

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION SYSTEM AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS OF KYRGYZSTAN

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Abstract

Kyrgyzstan gained its independence in 1991. The Constitution adopted in 1992 became a basis for the restructuring process in the religious sphere. According to the relevant articles of the Constitution, the issues relating to the place and purpose of formal and non-formal religious education in general education, the formation of religious groups, their relations with the state, etc., have been discussed. The subject of this article is the changes and transformations in religious education in schools after independence. In this context, first of all, information about the general education system and religious education of Kyrgyzstan will be given. Then, the legal and historical basis of religious education at schools since 1991, its status in the school system, its aims, teaching model, teachers, regional variations, etc., will be reviewed and evaluated. In the conclusion part, current developments and challenges will be discussed. The aim of the article is to evaluate whether religious education in the school system in Kyrgyzstan is structured on national and universal principles and to open the issue for discussion. The study is important in terms of drawing a future perspective on how religious education should be at the universal level in the school system and contributing to comparative religious education.

Keywords: *Kyrgyzstan, Religious Education, Religious Culture, Voluntarily Religious Course, Compulsory Religious Education*

1. Introduction

Kyrgyzstan is one of the Central Asian Republics where the democratization efforts that started in the Soviet Union with the Gorbachev's Glastnost-Perestroika process are most evident. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the "Kyrgyz Soviet Socialist Republic" vanished into history. Kyrgyzstan declared its sovereignty on 15 December 1990 and its independence on 31 August 1991.¹

After the declaration of independence, regulations in many fields, such as politics, economy, culture, and education, began to be made in Kyrgyzstan. The regulations on the religion-state relationship brought about new structures in the field of religion and religious education in the country gave a new status to the religion-state relations which enabled the revival of religious life and religious education.

The first regulation regarding religion-state relations was the adoption of Law "Concerning the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Establishments" ("O svobode veroispovedaniya i religioznh organizatsiyah", law number 657-XII) in 1991, and the "Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic" on May, 5 1993. The Law was adopted in 1991. The Constitution of 1993 created a free environment in the field of religion in the country with its liberal approach in religion-state relations. In both texts, citizens were given rights to practice their religion, establish religious institutions, get religious education, and even to go abroad for this purpose if necessary.²

The basis of the Constitution of Kyrgyzstan are the basic democratic principles such as giving importance to and protecting human rights and freedoms; freedom of thought and equality before the law in terms of language, religion, race and gender and equal rights for all citizens. In paragraph 1 of Article 1 of the Constitution, it is said that: "The Kyrgyz Republic is a sovereign, democratic, legal, secular, unitary, social state"; in paragraph 2 of Article 16, "Everyone in the Kyrgyz Republic has the freedom to believe in religion and to practice his/her religious customs and traditions."³

While the basic principles related to religion-state relations were included in the Constitution, the principles and practices related to religious education and training as a part of this relationship were included in the law "Concerning the Freedom of Conscience and Religious Establishments" adopted in 1991, and the laws and decrees related to religion in the following years. For example, Article 6 of

the 1991 Law included separating schools from religious institutions and issues related to religious education.⁴

One of the texts on religious education is "The Defense Council's New Religion Concept in 2014." The bloody events that took place on April 7, 2010, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflicts in Southern Kyrgyzstan, the increase in the activities of extremist and destructive religious organizations in the country, the emergence and spread of radical and extremist ideologies that threaten the constitutional order, personal, public and state security, the harsh attitudes and behaviors of religious groups towards each other, and similar events caused the emergence of such a concept.⁵

The 2014 Religion Concept defined the methodological and conceptual foundations for the development of the religious sphere, the state's approach to religious issues, the main aspects of the state to reshape its religious policies, and the strategic tasks of the Kyrgyz society in the legal, cultural, religious and social areas.⁶

As for religious education in Kyrgyzstan, the question of whether to give or not to give religious education in formal education institutions has been constantly discussed since the early days of independence. To this day, discussions arise from the application of the concept of "secularism" in the country. Those who oppose religious education in formal education institutions argue that it is not possible to provide religious education in state institutions due to the secular nature of the country. Those who advocate that religious education should be given in state institutions interpret secularism as the state's fair attitude towards all religious groups in the country. For this reason, the state is expected to provide its citizens with religious education correctly.⁷

Kyrgyzstan's legal regulations regarding religion-state relations in general and religious education in particular since 1991 are summarized above. The following questions should be asked and answered regarding these regulations;

What kind of a structure did these regulations create in the field of religious education and training? What is the place of religious courses at school in this structuring?

In the article, within the framework of the above questions, the general structure of religious education, which emerged as a result of the legal regulations made since 1991, and the place and importance of religious education at school within this structure are examined. In this context, in the article, firstly, information about the religious education of Kyrgyzstan are given, then the legal and historical basis of religious education at school, its historical

development, its place and status in the school system, its aims, teaching model, teachers, regional variations etc. are analyzed and evaluated. In the conclusion part, current developments and challenges are examined.

2. Purpose of the Research

The main purpose of the article is to describe the religious education system, which was formed as a result of the constitutional regulations regarding religion-state relations in Kyrgyzstan, the place of religious education in the general education system, and the place of school religious education at both in the general education and religious education systems. Within the framework of this general purpose, the aim is to examine the development and problems of religious education at public schools in particular. In this context, it intends to create a projection for the future of religious education at school to evaluate whether religious education in the school system in Kyrgyzstan is structured on national and universal principles and to open the issue for discussion.

3. Literature Review

After the declaration of independence of Kyrgyzstan, academic studies were carried out almost in every field. Religion-state relations were among the most researched areas due to the liberal approach of the Kyrgyz State on this issue.

Some studies on the research subject are thesis, articles and communiqués that concern religious institutions within the framework of religion-state relations, and some directly concern formal and non-formal religious education institutions, curricula and textbooks.

Myrzabaev, in his “Religion-State Relations in Kyrgyzstan”⁸ doctoral thesis, examined the relationship between religion and the state after independence. The religious education system in Kyrgyzstan, in general, was analyzed in Yusubov's doctoral thesis “Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan,”⁹ Abdrahmanov's article “Religious Situation and Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan,”¹⁰ Cebeci's Research Project on “Religious Situation and Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan: Situation Analysis and Suggestions,”¹¹ Aydar's book “Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan and Arashan Theology Faculty and Religiosization in Kyrgyzstan,”¹² Murzaraimov's book chapter “Religious institutions, religious education and religious communities in Kyrgyzstan,”¹³ Büyükalaca's master's thesis “Religious Education in Kyrgyzstan and Religious Office of Kyrgyzstan Muslims,”¹⁴ Aktaş's article “Recent developments in religious education in Kyrgyzstan,”¹⁵ and

Kurbanova's article "Islamic Education in Kyrgyzstan." These studies contain information about the historical background of religious education in Kyrgyzstan and discuss developments in formal and non-formal religious education in the country after independence.¹⁶

In the master's thesis of Akramova "The Place of Religious Education in General Education and the Situation in Kyrgyzstan,"¹⁷ the examination of Religious Education as a science and the determination and evaluation of religious education in Kyrgyzstan were made. In the article of Colaliyeva "The Bases of Religious Education: The Case of Kyrgyzstan,"¹⁸ the anthropological, social, cultural, philosophical, and legal bases of religious education in Kyrgyzstan were discussed.

The theme of religious education at public schools of Kyrgyzstan after independence was analysed in Akramova's "The Level of Realization of the Objectives Related to Religious Education in the 'Adep Sabagi' Course in Secondary Schools in Kyrgyzstan (The Example of Osh),"¹⁹ Akimcan Kyzy's "Religious Expression in Post-Independence Kyrgyzstan Secondary School Textbooks,"²⁰ Topchubaev's "Adep Teachers' Competences: A Field Study in the Case of Osh,"²¹ Colaliyeva's "The Examination of the Course Program of 'History of Religious Culture' Taught at Kyrgyzstan's Secondary Schools: The Case of Bishkek"²² master's and doctoral studies and Colaliyeva's article "Attempts to Introduce Religion Courses in Schools of Kyrgyzstan in the Years of Independence and Latest Developments."²³

Studies on formal religious education are valuable. However, these studies make situational analysis and contain generic information about religious education and training. They do not analyze the place, importance, model and future of religious education at school within religious education system. This study is important in terms of its contribution to the field and creating a future perspective in terms of the religious education system that emerged as a result of the religion-state relationship and the place, importance, and future of the religion course in schools within this system.

On the other hand, the study is also important in drawing a future perspective on how religious education should be at the universal level in the school system and in its contribution to comparative religious education.

4. Research Method

The research is qualitative research, designed according to the survey model.²⁴ Qualitative research tries to reveal with questions

such as “how, why” and is conducted in more detail and for understanding, instead of measurable characteristics such as the amount, average, and a number of the investigated events or phenomena.²⁵

A literature review was conducted in order to describe the general religious education system in Kyrgyzstan and the place and importance of the religion course at schools within this system. Data was obtained by reviewing academic studies, laws, decrees, and regulations on the subject of the study.

In addition to descriptive and content analysis, the document analysis technique was also used to analyze the qualitative data.

5. Findings and Discussion

5.1. Religious Education System in Kyrgyzstan

In Kyrgyzstan, religion and state were separated from each other, citizens were given wide religious rights and freedoms in the field of religion, and religious institutions were given the opportunity to freely structure and operate. Thus, its aim was to carry out religious education apart from general education, so religious education had been given mostly by religious institutions. The institutions responsible for religious education are as follows.

There are two institutions in Kyrgyzstan that are responsible for supervising, conducting and creating concepts for religious education. One is the Religious Office of Kyrgyzstan Muslims (Muftiyat). The other is the State Commission of Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Religious Office of Kyrgyzstan Muslims is subordinate to the State Commission.²⁶

Formal religious education in Kyrgyzstan is carried out by institutions, which are affiliated with the Muftiyat, independent religious education institutions, established by civil foundations or by certain individuals groups and institutions within the Universities and schools affiliated with the Ministry of Education. Religious education of other beliefs and religions is carried out by their own religious institutions. Non-formal religious education, on the other hand, is carried out through religious education activities in the mosques, affiliated with the Muftiyat, and in houses and mosques of different religious groups.²⁷

Madrasahs are non-state educational institutions in Kyrgyzstan, where Islamic religious knowledge is given.²⁸ Madrasahs work according to the standards of the Muftiyat and with the certificate approval of the State Commission of Religious Affairs.

In madrasahs, books written by previous Islamic scholars are generally taught and traditional teaching methods are used.²⁹ Those madrasahs, physical conditions of which are not very good, are financed by students' parents and the public. Muftiyat set a standard in education programs in 2013, and many madrasahs have started to improve their physical facilities.³⁰ Despite of it, the education level in these institutions has not reached the desired level yet. Diplomas of religious education institutions affiliated with the Muftiyat are not recognized by the state as they continue their activities without obtaining the license of the Ministry of Education.³¹ The only state-recognized secondary religious education institution in Kyrgyzstan is the Osh Imam Hatip High School, which was opened in 2013 within the Osh Theology Faculty.³²

There are also religious education institutions opened in universities within the religious education system in Kyrgyzstan. Some of them are the faculties³³ of Theology and some of them are the faculty departments of the universities. Theology Faculties provide education at the bachelor's level and give state diplomas to graduates. The programs of the faculties of theology are the ones in which Islamic sciences, philosophy and religious sciences courses are taught.³⁴ There are also Departments of Religious Studies called "Din Taanuu" in Kyrgyz, which work as departments within some state universities. The Department of Religious Studies has been opened within the Faculties of Philosophy and History. In these departments, Islam and other religions are taught in general.³⁵

In addition to formal religious education, non-formal religious education is carried out in mosques affiliated with the Muftiyat and in houses and mosques opened by religious groups. After independence, the number of mosques has begun to increase rapidly. It is estimated that there are nearly 3000 mosques, mostly in Southern Kyrgyzstan, but there are no records of all of them.³⁶ The clergy, called "Moldo" in the mosques, lead prayers and teach the men the Qur'an and religious knowledge. It is stated that a significant part of Moldos do not have sufficient religious and pedagogical knowledge.³⁷

An important part of non-formal religious education in Kyrgyzstan is "davat and tabliq" (exhorting and preaching). The person who exhorts Muslims to be more religiously observant is called "davatchy" among the people. This religious education activity is mostly carried out by the members of "Tabligh Jamaat" (in English Society of Preachers), a formation of Pakistan origin.³⁸ At the beginning missionary activities of this group were held without any control. But then the special department has been opened within the Muftiyat for the coordination and control of the preaching activities of the davatchy.³⁹

There are many problems in the religious education system. First of all, the human model desired to be educated is not clear, in other words, religious education philosophy has not been established yet. There are many lackings in an administrative and financial structures of formal and non-formal religious education institutions. Vagueness of the quality of the curriculum, teacher shortage and inadequacy, economic problems, lack of physical opportunities, employment problems of graduates etc. are some of the other shortcomings. Although the education given by higher religious education institutions within the university structure differs according to the institutions, it has a certain standard and quality because it is licensed according to state standards.

5.2. Religious Education in the School System

Until the beginning of the 20th century, education was not among the primary duties of the state all over the world. In general, although there are some insignificant differences according to geographies over the centuries, religion was at the center of culture and education, and the education was in the nature of religious education. Education was carried out by individuals and foundations rather than by state. In general, religious education approaches were theologically centered.

As a result of urbanization, caused by industrialization, structuring of states on citizenship, etc., state began to see education among its own duties. It developed a school system to train personnel in the fields it needed. In parallel with the new state structure, changes in understanding of society and people and the school system, religious education was not included in the school system in different countries. Religious education continued in traditional institutions, or effort was made to structure religious education within the framework of the general purposes of the school by including it in the school system or by being carried out in both institutions. However, along with this development and change, the legitimacy, nature, etc., of the religion course at school brought controversy. Every country has tried to solve the problem of religion courses in schools according to different variables since its emergence. Although the issue seems to have reached a social consensus in some countries, it still maintains its vitality in other countries. However, it can be said that a certain distance has arisen in the world in terms of religion courses at school.

Especially since the second half of the 20th century, the focus of discussions on religion courses at school was the question like “Which model of the religion course should be used?” The “classical liberal model”, that was widely used at the beginning of the 20th century, a transition from a closed society to an open society, advances in the economy, developments in communication and

informatics, differences in the understanding of the state, citizenship, and democracy had led to the emergence of new approaches in religious education/teaching at school, especially in Europe.

It is obvious that in the discussions concerning the legitimacy of religious courses at public schools and the model of religious education, the following variables are actual: the mono-religious or multi-religious structure of society, the relationship between religion and secularism, the historical tradition of each country, and the purpose and nature of religious education in public schools. In this context, in this part of the article, the development of the religion courses at public schools of Kyrgyzstan during the independency period has been examined.

5.3. The Legal Basis of Religious Education at Public School

Articles related to religious education at public schools are not included in the Constitution, but regulations on this issue are included in the "Freedom of Conscience Law." Article 8 of part 6 of the Law states that "Religious disciplines may be included in the programs of state educational institutions, but they should not contradict the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic and must have a general education characteristic."⁴⁰ The inclusion of such an article in the Law shows the state's intention to protect its national history and culture, as well as the willingness of the people and intellectuals to have such a course in the general education program. Also, it can be understood that the state sees religion as a power that will unite society.⁴¹ The Kyrgyz text of the Law "Iyman Sabaktary" concept is used. It can be translated into English as "Spirituality Courses", and as "Uroki Duhovnosti" in Russian. While the word "Iyman" is used in the meaning of "religion", "belief", "conscience" and "morality" in Kyrgyz, it is possible to say that the word "duhovny" in Russian corresponds to the words "religious", "spiritual" and "moral".⁴²

5.4. Religious Courses at Public School

5.4.1. Iyman Sabagi

The first course within the general education system of Kyrgyzstan was the "Iyman Sabagi". The course had started to be taught in secondary schools with the status of "optional". Initially, the aim of the course had been to teach the Kyrgyz national moral values, religious-moral norms and social behaviour norms. Iyman Sabagi was not taught all over the country. It had been included in the curriculum of schools where the language of instruction was Kyrgyz, especially in the more conservative Southern region. School principals could decide whether to include this course to the school program or not. The content of the course consisted of themes concerning Kyrgyz

national values, cultural customs and traditions, general moral norms, ecological issues, social behaviour norms, etc. Programs with unclear content were made for the course in 1991 and 1992, but they did not become widespread. There were not branch teachers yet, so the course was taught by clergy, Class Teachers, Kyrgyz Language and Literature Teachers, History Teachers and even Aesthetics, Guidance and Philosophy Teachers. There also was no course textbook, so its purpose and content had been shaped according to the understanding of the course teacher. For example, clergymen taught mostly Islamic subjects. Class teachers focused on religious subjects together with the Kyrgyz national values, and the philosophy teachers taught philosophical ethics themes together with the Kyrgyz cultural themes.⁴³

The official program of the *Iyman Sabagi* Course was prepared by the Ministry of Education only on 05.09.2003. It was made compulsory in all official schools of the country. In 2003 *Iyman Sabagi* started to be taught at public schools as one of the compulsory courses. It was taught one hour a week. However, the different meanings attributed to the concept of 'Iyman' in the name of the course caused discussions on the course content. As a result of these discussions, "*Iyman Sabagi*" was changed to "*Adep Sabagi*", on the grounds that the word "*Iyman*" caused false interpretations and was loaded with a religious content. Despite being demanded by the public, the *Iyman* Course could not show the desired success. The failure was caused by lack of systematic program and order, lack of branch teachers, among other problems.⁴⁴

5.4.2. Adep Sabagi

Adep Sabagi, as a continuation of *Iyman Sabagi*, had been a compulsory school subject in 1-11 grades since 2004. It was taught one hour a week. Kyrgyz Education Academy reviewed *Iyman Sabagi*'s program and prepared the curriculum for *Adep Sabagi*.

The content of this course consisted of national education moral principles, customs, moral values, and all human values and virtues that have been molded by the Kyrgyz people for centuries. The *Adep Sabagi* course aimed to strengthen the moral and spiritual values of the society, to educate students in accordance with the principles of national ideology, and to teach them virtue, basic moral, spiritual, human and cultural values. The aim of the course was to educate students as individuals who would adapt to new realities and social ideals, assimilate national culture, and would have good moral behaviors. The content of the course included themes on Kyrgyz culture, customs and traditions, morals, cultural and human values and similar themes.⁴⁵

The Adep Sabagi curriculum of 1-11 grades consisted of six units/modules. Subjects related to religion were included in these units not directly, but as an element of culture.⁴⁶

Textbooks of the Adep Sabagi curriculum were generally written by ethnopedagogues, historians, and linguists. In accordance with the program, the following themes were examined in the textbooks: Patriotism; Mountains, tombs, caravanserais; which are considered sacred places in Kyrgyzstan, Beautiful natural places, Importance of Kyrgyz names, History of the Kyrgyz, Sensitivity to corruption and crime, Morality and etiquette, Avoidance of waste, Honesty, Avoidance of arrogance and envy, Hard work. In the books, religion was referred to as one of the elements of Kyrgyz culture.⁴⁷ Therefore, Adep Sabagi was a general culture course in which religious elements were considered as a cultural element.

Due to the scarcity of branch teachers, Adep Sabagi was taught by Kyrgyz Language and Literature teachers. Guidance, History and Classroom teachers also taught this course.⁴⁸

Since 2004, the Adep course had been a compulsory subject in Kyrgyz schools and in Uzbek schools in the South. Since 2006-2007 academic year it had been taught compulsorily in 1-4th grades in schools with Russian language of instruction. Adep Sabagi was integrated into the "Human and Society" and "Introduction to Economy" courses in the 9th, 10th and 11th grades in the 2012-2013 academic year. Till 2020-2021 academic year Adep Sabagi had been taught in 1-8 grades as a compulsory course.⁴⁹ But in 2021-2022 academic year Adep Sabagi was removed from the program for pedagogical reasons such as optimizing education and reducing course load of students.⁵⁰

5.5. New Trends in Religious Education at School

In Kyrgyzstan, since 1991, religion courses have been included in the school program at least two times. First course had an "optional" status and had been applied between 1991 and 2003, and the other had a "compulsory" status and had been applied between 2003 and 2021.

As it could be understood from the explanations above, both Iyman Sabagi and Adep Sabagi were general culture courses rather than religion courses. As they consisted of topics on the Kyrgyz national culture, customs and traditions, and national moral values. On the one hand, discussions on course status, its content, and similar issues had started with Iyman Sabagi and continued with Adep Sabagi. On the other hand, activities of religious groups that were

increasing day by day in the country were also being actively discussed.⁵¹

The next attempt to introduce a religion course was "History of Religious Culture" course. It had been foreseen to teach this course with "teaching about religion" model.⁵²

The "History of Religious Culture" course was taught to the 9th graders as a pilot application in 10 schools across the country in the 2016-2017 academic year. In 2018-2019 the pilot implementation was continued in 56 schools in the country.

The basis of the History of Religious Culture course was the principle of neutrality. The course consisted of subjects such as scientific knowledge about religious culture in general, the history and theories of religions, the concept of the secular state and the principles of secularism, freedom of religion and conscience, rather than teaching any religion. In other words, in the History of Religious Culture course, religion was taught with a scientific approach. It was stressed that since Kyrgyzstan's society had a multicultural and multi-religious structure, it should not be focused on any single religion in the teaching process.

The History of Religious Culture course program was designed for one semester, to be taught for one hour per week, with a total of sixteen hours. History teachers taught the History of Religious Culture course. The reason for this was that: the religions described in this course were taught from a historical perspective.⁵³

By emphasizing the multicultural and multi-religious nature of Kyrgyzstan in the curriculum, it was argued that it would be wrong to focus on any religion, in other words, the principle of tolerance was overemphasized. The curriculum was prepared with a non-confessional religious education approach.⁵⁴ This pilot course was not continued.

The recent attempt to introduce the religion course is the "History of Development of Religions" course. In 2022-2023 academic year, according to the Presidential Decree⁵⁵ it has been foreseen to introduce the "History of Development of Religions" course as a compulsory course at public schools all over the country. It is planned to teach this course in 7-th, 8-th, and 9-th grades. History teachers and theologians with diplomas will teach this course.

The aims of the course are expressed as follows: "Formation of students' knowledge about the history of the emergence, development and operation of world religions, their impact on society; understanding the importance of morality, faith and religion

in the life of a person and society; ability to build interfaith dialogue and moral self-improvement, spiritual self-development; positive interaction skills with representatives of different cultures, nationalities, beliefs, social groups; readiness to counter radicalization and religious conflicts.”⁵⁶

This course is the latest attempt to introduce religion course to the school’s curriculum. Thus, information about the time that would be allocated to the course and other details are not clear at the moment. However, it is clear that the state has begun to take the active role in religious matters.

6. Discussion

Kyrgyzstan declared its independence upon the disintegration of the USSR, after the period of “perestroika.” “Perestroika” was the period when the assumptions that religion was a remnant of the past and the USSR’s religious policy had begun to be questioned. In addition to transitioning to the multi-party system since 1991, the Kyrgyz Republic, unlike the Soviet Union state, stated that it was a secular state in its Constitution. Kyrgyzstan did not give any place to religion in its administration, and thus - even though it did not derive its source from the society - laid the foundation for a new religion-state relationship model. Considering religion as one of the important elements of cultural heritage and a system of values, the state has accepted international agreements on religion and has tried to adapt its legal framework accordingly.

The principle of separation of religion and state in Kyrgyzstan and the wide opportunities provided by rights and freedoms have led to a significant change in the religious structure in the society. The activities of foreign actors such as Western missionary groups, political Islamist movements and capital from Islamic countries have come to the fore. The state, which found the role of external actors in the religious structure dangerous in terms of state and social security, decided to reorganize the areas of freedom that it had given in the first years of independence. The initial excitement was replaced by anxiety and suspicion. Kyrgyzstan's regulations in religion-state affairs affected the formation of the country's religious education system.

It can be said that Kyrgyzstan gained important experience in religion-state relations and religious education practices during its 30-year independence period. It is a very short period, compared to other countries, which have achieved this result over a longer period of time. Religion and religious education is separated from the state as a civil area, and is guaranteed freedom according to the “Freedom of Conscience Law” and the Constitution.

The freedom of religion and religious education started to become a security problem in the country, so new regulations were made regarding the laws regulating religion-state relations and the institutions controlling religious education. These regulations did not reach the desired aims, so other regulations were made in 2008 and 2014, and the religious concept of 2020 was issued.

Since its independence, the place of religion and religious education in Kyrgyzstan has continued to be the subject of constant debate. These discussions can be evaluated from two perspectives. The first is that religion and religious education is an important problem area, since the country comes from the 70-year-old Soviet tradition, which rejects religious values. The second is the importance given by the Kyrgyz people to religion as an important part of the culture, despite the negative process. In fact, it is possible to evaluate these two interpretations together.

On one hand, Kyrgyzstan left civil religious education to the Muftiyat, on the other hand, it included religious education, albeit partially, within the state institutions. The initial purpose of including religious education in state institutions was to train both the person who would meet the state's need for expertise in the field of religion and the personnel who would receive higher religious education in the civil field.

The structure established by the state within the framework of the religion-state relationship in Kyrgyzstan is a well-known structure. You give religion a sphere and leave religious education entirely to civil society, and as a state, you only check whether the actions comply with the law or not. This structure, which sounds very nice at the beginning, does not work in the same way in every country and does not give the same results. First of all, both the state mind and people should assimilate this thought well and turn it into a culture and lifestyle. It can be said that Kyrgyzstan has a multicultural and multi-religious past. However, in the past Kyrgyz society had a closed society model, not an open one. The new interpretations and movements about religion in the country after independence made the possibility to become an open society more difficult. It is a result of this that the atmosphere of freedom in religion and religious education in the first period was taken under control with the regulations made later.

The religious education system created by religion-state relations in Kyrgyzstan is as follows:

Although religious education partially takes place in state institutions, it is mostly left to civil institutions. Civil religious education institutions are under the control of the Muftiyat. Although

these institutions have made some progress in religious education, there are still serious problems such as insufficient pedagogical, physical facilities, financing, etc. Studies on the subject also indicate many problems in the field of civil religious education, from lack of control to quality in education.

The main subject and problem of this study is the religious education at public schools of Kyrgyzstan. It is important to find out where does this stand in the civil religious education and general education system? What could be the reason for the state, which fully left religious education to the civilian sphere, to include religion lessons in school right after independence? It can be said that three approaches have been experienced in the subject of religion course at school in the country. The first is an optional religion course (1991-2003); the second one is compulsory religion lesson (2003-2021), and the third one is learning lesson about religion in addition to compulsory religion lesson. It can be said that the optional and compulsory religion lessons couldn't satisfy both the secular and the religious sections of society. While the secular section stated that no religion-related course could be included in any secular state institutions, the religious section emphasized that the course was not related to Islam, but rather a culture lesson. In fact, while the state included Iyman Sabagi and Adep Sabagi courses in the general education system, it aimed to raise individuals who gained the Kyrgyz national culture. Religion was included in general education as an important element of this culture. Non-governmental organizations were accepted by the state as an area, where citizens could learn and live their own interpretations of religion.

However, the situation did not develop as desired. The desired success from the course could not be achieved due to many reasons such as an inability to prepare the curriculum of the course, lack of textbooks and branch teachers. On the other hand, some religious activities in the country have turned into a security problem. Individuals with different cultures and religious interpretations have to study, work, etc. in the same institutions. So it has become obvious that people need to learn about religion in order to be tolerant towards each other. Thereupon, courses such as the History of Religious Culture and History of Religions where learning about religion can take place, started to be implemented as a pilot course in the general education system.

7. Conclusion

It is apparent that, on the one hand, Kyrgyzstan, as a secular country, wants to keep a distance from religious education by leaving it to civil institutions. But on the other hand, it can be said that it has not been able to create definite policies on how far this distance

should be. For example, while taking and applying the religious law of the Soviet period with insignificant changes, the state assumed that the Law would give the result of the Soviet period to a large extent. However, because the state could not predict that many religious groups from various parts of the world would come and operate in the country, it encountered very different results. Again, it was not foreseen that the Lyman Sabagi course, which was included in the education program in order to contribute to national unity and solidarity, benefit from national culture, and shape citizenship consciousness, could turn into a secularism debate.

It can be said that Kyrgyzstan has achieved a rich experience in religious education in a short time. If this experience is analyzed well, it will be possible to make important contributions to the religious education policies that are starting to be formed. It is obvious that religion and religious education policies developed for a certain period should be reconsidered by taking into account all changing conditions. Undoubtedly, it is normal and necessary for religious education to be discussed and critically evaluated by interested parties in a democratic society. However, it is seen that ideological positions on religion and religious education are more effective than scientific ones in this discussion. In fact, discussions on religious education are more related to the place of religion in individual, social and educational life. In other words, religious education policies of countries are not independent of the position of religion in individual and social life. In order to develop solid religious education policies in Kyrgyzstan, it may be better to hold discussions on this ground.

It is observed that there is a positive tendency in the world to include religious courses at schools compared to the past. However, the tendency to develop content of religion courses in schools that cover more than one religion and to present other religions and beliefs that are not the majority religion in their entirety, without judging them, is in the foreground. In other words, it is the prediction of a change in the exclusionary traditional understanding of religious education that advocates a religious belief. Kyrgyzstan will certainly combine its experience in religion lessons at school with the experiences of other countries and reach the most appropriate religion course model for its own historical and social reality. However, it should not be forgotten that this process is a multi-faceted process, full of interrelated problems waiting to be solved.

As a result, the religion policy determined in 1991 failed to be consistently implemented due to such factors, like moral security perception developed by the state due to external factors, economic problems, lack of strategic perspective, lack of trained personnel, state and statesman absolutism remaining from the USSR period,

gaps in the legal framework and inconsistencies in practice. This situation affected the religious education system in the country and the model in which religious courses at school would take place within this system. The place, status, and purposes of religion courses in the general education system were made within the framework of secularism discussions but not from pedagogical aspects.

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