

Civil Religion in Kazakhstan



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What is civil religion?

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden, beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community, called a Church, all those who adhere to them”

-Durkheim

Civil religion as nationalism

“The religious symbols through which, if Durkheim is to be believed, it was worshipped, cease to be serviceable. So let culture be worshipped directly in its own name. That is nationalism”

-Gellner

Civil Religion in Kazakhstan

- Attempts to build a single national identity through promotion of a Kazakhstani identity
- Explicitly secular state, no state religion
- Coat of arms, anthem, flag are devoid of religious symbols
- Among new national holidays: Day of Astana, Day of the First President, Day of the Unity of the People
- Secular state administers traditional religions in a strict fashion, monitoring activities of fundamentals

Examples of new symbols of the nation

“The flag ritually transformed is the god of society renewed”
-Marvin and Ingle



Opposition

- Opposition from the main ethnic groups (Kazakhs and Russians)
- Cleavages along the lines of language and religion (Ethnic russians do not learn Kazakh, Kazakhs are muslim and Russians are Christian)
- Very strict divisions with little overlap
- Ethnic Russians see their identity being tied to the population in Russian Federation
- Ethnic Kazakhs are hostile towards Kazakhstani identity as they see it to sth similar to Soviet identity (which stripped them of their Kazakh identity in the past)

Conclusion

- State is attempting to get rid of cleavages, but it seems that it is failing
- Ethno-religious identities in Kazakhstan is as strong as ever
- Civil religion is competing with traditional religious identities of the people

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Thank you!