, the SCRA notes that in relation to the problematic issues of their activities, active work is underway in order to regulate and streamline the *dawah* process.

Certainly, the work on regulating the religious sphere of society, which began with the adoption of the Concept of state policy in the religious sphere and the plan of measures for its implementation, contributed to active preventive measures on the process of politicalizing religion. Measures are being developed and implemented for long-term processes aimed at increasing secular and religious knowledge of the population, monitoring and analyzing the situation, preparing a new generation of clergy who are aware of how important it is to ensure religious freedom within a secular state and the need to prevent the spread of radicalism for the stable development of society and the state.



Related material: [What does the female wing of Tablighi Jamaat do in Kyrgyzstan?](#)

However, these processes require special attention from the state, civil society and the clergy. Only constant teamwork is able to direct and stabilize the situation for a long term.

To ban or to control?

Perhaps the question of Tablighi Jamaat would not be so acute if nowadays Kyrgyzstan was not the only country in Central Asia where this movement is not yet considered extremist and forbidden. There is a recommendation by the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to ban Tablighi Jamaat, adopted by Russia and other Central Asian states, except Kyrgyzstan. Until now, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic and the State Commission for Religious Affairs hold the view that they have no reason to consider Tablighi Jamaat as an extremist organization.

However, deputy of the parliament, Iskhak Masaliyev raises the issue of non-compliance on the part of Kyrgyzstan with the unified principles of the SCO Convention on countering extremism regarding Tablighi Jamaat. In his judgment, according to SCO convention, Kyrgyzstan should recognize Tablighi Jamaat as illegal. The SCO Convention states that all member states pursue unified principles. Consequently, in some countries that have joined this convention, Tablighi Jamaat was outlawed. Accordingly, our republic should make it outlaw and recognize it as illegal as well [10].



*Today, it is “dawah makers (missionaries)” that are the main barrier stopping the spread of ideas and practices of Salafism in Kyrgyzstan.
Photo: Temir Sydykbekov / RFE / RL.*

In 2009, the official government of Kyrgyzstan tried to declare Tablighi Jamaat an extremist organization. For example, on February 3rd, 2009, Pervomaysky District Court of Bishkek received a statement from the General Prosecutor’s Office of Kyrgyzstan on recognizing the movement as extremist. However, it was withdrawn for a deeper study of its activities. A methodological manual had brought to a close such skepticism from the state bodies: “State policy in the sphere of religion and the main religious movements in Kyrgyzstan” [11] issued in 2015 by the State Commission for Religious Affairs. This manual clearly states that the movement does not pose a threat to the country’s security [12].

Asylbek Kozhobekov, deputy chairman of the State Committee for National Security of the Kyrgyz Republic, stated that the organization is under the control of special services and does not pose any threat [13]. It should be noted that an alternative method is carried out in the United States and European countries, where the special services are closely watching after this organization.

Today, a certain number of local experts believe that the ban on Tablighi Jamaat in the country will be extremely unwise. Since for Kyrgyzstan it represents no threat, but, on the contrary, ideologically opposes the Wahhabi and Salafist movements, as well as Hizb ut-Tahrir (a banned organization in Kyrgyzstan)

Emil Nasritdinov notes that today “*dawachis (proselytizers)*” are the main barrier stopping the spread of Salafi ideas and practices in Kyrgyzstan. In most cases, this effect works at the

level of prevention: since the “*dawachis (proselytizers)*” are more open and accessible to the public [14].

According to Kadyr Malikov, banning Tablighi Jamaat is “suicide” for the government of Kyrgyzstan, because this movement is today almost the only powerful counterbalance to radical Salafi currents, and that having banned *dawah*, the government will remain “alone with the wolves”. Today, the government cannot afford it, since own religious base is practically absent in the country [15].

At the present stage, the state bodies of Kyrgyzstan are also sure that they are unable to cope with the movement if in case of a ban it goes underground. It is much more difficult to control the activities of underground organizations, since it requires the presence of professional law enforcement agencies and a certain will of the country’s leadership. In addition, in the absence of state ideology, as well as in conditions of economic instability, the weakness of the state system as a whole, the authorities hope that *Tablighi Jamaat* movement, as a distributor of the Hanafi madhhab calling for patience, will be able to distract people from dissatisfaction with authorities, social problems, and refer its attention to the religious mainstream. Such tactics in the short term can be successful. However, in the long term, it may be the cause of destabilization of the society. Since the activity of Tablighi Jamaat is aimed at the Islamization of the broad masses of the population. In this regard, state authorities should impose restrictions and intensify control over the activities of *dawah* and its missionaries. It is also necessary to strengthen interaction between the state and civil society to regulate the religious situation in the process of implementing the Concept of state policy in the religious sphere for 2014-2020.

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[1] “Tabligh” literally means “to transmit”, i.e. pass on the message of Islam to people. Representatives of the Tablighi Jamaat Movement justify its existence through many references to the Holy Quran.

[2] Komissina I.N. “Tablighi Jamaat” movement: theory and practice of radicalism. Problems of national strategy, number 1 (6). 2011. P. 46.

[3] Kozukulov, T.A., Khamdamova, D.Kh. A brief analysis of Tablighi Jamaat’s influence on the social and political life of Kyrgyzstan. Problems of modern science and education. 2016

<https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/kratkiy-analiz-vliyaniya-deyatelnosti-tabligi-dzhamaat-na-obschestvenno-politicheskuyu-zhizn-kyrgyzstana>

[4] Elebaeva AB, Esenamanova N.S. The influence of religious factors on the socio-political situation in the Kyrgyz Republic. Sociological research. SCRA. Bishkek, 2016. p. 173.

[5] Le Monde Diplomatique. 2002. May 15 - <https://mondediplo.com/2002/05/02islam>

[6] Chotaev Z.D, Tursunbekov Z.A, Zhumakunov E.M, Smanova N.T., Gaybbaeva A.T. State policy in the religious sphere and the main religious movements in Kyrgyzstan. Textbook. Bishkek, SCRA, 2015. p. 35.

[7] E. Nasritdinov, N. Esenamanova. “Religious Security in the Kyrgyz Republic”. Bishkek, 2014. p. 48.

[8] Yegorov E.N. “Tablighi Jamaat”: ideology and specificity of their activity. Islamic studies. 2016. T.7. Number 3. C.5.

- [9] Tablighi Jamaat. What kind of religious organization? <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/kyrgyzstan-religion-islam/29501707.html>
- [10] Masaliyev: In accordance with the SCO convention, Kyrgyzstan has to recognize Tablighi Jamaat as outlawed. September 12, 2018. <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29486113.html>
- [11] Chotaev Z.D., Tursunbekov Z.A., Zhumakunov E.M., Smanova N.T., Gaybbaeva A.T. State policy in the religious sphere and the main religious movements in Kyrgyzstan. Textbook. Bishkek, SCRA, 2015. p. 90.
- [12] Ibid. S. 36.
- [13] State Committee for National Security: The Tablighi Jamaat does not yet pose a threat. September 12, 2018. <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/29485859.html>
- [14] E. Nasritdinov, N. Esenamanova. "Religious Security in the Kyrgyz Republic". Bishkek, 2014. P. 49.
- [15] Ibid. P. 44-45.



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