

Conceptual and Legal Foundations of State Policy in the Religious Sphere in the Republic of Uzbekistan

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Under the conditions of increasing global polarization, religious radicalism, and the growing number of ideological challenges, the development of a balanced state policy in the religious sphere becomes especially relevant. In this context, the Republic of Uzbekistan offers a unique experience in the institutionalization of the principles of freedom of conscience and secularism, based on constitutional guarantees, legal regulation, and humanistic values. The present paper examines the provisions of the Concept of State Policy in the Religious Sphere, which reflect both the theoretical and legal foundations as well as the historical and institutional context of the formation of the corresponding policy course.

The Concept contains clear definitions of key terms that constitute the normative and ideological foundation of state policy. In particular, freedom of conscience is defined as the constitutional right of every citizen to profess any religion or not to profess any religion at all. This formulation corresponds to international legal standards in the field of human rights and emphasizes the individual character of religious identity¹.

Secularism is presented as a system of views and norms that presupposes freedom of thought, freedom of conscience, and morality based on humanistic values and public interests. In the Uzbek context, secularism is not reduced to the negation of religion, but rather serves as the basis for guaranteeing pluralism and legal equality.

A secular state, as characterized in the Concept, is a political and legal structure that ensures the separation of religion from power, state neutrality with respect to religious doctrines, and governance based on the Constitution and laws rather than on religious prescriptions.

Particular attention is given to the definition of secular values – as a set of norms and principles that ensure public harmony, religious tolerance, and the rule of law. This definition serves as the ideological foundation for the state ideology aimed at strengthening interfaith and interethnic peace.

The second chapter of the Concept outlines the historical trajectory of the formation of Uzbekistan's religious policy. After gaining independence, the country faced the task

¹ <https://lex.uz/docs/7404926>

of developing a legal mechanism for regulating religious relations, which became especially urgent in the context of threats of religious extremism in the Central Asian region.

Amid the rise of radical and terrorist groups in the 1990s that promoted the idea of establishing a clerical state, Uzbekistan adopted the Law “On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations” (1998)². This legal act became a key instrument for protecting both individual freedom of conscience and the principles of secularism, establishing a legal framework to counteract the threats of radicalization.

The Concept emphasizes that in the 2000s, despite the growth of international terrorism, the government continued to implement a consistent policy aimed at maintaining stability and safeguarding religious freedoms. This enabled the preservation of an atmosphere of interconfessional peace, which is of particular importance for a multiethnic and multiconfessional society³.

The third chapter of the Concept formulates the goal and main objectives of state policy in the religious sphere. The central goal is declared as the creation of equal conditions for the realization of the right to freedom of conscience, the strengthening of interreligious dialogue, and the promotion of religious tolerance.

Among the priority objectives are⁴:

- ensuring legal equality of all citizens regardless of religion and beliefs;
- strengthening the unity of a multinational and multiconfessional society;
- preventing discrimination on religious grounds;
- creating conditions for equal participation of citizens in public life;
- protecting individuals from the imposition of religious views;
- maintaining state neutrality in religious matters;
- supporting interreligious harmony;
- combating radicalization and extremism.

Thus, state policy is based on a balance between the protection of individual rights and the interests of public security.

The Concept places particular emphasis on adherence to the principle of the rule of law. All actions of state bodies in the religious sphere must comply with the Constitution and legislation. This eliminates arbitrariness or a selective approach to the regulation of religious matters.

² <https://www.lex.uz/acts/65089>

³ <https://lex.uz/docs/19015?ONDATE=20.01.2001%2000>

⁴ <https://lex.uz/docs/7404926>

In addition, the principle of the separation of religion from the state is set out in the form of specific norms: state bodies do not interfere in the affairs of religious organizations, do not assign them managerial functions, and do not engage in religious activities themselves. Such institutional autonomy contributes to strengthening trust between the state and religious associations.

The state assumes the responsibility to foster an atmosphere of mutual respect between believers and non-believers, promotes interreligious tolerance, and excludes any form of incitement to hatred.

The Concept presented demonstrates a comprehensive and balanced approach to issues of religion in a modern secular state. Uzbekistan, maintaining its commitment to the principles of freedom of conscience and secularism, seeks to ensure sustainable development, social stability, and cultural diversity. The document not only articulates ideological guidelines but also proposes concrete mechanisms to counter modern challenges – from extremism to interconfessional tension.

Thus, the Uzbek model of state policy in the religious sphere may attract the attention of the international academic community as an example of the successful institutionalization of secularism within a pluralistic society.

Bibliography:

1. <https://lex.uz/docs/7404926>
2. <https://www.lex.uz/acts/65089>
3. <https://lex.uz/docs/19015?ONDATE=20.01.2001%2000>