

General Characteristics of Islamic Education in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract

This article looks at certain major characteristics of Islamic education in contemporary Russia. It covers such issues as the status of Islamic educational institutions within the Russian legal system, the forms they take and the problems they face in the system, as well as the nature of reforms initiated, with government backing, by the leaders of the Russian Muslim community and the results achieved. The author argues that the development of Islamic education in contemporary Russia has not been without its problems, but has nonetheless achieved significant results, as reflected in both the number and variety of institutions involved. The reforms aim to convert quantity into quality and raise the standard of teaching in Russian educational institutions to match that of international centers of excellence in Islamic sciences.

Key words: Islamic education, Russia, legal system, problems, reform.

Introduction

The topic of Islam in Russia is not completely unfamiliar to Western readers. In contrast to the conditions under which Muslim communities in other Eastern European countries live, the realities of Islam's existence in Russia have been relatively well-reflected in works by Western scholars, with nearly two dozen books published on the theme in the West over the past twenty years. A review of the issues covered reveals the narrow focus of most of these books, however, viz. the Chechen crisis and the spread of radical Islam in Russia. Other aspects

of Muslim life receive far less coverage, if any. One such topic is Islamic education in contemporary Russia, a sphere completely ignored by Western scholars, for some reason. This is particularly noteworthy, given the attention paid to this topic with regard to European Muslim communities. Educational reform is emerging as a top priority for Muslim intellectuals. The processes taking shape in Islamic education in Russia, which has the largest Muslim population in Europe, should therefore be of interest to Western readers. This work aims to fill this gap.

The contemporary system of Islamic education in Russia has been taking shape over the past three decades. The process began in the late 1980s, with liberalization of the Soviet political regime, when the first mosques opened and began teaching courses on the fundamentals of Islam and Arabic. After the Soviet Union fell, the process of dissemination gained in strength, with courses for Muslims held in all regions with dominant Muslim population, primarily the Middle Volga and the Northern Caucasus. Networks of Muslim educational institutions were developed, with formal educational institutions established at various levels, from elementary schools (*mektebs*) through *madrasas* to universities.

Islamic education in modern Russia has, practically speaking, had to be recreated from scratch. It was almost destroyed and the continuity of the transmission of Islamic knowledge from generation to generation within traditional institutions broken during the Soviet period. It did survive to some extent in the republics of the Northern Caucasus (in informal *mektebs* and *madrasas*). During the years of militant atheism, it became considerably degraded. The revival developed in two main directions. The first was the creation of appropriate infrastructure – mosques, *madrasas*, and, more recently, Islamic universities. New buildings have been built, while nationalized religious buildings have been returned to Muslims and other premises leased. The second has been the education and training of teaching staff for the *madrasas* and universities to ensure a satisfactory standard of transfer of Islamic knowledge. During the 1990s, teachers pursued further Islamic education abroad, particularly in Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey, and Morocco. In the next phase, teachers could be trained in the new Russian *madrasas*, where the first generation of graduates taught.

Some attention is required to the context in which Islamic education in Russia has developed. Muslims are a minority, numbering, depending on the estimate, from 15 to 20 million people, or 10-15 per cent of the total population. Most Russian Muslims live in the Volga-Urals region, Western Siberia, and the Northern Caucasus. Other parts of Russia, including megacities like Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod and Saint Petersburg, also have significant Muslim populations. Russia's Muslims belong to more than forty ethnic groups, including the Volga Tatars, the Siberian Tatars, Chechens, Ingushs, Bashqorts, Dargins, Balkars, Avars, Karachays, Circassians, Kabardins, and many others. They are now also

many labor migrants from the newly independent Central Asian republics – mainly from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.¹

Regions of Russia	Muslim population (millions)	% of the total population of the region
Bashkortostan	2.2	54%
Dagestan	2.1	82%
Tatarstan	2.0	54%
Moscow	2.0	20%
Chechnya	1.0	95%
Kabardino-Balkaria	0.6	68%
Ingushetia	0.5	98%
Karachayevo-Cherkessiya	0.2	51%
Northern Ossetia	0.1	20%
Adygea	0.1	26%

Table 1. Major concentrations of Muslim populations by region in Russia (Source: Russian census 2002)

Muslim minority status means Russian realities are comparable to the situation in several EU countries that are home to large Muslim communities and centers of Islamic learning. In the EU, as in Russia, finding ways for the secular state and religious minorities to interact is one of the most pressing issues. The situation in Russia differs in one key regard, however. Russian Muslims are indigenous citizens with a long history of residence in the given territories and a long tradition of Islamic education. Islam is one of the traditional religions of Russia, as top officials have repeatedly stressed in speeches. This creates a totally different context, whereby many Muslims with a strong Russian identity insist on their right to state assistance in solving major problems for Muslim communities in the country. Islamic education is one area where state and Muslim organizations' interests share considerable common ground. The reform of Islamic education, initiated by the centralized Muslim spiritual administrations and financially and organizationally supported by the state, forms the new reality within which Russian Islamic educational institutions function.

The topic of Islamic education is an urgent priority for the country's Muslim community. Numerous conferences and seminars, hundreds of scientific and jour-

¹ Elmira Akhmetova, *Islam in Russia: historical facts and modern developments* (Kuala Lumpur: IAIS Malaysia monograph series, 2013), pp. 47-48.

nalistic materials, and many interviews have been devoted to discussing it. A wide range of publicly available sources has therefore been used to write this paper, including: licenses to conduct educational activities, certificates of registration and accreditation for educational institutions, the curricula of the *madrasas* and Islamic universities, their reports on research, official statistics on the number of educational institutions, etc. Another important source has been interviews with leaders of Russian Islamic educational institutions and other representatives of the Ummah. Many of these interviews are from the media, while others were conducted by the author. The interviews with the rectors of the Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan, Rafi Mukhametshin, and of the Moscow Islamic Institute, Damir Khairtdinov, were especially informative. They shed light on many questions as to how their institutions function and the problems they face and their priorities in development. Another source was published academic research into the problem of education, viz. articles and monographs by Russian researchers analyzing the history and modern development of Islamic education in the country. These researchers included Leyla Almazova, Ahmet Yarlykapov, Vladimir Bobrovnikov, Aleksei Starostin, Makhach Musaev, Amir Navruzov, Rinat Pateev and others. Information posted on the websites of Islamic educational institutions about their creation and history, teaching and research areas, students and teachers, and ongoing activities has also been useful, as were journalistic materials on the topic, particularly those by writers who belong to the Muslim communities in Russia, whether as employees of the Muslim spiritual administrations, Islamic educational institutions, media organizations, etc.

Work on these sources revealed certain problematic issues that came up repeatedly. The first is the sheer volume of information, given the size of the country and the large number of Islamic schools. It was not possible to do all of it justice in the present work. The study focuses accordingly on key regions with dense Muslim populations – Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, Moscow and the Northern Caucasus (mainly Dagestan and Chechnya). Information on the state of Islamic education in each region has been grouped into blocks: A brief history of the development of Islamic education in the region, followed by consideration of the current situation, including analysis of foreign influence on Islamic education and the establishment and operations of elementary schools, *madrasas* and Islamic universities. A separate paragraph highlights the issue of reforming Islamic education within the framework of the Federal program under preparation by specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam.

A second difficult is the unequal coverage of Islamic educational development in different regions of the country. The processes in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Moscow have been comprehensively covered, through both academic and journalistic material, interviews with the heads of Islamic schools, and information from institutional websites. By contrast, Islamic education in the Northern Caucasus is only modestly reflected in academic and journalistic materials. Moreover, Islamic schools in the region seem to present only basic information on their websites. Many have no websites at all.

Third, Islamic education in the country has been developing quite dynamically, with new developments and processes taking place continuously. In some regions of Russia, the system of Islamic education has been being optimized, which in practice means reducing the number of educational institutions and associations and renaming them. There is also a developmental process of discussing standards in Islamic education at various levels. All of the above has made information processing more difficult and imposed an additional burden of re-checking and refining the information.

Overall, this paper is intended primarily for readers unfamiliar with the realities of Islamic education in Russia. It is designed to offer a good general overview of developments in this area over the past two decades and to present the relevant institutions, characteristics and trends in the process in different regions of the country. The paper focuses on formal Islamic education in Russia – *mektebs*, *madrasas* and Islamic institutes and universities, whose shared goal is to raise the overall level of knowledge among Muslims and to train a professional clergy. The author has also tried to point out the milestones in the ongoing discussion on Islamic education inside Russian society and to present the range of opinions held by officials, the representatives of the Muslim spiritual administrations, Islamic educational institutions, and scholars and journalists, rather than just her own critical voice.

General characteristics of Islamic education in the Russian Federation

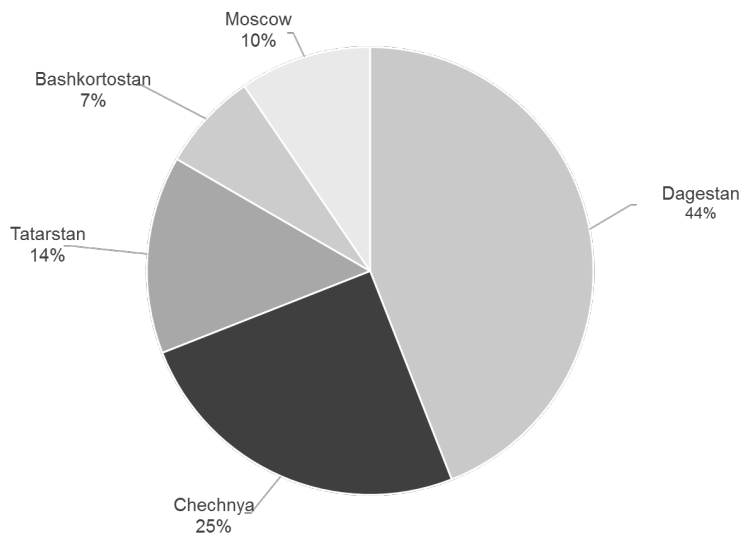
Islamic educational institutions in the Russian legal system

According to the Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation, there were 5206 Muslim religious organizations, including 80 educational institutions, registered in the country on January 1, 2016.²

They included 20 institutions of higher Islamic education, comprising both institutes and universities. The remainder made up the system of professional Islamic education, including colleges and *madrasas*. The region with the largest number of educational centers was Dagestan, with eight Islamic universities and some three dozen *madrasas*. Second was Chechnya, with two higher education Islamic institutions and some two dozen *madrasas*. Tatarstan is another center of education in Russia. It has two Islamic institutions of higher education, in the same building, and a third recently opened institution of higher Islamic education, the Bulgarian Islamic Academy. Tatarstan also has a well-developed system

2 The number of religious organizations registered in the Russian Federation on January 1, 2016. Federal State Statistics Service of Russian Federation: http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/state/#

of secondary Islamic education, with nine *madrāsas*. Other major Muslim regions of Russia with Islamic educational institutions are Bashkortostan, Ingushetia, Moscow and individual cities of the Volga-Urals region with dense Muslim populations (Nizhny Novgorod, Samara, Astrakhan, etc.).



*Fig. 1. The distribution of formal Islamic educational institutions in Russia
(Source: Federal State Statistics Service of the Russian Federation,
January 1, 2016)*

According to some representatives of the Muslim community of Russia, official statistics do not fully reflect the situation on the ground in the sphere of Islamic education because, first, registering as an educational institution is not the same as actually providing educational services, and, secondly, not all operational religious educational establishments are officially registered and licensed, i.e. some work informally. For example, according to official data for 2014 from the Committee on the Freedom of Conscience and Cooperation with Religious Organizations of the Republic of Dagestan, only six of the eight universities and 13 of the 29 *madrāsas* had licenses for educational activities.³ The rest were working without formal registration.

The situation regarding the legal establishment of Russian Islamic educational institutions differs depending on the level of education in question. The situation at the lowest level of Islamic education was problematic right from the start – *mek-tebs* operated within mosques, which traditionally have a significant influence on

3 Information on religious associations in the Republic of Dagestan on July 1, 2014: <http://komrelig.e-dag.ru/activity/statis/34130-informatsiya-o-sostoyanii-religioznogo-obrazovaniya-v-respublike-dagestan-na-1-aprelya-2015-g>

the outlook of ordinary Muslims. Many of these schools had difficult meeting official requirements for a license to conduct educational activities. These schools rely on the private donations of parishioners and cannot provide the level of logistical and sanitary-epidemiological equipment required for the educational process. For this reason, the vast majority of *mektebs* in the Russian Federation has gone unregistered for years.⁴ Registration by public authorities, and indeed by the centralized Muslim spiritual authorities, has always proved difficult.

This situation was partially resolved in 2015 with the introduction of amendments to Article 5 of the Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations'. The status of the *mektebs* was defined as follows:

Religious associations have the right to carry out the teaching of religion and religious training of their adherents in the manner prescribed by the legislation of the Russian Federation, in the forms of certain internal regulations of religious associations. The teaching of religion and religious training is not an educational activity.⁵

This allowed for the removal of the stipulation for licensing *mektebs*, which from then on have been regarded not as lower-level educational institutions, but as centers of religious training, which do not require official registration or licensing.

There have also been problems at the level of the secondary vocational Islamic schools – the *madrasas*. Neither the state nor the central Islamic religious authorities have full information on how many *madrasas* there actually are in Russia. Again, the reason is rooted in the fact that many are not formally operational. According to some experts, the situation regarding *madrasas* status differs by region across the Russian Federation: there are no difficulties in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, where all existing *madrasas* are state registered and licensed by the local Ministry of Education, but the situation is less satisfactory in some Northern Caucasus republics.⁶ As mentioned earlier, unlicensed *madrasa* networks were still operating in Dagestan in 2014.

The situation is least problematic regarding the legal regulation of higher Islamic education in Russia. Nearly all Islamic universities and institutes have or are in the process of obtaining licenses. A different problem many have, however, is that without state accreditation they cannot issue state-recognized diplomas. Given the secular nature of the Russian state, enshrined in the Constitution, the Ministry of Education and Science cannot accredit teaching programs for 'Imams'

4 The statute of the Russian Government on the licensing of educational activities on October 28, 2013, no. 966: http://magarifrt.ru/netcat_files/multifile/2311_olozhenie_o_litsenzirovanii.pdf

5 Federal Law 'On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations' on September 26, 1997, no. 125-F3 (version of 28 November 2015): http://magarifrt.ru/netcat_files/multifile/2311/O_S_OBODE_SOVESTI_I_O_RELIGIOZNYH_OB_EDINENIYaH.pdf

6 Levichev N. Religioznoe obrazovanie protiv islamskogo ekstremizma [Religious education against Islamic extremism]: <http://expert.ru/expert/2012/36/religioznoe-obrazovanie-protiv-islamskogo-ekstremizma/>

or 'Hafi' (the Qur'an memorization program) run by the most Islamic universities. This would be regarded as state interference in religious affairs. As a result, there is a problem with the non-recognition of degrees from Islamic higher education institutions by government agencies and consequently of unemployment for graduates.

Muslim leaders in Russia have established several bodies to represent their collective interests vis-à-vis the state and other native or international organizations, with a view to effecting resolution of these and other problems in Islamic education. An important step was the creation in 2005 of the Council on Islamic Education (CIE), a consultative body that currently comprises nine higher and 25 secondary Islamic institutions, from Tatarstan, Moscow, Bashkortostan, Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria and other regions of the country.⁷ The current Chairman of the Council is Rafik Mukhametshin, rector of the Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan.

The Council's objectives include:

1. To create a single educational space in the field of Islamic religious education.
2. To ensure that the conditions required for Russian citizens to exercise their right to religious education are being met and to meet the needs of the state and society for specialists requiring theological, religious, and other training.
3. To coordinate the activities of the various organizations conducting religious education.
4. To develop and adopt common standards in the fields of Islamic theology and religious education.
5. To develop and approve model curricula and syllabi for the religious subjects taught in Islamic theological and religious institutions, etc.⁸

During its first years of active work, the Council developed unified standards for higher, secondary and elementary Islamic education and adopted common models for the diplomas issued by educational institutions of the Council of Muftis of Russia and headed by the mufti Ravil Gainutdin. Another important achievement was development of a concept for Islamic education in Russia, setting out several stages. The first stage comprises elementary religious education, as provided through Weekend (elementary) schools (*mektebs*) and courses at local mosques and religious organizations. The goal is to provide a grounding in the foundations of Islam and the basic duties of a Muslim. The second stage includes secondary religious education, as provided by secondary (evening) schools (*madrasas*). The goal is to prepare students to continue their studies at professional and higher educational institutions or to carry out religious duties as ancillary staff at mosques (ritual service, *muezzins*). The third stage covers secondary

7 ISLAMOBR – the information and education portal: <http://islamobr.ru/>

8 ISLAMOBR – the information and education portal: <http://islamobr.ru/>

professional religious education provided at secondary (day or evening) colleges. The goal of this stage is to prepare students to continue their studies at higher educational institutions or carry out the duties of religious personnel in mosques (imams). The fourth stage comprises the highest level of religious education provided by Islamic institutions during the day or in the evening or through extramural courses. The goal is to train *imam-khatibs*, employees of other spiritual institutions, and religious education teachers. The fifth stage takes place within secular higher educational institutions with an Islamic component. It is provided by Islamic universities (private educational institutions) and created by the Muslim spiritual administrations. The goal is to offer specializations in Islamic theology, philosophy, history, or pedagogy, etc., with a sufficient level of religious knowledge. The sixth stage offers graduate-level education (Master's) at university, whether on daytime or evening courses. The goal is to train specialists capable of carrying out teaching and research work.⁹

This concept for Islamic education in Russia was first developed in the early 2000s, when Marat Murtazin, then rector of the Moscow Islamic University, was head of the Council. With the appointment of Rafik Mukhametshin as head, the new concept was further developed. It is now at the stage of discussion by Council members. During a conference on 'Islam in the Multicultural World', held in Kazan in December 2016, Mukhametshin explained that the concept had still to be fully embraced, as Council members, and especially the Muslim leaders in Moscow, had differing views on the prospects for Islamic education development in Russia.

Types of Islamic education

A common approach by researchers is to define ideological orientations, using different classifications and terminology, in analyzing the development of Muslim education in Russia. One such typology is offered by the political scientist Rinat Pateev, who identifies three main types of Islamic education in the Muslim world: traditionalist, modernist and fundamentalist, and tries to show how present they have been in the various regions of Russia.

According to Pateev, traditionalist Muslim education is the basic system of training for Muslim clergy and the main source of religious education for Muslims. He believes that the supporters of traditionalist Islamic education stand primarily for preserving the basic elements of religious education, particularly the study of the original sources of Islam (the Qur'an and Sunnah), Arabic, the history of Islam, and the foundations of the faith. At the same time, they sometimes hold negative attitudes to the introduction of (in their view unnecessary) secular subjects into the curriculum. He further argues that, since traditionalist Islam is

9 Murtazin M. Islamskoe obrazovanie v Moskve [Islamic education in Moscow]: <http://muslim.ru/articles/281/8579/>

associated with regional ethno-cultural characteristics and to the ‘*adat* component’ in particular, the study of the Muslim peoples’ local languages and their customs, as they relate to religious ritual practice, is an important element in traditionalist religious education. As a rule, traditionalist teaching is conducted in local languages, with considerable attention to the dissemination of religious literature by domestic authors. A third important component of traditionalism, Pateev believes, is its noninvolvement in politics: the official clergy usually maintains a position of keeping politics separate from religion, which is why the system of traditionalist Islamic education often lacks a political component.¹⁰

The traditionalist trend in education remains strong in the Muslim regions of Russia. Many educational institutions have seen a revival of the so-called ‘old school’, which existed there in the past. The traditionalist trend is dominant in the Muslim republics of the Northern Caucasus, where a vast majority of Muslim educational institutions continue to prioritize the reproduction of training systems and knowledge as they existed in the pre-revolutionary period. Traditionalism in Islamic education is represented in different forms in the different republics of the region. In the North-Eastern Caucasus, it is widely spread in the form of the Sufism of the Naqshbandi, Shadhili and Qadiri tariqas, where there is less teaching of secular subjects. In the Northwest Caucasus, Islam is mainly present in the form of traditional Sunni thought and particularly the Hanafi school. This region seems to be more tolerant of the inclusion of secular components in religious education. The third characteristic of traditional education, under Pateev’s typology, its apparently ‘apolitical nature’, requires qualification, given the experience in Dagestan, one of the most traditional republics of the Northern Caucasus, where the head of the Republican Muslim Spiritual Administration (SAMRD), who is also mufti and rector of one of the Islamic universities, Akhmet-hajji Abdullaev, is actively involved in the social and political life of the republic and even in the fight for power.¹¹

Muslim religious education of the fundamentalist type, under Rinat Pateev’s typology, “acts as the main system for the ideological and practical training of the most politicized, even radical, supporters of the Islamist movement.” The supporters of fundamentalist trends in education embrace a radical interpretation of Islamic teachings that fits their political attitudes and goals, as well as justifying their political practices. On the other hand, they can be open to secular subjects within an Islamic education, if secular knowledge can be used in their practice. Moreover, in Pateev’s view, given that Islamic fundamentalism entails a critique

10 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'* [Political aspects of Muslim education in Russia: History and modernity]. Thesis (Rostov-On-Don, 2006), pp. 33-34.

11 Mufti Akhmet-hajji Abdullaev is rector of the Dagestani Islamic university named after Sheikh Muhammad-Arif in Makhachkala. In spring 2016, he announced their intention of participating in elections to the Dagestan parliament, which led to tensions between the mufti and the head of the republic.

of traditional norms and practices in the education system, it can produce sharp criticism of forms of *adat*, as well as a dismissal of the traditional cultural achievements of Muslim and other peoples.¹²

The fundamentalist model of Islamic education has spread in Russia mainly in areas of acute ethno-political conflict (Chechnya and Dagestan), such as took place in the 1990s and early 2000s. It has also been active in other regions of the country, in both formal and semi-formal elementary Islamic schools and *madrasas*. At present, this model is not very prevalent within the Muslim educational space of Russia, which has increasingly come under state regulation and control.

For adherents of what Pateev calls the modernist current in Islamic education, reform of religious education remains integral. In their view, it is only by embracing the global heritage of human achievements, some of which does need to be examined and rethought, that the Muslim world can set itself on the path of revival and become a full member of world community. By modernist education, the author understands “a system of religious education that aims at familiarizing Muslim peoples with the values of Islam and the achievements of human culture and civilization.”¹³ In his view, its proponents insist primarily on greater balance in interpreting the original sources of Muslim faith and on the need to strengthen the secular elements in Muslim education. Secondly, according to Pateev, modernist religious education is loyal to the traditional (*adat*) forms found in different regions all around the world. There is consequently attention to the study of local languages, history and culture, both Muslim and non-Muslim.

Of all the Muslim educational institutions in Russia, it tends to be the *madrasas* and universities of the Volga-Ural region (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) and Moscow that are thought of as modernist. Secular subjects, including those with a ‘national-regional component,’ occupy an important place in their curricula. For example, the curricula of Tatarstan Islamic educational institutions include such subjects as ‘The history of Tatarstan and the Tatar people,’ ‘The history of Islam in Tatarstan,’ and ‘Tatar language and literature,’ etc.¹⁴ At the same time, one should note that ‘modernist’ education has different faces in the different Russian regions. In the Islamic universities of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, there is a mixture of traditional curricula, close to the curricula of famous centers of Islamic knowledge in places like Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Morocco, etc., with modern innovations in teaching, including science and technology. In Moscow, there has been a notable trend toward the development of an exclusively secular specialty, ‘Theology,’ standards for which have been developed by state institutions. These standards embrace a huge number of secular disciplines, many deeply rooted in the Russian context.

12 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, pp. 34-35.

13 Ibid., pp. 35-37.

14 *Obrazovatel'nye standarty srednego professional'nogo religioznogo obrazovaniya* [Educational standards in secondary vocational religious education] (Kazan, 2014), p. 108.

	Traditionalist	Modernist	Fundamentalist
The main goal	Preserving the basic elements of classical religious education	More balanced view in interpreting the original sources of the Muslim faith	Radical interpretation of Islamic teachings
Attitude toward secular subjects	Negative attitude towards the introduction of secular subjects in the curriculum	Emphasis on strengthening the secular elements in Muslim education	Favorable attitude, if secular knowledge can be of practical use
Attitude towards adat	Close connection to <i>adat</i>	Loyalty to <i>adat</i> forms	Sharp criticism of <i>adat</i>
Regional distribution	Northern Caucasus, Volga-Urals region	Moscow, Volga-Urals region	Northern Caucasus (Chechnya and Dagestan) in the 1990s

Table 2. Types of Islamic education in Russia
 (Source: Typology of Rinat Pateev, compiled by the author)

These three types of Islamic education can be used only conditionally to classify educational institutions in Russia. In practice, a mix of types is to be found in almost every region and institution. Global trends and the realities of the Russian political context are increasingly blurring lines between them.

Problems in Islamic education

A lack of sufficient qualified personnel has affected the ability to organize and implement the educational process in Islamic institutions of Russia. The development of a domestic system of Islamic education has been influenced by the adoption of curricula from other countries and regions, and often such curricula have been adopted with the contexts in which they were developed in the respective countries of origin. As a result, Islamic educational development in Russia has faced a number of problems.

One of the most significant problems facing Islamic education in Russia has been the flaws in these adopted curricula. This problem has several dimensions. The first is the obsolescence of the programs, including their incompatibility with current domestic and global trends. The second is the lack of a unified curriculum for Russian Islamic educational institutions. The third problem is the ratio of religious to secular subjects in the curricula of universities and *madrasas*.

It is worth noting that the issue of flaws in the curricula has been recognized by representatives of the Islamic education system. As the rector of the Moscow

Islamic University (MIU), Damir Khairetdinov,¹⁵ pointed out in 2012, not all heads of *madrasas* and Islamic universities have fully understood the need for a revision of the curriculum, both with regard to methodology and the purpose of Islamic education. According to him, education in many institutions is based on

pre-revolutionary experience, on 19th – early 20th century textbooks, so that the style of teaching of religious foundations in modern *madrasas* and Islamic universities in Russia is not much removed from the pre-Soviet past.¹⁶

According to Khairetdinov, two directions had appeared in Islamic education in the country before the October Revolution 1917, namely:

isolationist traditional education, in the spirit of rural *mullahs* with elements of Sufism, and Islamic-secular education, which, despite its higher authority, led to the domination of nationalist sentiment among its graduates.¹⁷

Damir Khairetdinov has also observed the absence of a shared curriculum in most Russian Islamic educational institutions, as every *madrasa* and institute conducts its teaching according to its own curriculum and teaching methods. Basically, he says, most *madrasas* teach only four to five subjects, Qur'an, Hadith, Sharia, Arabic and *Aqidah* (Creed). Only some Islamic universities provide English and computer training. Islamic educational institutions thus provide a highly-specialized education, which is the main obstacle to the recognition of diplomas and the further employment of graduates.¹⁸

According to the deputy head of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation (SAMRF), Damir Mukhetdinov, Islamic educational institutions' poor integration is related to the lack of a common understanding of the goals and objectives of an Islamic university. In the mid-1990s, it was a common theme that Islamic universities were a place for preparing highly-educated imams, in other words – religious leaders. This view of the purpose of higher Islamic education is native to functionaries in the spiritual administrations and *muftis* and was formed at a time when rapid construction of new mosques in major cities coincided with huge staff shortages. It was sympathetically received by the leadership of the larger Islamic foundations and philanthropists from prosperous Gulf countries, who have provided sponsorship for arrangement of these universities. The representatives of the national intelligentsia take a fundamentally different approach, according to Mukhetdinov, as they believe that modern Islamic universities should first and foremost prepare Muslim intellectuals with a balanced awareness of the fields of both the religious and the secular sciences,

15 In March 2012, he replaced Marat Murtazin, one of the founders of the Moscow Islamic University.

16 *Islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii: Istoriya i perspektivy* [Islamic education in Russia: History and outlook]: <http://www.islamrf.ru/news/analytics/expert/21737/>

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

combining both civil and Muslim identity and ready to work in Muslim and secular institutions in the spheres of education, public administration, media, etc. These principles provided the basis for the foundation of the Russian Islamic University in Kazan in 1998.¹⁹

One can view this lack of a common curriculum in secondary and higher Russian Islamic institutions from different perspectives. On the one hand, pluralism of educational programs can be a factor that enriches the Russian experience of Islamic education. Different programs with different priorities for educational activities could occupy different niches in the overall system of Islamic education in the country. On the other hand, it is an obstacle to the development of horizontal cooperation between educational institutions through student and faculty mobility, textbooks and the sharing of manuals.

Another very similar problem is the issue of the balance between religious and secular subjects in the curricula. This question has, for some years, provoked debates in the leadership and among ordinary teachers at educational institutions, many of whom are skeptical of secular 'overreach' within religious sphere. The problem was forcefully expressed during the International conference on 'Humanistic values and the Muslim Youth of Russia' (2006) by the rector of the MIU, Marat Murtazin, who said:

We in the Council on Islamic Education have repeatedly discussed this issue, and most of our colleagues are confident that in Islamic university students should study Russian, the History of the Fatherland, Basic Philosophy, Computer Science and many other subjects, at the universities' discretion. Naturally, in this case, top priority should be given to religious subjects, such as the Qur'an, Hadith, the Prophet's Biography, Interpretation of the Qur'an, and others.²⁰

Murtazin also noted that not everyone agrees with these views and that some *muftis*, imams, teachers and theologians believe that these subjects are unnecessary and even harmful for students. Thus, Philosophy, Pedagogy, Political Science, Cultural Studies, etc., according to the rector, have sometimes been denounced by them as '*kyafir*' (godless) and, as an argument in favor of this, they indicate the need to preserve the purity of religion and fight against '*bidat*' (innovations) and deviations.

When it comes to introducing secular subjects into the curricula of universities and *madradas*, the situation differs in the various regions of the country.

19 Mukhetdinov D. Sistema rossiiskogo islamskogo obrazovaniya: Puti razvitiya [The system of Russian Islamic education: The paths to development]: <http://www.idmedina.ru/books/islamic/?1982>

20 Doklad rectora Moskovskogo islamskogo universiteta Marata hazrata Murtazina na Mejdunarodnoi konferentsii "Gumanisticheskie tsennosti i musul'manskaya molodej' Rossii," [Paper by the rector of the Moscow Islamic University, Marat hazrat Murtazin, at the International conference on 'Humanistic values and the Muslim youth of Russia'], Moscow, 30-31 May, 2006: <http://muslim.ru/articles/281/8564/>

Introduction has been most difficult in the Northern Caucasus, where there is a bias towards traditionalism in the field of Islamic education and the perception exists that the pre-revolutionary experience of teaching Islam in the region is the only 'correct' path. This ensures in advance a critical attitude to innovation in the educational process, including the issue of secular subjects and modern teaching methods.

The issue of curricular imperfection is largely due to a lack of textbooks in Russian that take account of the nuances of the Russian Muslim cultural environment. This lack is evident with secular subjects and not just religious ones. As deputy speaker of the Russian parliament, Nikolay Levichev, noted in 2012, within the framework of the special Federal program for training specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam, over the period of five years only the universities in Kazan had developed a significant number of textbooks (80 of them). Moreover, even the authors themselves admit a low level in content and methodology.²¹ This issue of the lack of teaching materials persists today. In autumn 2015, during a conference on Islamic education in Kazan, the dean of the Moscow Islamic Institute, Gulfiya Khabibullina, complained that her institution was still in dire need of textbooks in disciplines like Qur'anic studies, Hadith studies, Islamic Law and legislation, and the History and Culture of Islam.²²

In recent years, some institutions have made significant improvements in the quality of their curricula. In particular, the Council on Islamic Education has developed uniform standards in the field of Islamic education that provide for a wide range of religious and secular subjects for *madrasas* and Islamic universities. The problem of outdated programs, insufficient attention to secular subjects and modern methods of teaching remains a challenge for most Russian Islamic institutions, nonetheless.

One of the crucial problems of Islamic education in Russia is graduate unemployment and their unwillingness to work in the field. As Marat Murtazin noted in 2006, in many Islamic educational institutions there is a significant outflow of students after the second year of study. He referred to case studies carried out in the Russian Islamic University and Madrasa 'Muhammadiyah' in Kazan, which showed that about half of the students at admission were guided by an interest in the religious field. However, at the upper level, students started to think about their future employment and salaries. The rector admitted that the prestige of the profession 'imam', especially in rural areas, is still very low and that:

21 Levichev N. Religioznoe obrazovanie protiv islamskogo ekstremizma [Religious education against Islamic extremism]: <http://expert.ru/expert/2012/36/religioznoe-obrazovanie-protiv-islamskogo-ekstremizma/>

22 Gafiyatullina I. Musul'manskoe obrazovanie: ot pervogo litsa [Muslim education: In the first person]: http://islam-today.ru/islam_v_rossii/tatarstan/musulmanskoe-obrazovanie-ot-pervogo-lica/

an imam's salary is just two to three thousand Russian Rubles (about 30-40 EUR), which is why mainly pensioners work in the mosques and many young and better educated graduates of Islamic institutions combine religious work with a business or go directly into business, teaching or public service.²³

Marat Murtazin also explained that the CIE is looking for measures to resolve these problems by signing contracts with students that make them work as imams after the graduation, as well as finding the resources to offer them good salaries.

Despite all attempts to resolve the problem, the situation has not changed significantly over the years. According to the new rector of MIU, Damir Khairetdinov, the 2012 graduates went on to work 'in markets and construction', and no one took work as an imam.²⁴ He drew attention to an interesting point: in the late 1990s – early 2000s, when the material and methodological components of the teaching process were much worse, the situation regarding graduate employment was much better. In those difficult conditions, says Khairetdinov,

our educational institutions prepared a professional body of imams, who now head the major religious organizations throughout Russia and have become the face of Islam in Russia in the regions. The number of graduates of that period who became imams was more than 50% ... today we no longer see graduates with burning eyes, ready to go to a distant region and start from scratch, to educate, to develop relationships, to build communities, to construct mosques, to make sermons.²⁵

This situation seems particularly strange to the rector given the obvious real shortage of qualified personnel, not only in far distant rural areas but also in urban areas, where imams enjoy the support of the community, business and diaspora, and are not in poverty. He believes that, compared to the situation 10 to 15 years ago, young imams now have much better opportunities. Nevertheless, he says,

we are unable to retain the graduates of *madradas* and Islamic universities in the profession or provide them a higher level of training, despite serious financial investment through the federal program and grant support.²⁶

23 Doklad rectora Moskovskogo islamskogo universiteta Marata hazrata Murtazina na Mejdunarodnoi konferentsii "Gumanisticheskie tsennosti i musul'manskaya molodej' Rossii"

24 Vystuplenie rectora Moskovskogo Islamskogo Universieta D. Z. Khairetdinova na II Vserossiiskom musul'manskom soveshanii [Speech of the rector of the Moscow Islamic University, D. Z. Khairetdinov, at the 2nd All-Russian Muslim meeting]: <http://www.dumrf.ru/dumer/speeches/7008>

25 Doklad rectora Moskovskogo Islamskogo Universiteta Damira Khairetdinova na Mejdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 'Formirovanie dukhovnogo prostranstva sovremennoi Rossii' [Speech of the rector of the Moscow Islamic University, Damir Khairetdinov, at the International scientific conference on 'The formation of spiritual space in contemporary Russia'], Pyatigorsk, 31 May – 2 June, 2012: <http://muslim.ru/articles/281/8525/>

26 Ibid.

While experts note that this is not the situation in all Islamic universities in the country, they recognize that the problem is systemic. It is connected, in their view, in particular, with the fact that, despite the efforts and funds invested, development of a Russian Muslim educational system has not yet taken place. One of the reasons for the failure is the low professional level of teachers at Islamic institutions, who lack specialized education. For example, Sergey Jannat, chief editor of *'Islamic culture'*, a magazine, has said: "...there is currently only one doctor of Sharia Sciences in the whole of Russia and even he got his degree abroad."²⁷

Damir Khairtdinov connects the problem of graduate unemployment with the general weakening of control over educational institutions on the part of the Muslim spiritual administrations. According to him, educational institutions have received greater financial support, while at the same time got out the tutelage of the spiritual administrations and gained independence. Their performance has, however, dropped significantly, and the very development of an Islamic educational system has reached stagnation. He agrees with the head of the Russian Council of Muftis Sheikh, Ravil Gainutdin, who said that,

just acquiring independence does not make education independent in the fullest sense of the word. Instead it may fall under the influence of and become dependent on foreign organizations, often associated with borough needs.²⁸

One result, according to Khairtdinov, is that new prominent figures are not being born.

Difficulties with student enrollment in *madrasas* and Islamic universities, with their retention through the senior years of study and involvement and progress into work in the field after graduation are common to all Islamic educational institutions of Russia, regardless of region. The professional prestige of imams remains low, and graduates do not receive attractive offers of employment with clear career prospects from the spiritual administrations and other Muslim institutions. The experience obstacles applying for jobs in government agencies, etc. Tatarstan offer an example of a potential solution to the problem of the recognition of diplomas of religious universities, with two Islamic universities work in one building: one prepares imams, the other secular experts. Students can study in both universities at the same time and receive two diplomas, one of which is recognized by the state. Another way to solve the employment issue is by opening a secular specialty, 'Theology', which allows students to receive a state-recognized diploma.

27 A est' li v Rossii islamskoe obrazovanie? Vopros ne ritoricheskii, a ostro jiznennii [Is there Islamic education in Russia? A vital, not a rhetorical question]: <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-140581.html>

28 Doklad rektora Moskovskogo Islamskogo Universiteta Damira Khairtdinova na Mejdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 'Formirovanie dukhovnogo prostranstva sovremennoi Rossii'

Foreign influence on Islamic education

Views on such influence vary, from the very rosy to the extremely negative. Certainly, foreign Islamic centers have played and continue to play a role in Islamic education in the country.

Foreign educators have had significant influence on the formation of Muslim education in Russia since the early 1990s. The leadership of the spiritual administrations from that early period contributed to this. Firstly, as Rinat Pateev points out, it embraced the admission of foreign Islamic educators into the process of Islamic education as natural (as Muslim solidarity) and had no issues with it. Secondly, there has been a lack of educated Islamic leaders, which made the admission of foreign teachers essential.²⁹

Foreign educational activity has been evident at all levels of Islamic education. At the level of *mektebs*, it has been evident in the teaching of Arabic, the Qur'an and the fundamentals of Islam (mainly the rules of religious rites). At the level of *madrasas*, foreign educators conducted lessons on the rules for reading the Qur'an (*Tajweed*), the Basics of Faith (*Aqidah*), Fiqh (jurisprudence), and so on. Thus, Rinat Pateev believes, foreign educators have played an important role in the formation of a new stratum of Russian Muslim clergy, educated in the newly-formed *madrasas*.³⁰ Furthermore, educators from foreign Islamic countries contributed to the development of Islamic universities in the country, which began to appear in the mid-to-late 1990s. In particular, they helped develop the curriculum at the Russian Islamic University in Kazan, which opened in 1997.³¹

It is possible to identify where different Islamic countries have exerted the most influence on Muslim education in Russia. Thus, due to the linguistic and ethnic proximity of the Turkic peoples, Turkey has influenced the formation and development of Islamic education in the Volga-Urals region and the European part of Russia, where large Tatar and Bashkir communities live. Turkey has also had significant influence in the North-Western Caucasus, not just because of the linguistic proximity of Turkic peoples, but also the influence of Caucasian diasporas (especially Adyghe), whose ancestors emigrated to the territory of the Ottoman Empire after the Caucasus wars of the 19th century. Turkey's impact has also been significant in the Eastern Caucasus, in particular the Nogai and Kumyk communities.³²

29 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 113.

30 Ibid.

31 Zakirov G.G. *Stanovlenie vysshego religiozno-svetskogo obrazovaniya v Tatarstane: Opyt Rossiyskogo Islamskogo universiteta* [The formation of religious-secular education in Tatarstan: The experience of the Russian Islamic university]; http://www.e-riu.ru/knldg/preprod_publ/?id=229

32 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 114.

Turkish influence was exercised both through the State Administration for Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) and Turkish private foundations and organizations, many of which were operating freely in Russia by the mid-2000s. They offered courses on Islam at mosques, oversaw the activities of several *madrasas*, and participated in Islamic higher education. Among private Turkish organizations, the Gülen schools have played a significant role, with, according to various estimates, their representatives supporting activities at about 30 educational institutions throughout Russia.³³

Arab countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, have also had a significant impact on religious education in the North-Eastern Caucasus. Some scholars limit this impact primarily to support from the Salafi movement. For example, Rinat Pateev tells us that one of the ideologists of Dagestani Salafism, Bagauddin Kebedov, opened a *madrasa* in Kizilyurt in 1989 with the support of educators from the Gulf states, at which up to 700 students studied,³⁴ before it was closed down in 1997 on the grounds of spreading 'radical ideas'. In our opinion, however, the impact of Arab countries has been broader than this and should not be limited to the support of a single movement, particularly one with a tarnished reputation in Russian official discourse. In any case, Arab educators have been active, not only in the North-Eastern Caucasus, but in other regions of Russia, including the Volga-Urals and Moscow.

Another major source of influence on the formation of Islamic education has been Russian graduates returning from foreign Islamic universities. In the early 1990s, given the lack of a developed system of Islamic education at home and unprecedented demand for Islamic knowledge, Muslims began to leave to travel to Islamic countries for their professional religious education. This outflow of students was also promoted by the widespread view among local Muslims that 'true' Islamic education could only be obtained in Muslim countries. Thousands of Muslims used a range of different channels and opportunities to travel to Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria and other countries.

Many Russian Muslims went to study abroad through initiatives of the local spiritual administrations, managed by foreign education institutions. In many cases, these initiatives included the offer to cover travel and accommodation expenses. Even more young people left to pursue Islamic knowledge off their own bat, however, without the good office of the official Muslim agencies in Russia. In such cases, students generally did not have the means to live and study and, not infrequently, received help from charities.³⁵

33 From the beginning of the 2000s, the activities of representatives of the organization came under the close scrutiny of the Russian security services, who accused them of disseminating ideas of radical Islam and Pan-Turkism. The result was the deportation of Turkish teachers at lyceums and schools and the determination that Said Nursi's books were 'extremist': Vitaliy Ponomarev, *Rossiiskie spetssluzhby protiv 'Risale-i Nur' 2001-2012* [Russian special services against 'Risale-i Nur' 2001-2012] (Moscow: Zven'ya, 2012), p. 248.

34 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, pp. 115-116.

35 *Ibid.*, pp 145-146.

The exact number of Russian Muslims graduates from foreign educational institutions is difficult to assess. According to some data, in 1997 there were more than 800 young Muslims studying overseas, including 400 from Dagestan.³⁶ According to reports, in 2004 some 600 people from Russia were studying at the Egyptian university of Al-Azhar.³⁷ In 2016, the number was more than 900.³⁸ According to estimates of the Justice Ministry of the Russian Federation, a total of 1,500 Russian Muslims left for foreign Islamic institutions, availing of various grants and scholarships.³⁹

It is important to address the set of problems associated with Russian Muslims' studying in foreign Islamic universities. According to Damir Khairtdinov, the approach was also harmful for foreign institutions of higher Islamic education, with 'all and sundry' going abroad, because the process of studying abroad was not controlled by anyone and few succeeded in actually graduating. It is equally important, in his opinion, that practically no Muslim state has an agreement with Russia on the mutual recognition of degrees. Therefore, anyone spending five to seven years at an Islamic university may well have spent those years in vain, because he or she has not acquired a valid degree under Russian law.⁴⁰

The pursuit of Islamic knowledge abroad, away from Russian realities and traditions, has raised the question as to whether the negative consequences outweigh the positive. This has given rise to broad public debate, among both experts and the leadership of the spiritual administrations and Islamic educational institutions. Some believe that the Russian Ummah cannot yet do without the help of foreign educational centers, as its own system of Islamic education is still not at high enough a level. For example, a leading Russian scholar, Alexei Malashenko, has argued that there are still no opportunities for a good Islamic education in Russia, so that the problem of young people leaving for famous Islamic educational centers around the world is inevitable. According to him,

the leading theological centers of Islam are located in the Arab world and people will surely go there. The matter is compounded by the fact that Russian Islam is largely ceremonial. And the Islam that students bring from abroad provides answers to contemporary questions: what is power, what is the state, and what is social justice.⁴¹

36 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, pp. 117-118.

37 V universitete al-Azhar nachalis' ekzameny [Exams start at Al-Azhar university]: http://nurlat.kazan.ws/cgi-bin/guide.pl?id_org=78&action=fullnews&id_news=3563

38 Damir Mukhetdinov. *Shag vpered, dva nazad? Mirovye islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii: Ugrozy i perspektivy* [One step forward, two steps back? World Islamic education in Russia: Challenges and perspectives]: <http://www.islamsng.com/rus/opinion/10576>

39 Rinat Pateev, *Politicheskie aspekty musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii: Istoriya i sovremennost'*, p. 148.

40 Doklad rektora Moskovskogo Islamskogo Universiteta Damira Khairtdinova na Mejdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 'Formirovanie dukhovnogo prostranstva sovremennoi Rossii'

41 *Mojno li poluchit' khoroshee islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossiiskoi Federatsii?* [Is a good Islamic education possible in the Russian Federation?]: <http://www.dagestanpost.ru/odagestane/religion/4633-mozhno-li-poluchit-xoroshee-islamskoe-obrazovanie-v-rf>

Other experts and representatives of the Islamic community understand that it is too early to limit Russian Muslims to within their own educational system and call for strict oversight by the spiritual administrations and government agencies to regulate the process of sending students abroad. The Law of the Republic of Dagestan ‘On the freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious organizations’ has been seen as reflecting this position, as it regulates the mechanisms for citizens travelling for religious education abroad. According to it, study abroad “is to be arranged by religious organizations with the consent of the republican religious organization.” At the same time, all contracts concluded to organize studying “must be registered with the state body on religious affairs of the Republic of Dagestan.”⁴²

Some representatives of the Russian Muslim clergy have suggested introducing restrictions related to age and the possession of a basic religious education for anyone wishing to pursue religious studies abroad. Thus, the rector of the Russian Islamic University in Ufa, Rinat Raev, has said:

We send some of our best graduates for further education to Egypt, to Al-Azhar University – the largest Islamic university in the world. However, they received their basic religious education and knowledge on the fundamentals of Islam in Russia. Many of these students mainly learn Arabic abroad.⁴³

The head of the Central Muslim Spiritual Administration (CSAMR), Talgat Tadzhuiddin, also supports the idea of the spiritual administrations tightening up the sending of students abroad. He particularly advocates intergovernmental agreements between Russia and Arab countries, according to which student visas would be issued only by agreement with the Russian Muftiyats, pointing out:

There was a time when not young people, but children 14–15 years and even 13 years old were going abroad. They went there without any consideration or direction from the Muslim spiritual administrations... Many got an education that does not correspond to our traditions.⁴⁴

Tadzhuiddin has noted that only students who have completed two years at a Russian preparatory school and four years at university should then be sent to Al-Azhar. According to him, the CSAMR does not send students to study in Saudi Arabia, but mainly to Morocco and Syria.

42 Zakon Respubliki Dagestan ‘O svobode sovesti, svobode veroispovedaniya i religioznikh organizatsiyaakh’ (s popravkami ot 29 aprelya 2004 g.): Gosudarstvo, religiya, zakon. Sbornik dokumentov i metodicheskikh materialov dlya rabotnikov administratsii gorodov i raionov Respubliki Dagestan [The Law of the Republic of Dagestan ‘On the freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and religious organizations’ (with amendments of the 29th of April, 2004): State, religion, law. A collection of documents and training materials for employees of city and district administrations of the Republic of Dagestan] (Makhachkala, 2004), pp. 50–51.

43 V regionakh nachalsya protsess ob’edineniya musul’manskikh obshin [The process of uniting Muslim communities started in the regions]: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=interview&div=57>

44 Verkhovnyi mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin: “Prava obshchestva vyshhe prav otdel’noi lichnosti” [Supreme mufti Talgat Tadzhuiddin: “Society’s rights are higher than individual rights”]: <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=print&div=3480>

Similar views are shared by the Muslim clergy of the Northern Caucasus. The head of the Muslim spiritual administration of the Republic of Dagestan (SAMRD), Ahmad-Haji Abdullaev, has noted that, during his two years in office some 30 people with an elementary religious education at home were sent abroad, adding:

I do not support sending our children abroad; on the contrary, I keep saying that there are worthy *ulama* in our country and the basics of Islam should be studied here.⁴⁵

In recent years, Al-Azhar in Egypt has become a key Islamic educational center for Russian Muslims. In March 2016, a large representative delegation of Russian Islamic leaders visited the university. At a meeting, according to Damir Mukhetdinov, “unprecedented results were achieved that have made it possible to realize a breakthrough in religious education in Russia”. Al-Azhar sheikh Ahmad Tayyib issued an order requiring that applicants from Russia be accepted only on the basis of agreement with the Council on Islamic Education and the Embassy of the Russian Federation. A list of current Russian students (total of 920) was to be sent to the CIE for approval. Also on the instructions of the sheikh, 20 scholarships were to be allocated to the CIE. But the most important thing, according to Mukhetdinov, was that the leader of Al-Azhar ordered the creation of a working group to adopt the necessary documents for recognition of the educational standards of the CIE. The Russian side wants the CIE standards for higher Islamic education to have equal status to the Al-Azhar’s high school (*thanaviyya*). That will allow Russian graduates to enter directly at Bachelor level at the university. In addition, an agreement was reached on establishing a Union of Al-Azhar Students and opening a branch of the League of Al-Azhar Graduates in Russia. Further, consideration was given to opening branches of the university in Kazan and Grozny. This would allow Russian citizens to obtain a classical Islamic education without needing to travel to Egypt.⁴⁶

The Reform of Islamic Education in Russia

By the mid-2000s, politicians, government officials, researchers and representatives of the Muslim community of the Russian Federation had acknowledged the need to reform the system of Islamic education in the country. The outflow of young people to foreign educational institutions, the problem of adjustment after returning home, the low prestige of training programs for imams in Russia, and other negative processes have forced the issue of improving the quality of the domestic Islamic education onto the agenda.

45 V tselyakh rasprostraneniya islama. Interv’yu muftiya A.Kh. Abdullaeva [With the aim of spreading Islam. An interview with mufti A.Kh. Abdullaev]: http://assalam.dgu.ru/html5/a5_9.html

46 Damir Mukhetdinov. Shag vpered, dva nazad? Mirovoe islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii: Ugrozy i perspektivy

Around this time, the need to reform Islamic education in Russia was taken up in the public sphere and has been widely discussed in scientific, theological and other arenas, with the participation of representatives from the Islamic establishment, government agencies and academic institutions. Towards the end of June, 2007, a conference on “The development of the religious education of the Muslims of Russia” took place in Moscow, which some analysts hailed as a new milestone in the history of Islamic education in Russia. Dozens of international conferences have subsequently been devoted to domestic Islamic education, including: “The development of Islamic theology and religious education in Russia and abroad” (Moscow, November 13, 2008); “Islamic education in the multicultural space of Russia: Yesterday, today and tomorrow” (Pyatigorsk, October 7-9, 2015); “Islamic education in Tatarstan: The past, present, and future” (Kazan, October 10, 2015); “The ideals and values of Islam in the educational space of the 21st century” (Ufa, October 22, 2015); “Intellectual Islam – the preservation and development of the Islamic heritage and religious education in Russia” (Novosibirsk, October 28-29, 2016); and “Islamic theology and the objectives of Islamic education” (Moscow, October 31 - November 1, 2016).

The process of reforming Islamic education could not have gained traction without the direct involvement of the state. By initiating and sponsoring reform, the state acts not as a philanthropist, but a party, pursuing its own interests. As former rector of the Dagestan Institute of Theology and International Relations, Maksud Sadikov has stated that the reform of Islamic education is a mutually beneficial process, as the Muslim clergy cannot conduct such reform and raise the level of religious education on its own. This requires organizational, intellectual, and financial support from the state. By helping the clergy, the state helps, above all, itself and society, because it is not just about the development of Islam, but about the moral and spiritual health of the nation and the preservation, strengthening and promotion of human values.⁴⁷

Statements by high-ranking Russian politicians and official and their decisions show the level of attention being given to the problem of Islamic education from the perspective of the state. One example is the Order by President of Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, on June 19, 2002, in which he stated:

The ongoing manifestations of religious extremism in the country require additional measures to increase the level of interaction between the state and religious associations. I ask, as a priority, that a range of measures be taken to provide organizational, financial and methodological assistance to the development of the sphere of religious, primarily Muslim, education.⁴⁸

47 Ibragimova E. *Islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii, kakim emu byt'?* [Islamic education in Russia, what will it look like?]: <http://assalam.ru/content/story/634>

48 Ponkin I.V. *O soderzhanii, napravlenosti i posledstviyakh realizatsii Plana meropriyatiy po obespecheniyu podgotovki spetsialistov s uglublennym znaniem istorii i kul'tury islama v 2007-2010 godakh. Analiticheskaya zapiska* [On the content, direction and consequences of the plan of events on the training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of history and culture of Islam in 2007-2010. An analytical note]: <http://www.state-religion.ru/index.php?p=post&cid=15>

In October 2013, at a meeting with Russian *muftis* in Ufa, Vladimir Putin outlined the main challenges facing Islamic education. One of them is countering terrorism and extremism. The second task is the socialization of Russian Islam. A third is revival of the domestic Islamic theological school.⁴⁹

Thus, from the early 2000s, there has been a direct link between the sphere of Islamic education and anti-extremism policy in the official discourse in Russia. And, in our opinion, it explains the essence of the state interest in this sphere. Illustrative of state interest in reform of the Islamic educational system is the Federal program on training specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam (henceforth the Federal program).

The Federal Program

The federal program was launched in 2007.⁵⁰ The decisive official argument in favor of it was that all activities would be aimed at combatting extremism within the Islamic community of Russia. Its essence was to bring together religious and secular universities in order fundamentally to change the quality and nature of Islamic education. The main objective of the project, as stated by its creators, was the development and implementation of measures “to support the loyalty of the Muslim religious communities (mosques) to the government and to strengthen their property and financial situation in order to organize a counterweight to radical elements.”⁵¹

For the period of 2007-2010, two main tasks were identified. The first was to build up the system and a complex structure of Islamic education, that would be organically integrated and coordinated within all kinds of learning – both professional religious and secular education at all levels. The second task was to build a system of teaching and methodological support for Muslim education through the existing base of secular universities.⁵²

49 Muftii, uchenye i vostokovedy o konferentsii ‘Islamskaya teologiya i zadachi islamskogo obrazovaniya’ [Muftis, scholars and orientalists on the conference on ‘Islamic theology and the challenges of Islamic education’]: <http://www.ansar.ru/person/muftii-uchenye-i-vostokovedy-o-konferentsii-islamskaya-teologiya-i-zadachi-islamskogo-obrazovaniya>

50 Order of the Federal Agency for Education, dated August 15, 2007, number 1476 ‘On the implementation of projects carried out in 2007 within the framework of an action plan to ensure training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam in 2007-2010, financed by the federal budget’: http://www.edu.ru/db/mo/Data/d_07/a1476.html

51 Igor Alekseev, “Traditsii i novatsii v prepodavanii islama v Rossii” [Traditions and innovations in teaching Islam in Russia] in *Izuchenie i prepodavanie islama v Evrazii: sbornik statei* [The studying and teaching of Islam in Eurasia: A collection of articles] (ed. M.S. Meier) (Moscow: Klyuch-S, 2010), p. 20.

52 Ibid., pp. 20-21.

On June 4, 2007, an order 'On ensuring the training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam in 2007' was issued by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. A working group was also established to implement the program. An 'Action plan to ensure the training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam in 2007-2010' was developed and approved by government decree. The plan included a package of measures, among which were the following:

1. Development of exemplary educational programs, based on state standards for higher professional education in such areas of training (specialties) as the Arts and Humanities, Cultural Studies, Regional Studies, Sociology, Theology and based on state standards of secondary professional education in the specialty of 'The Organization of Educational Activities'.
2. Development and testing of the textbooks, manuals, dictionaries, anthologies, workshops, guidelines, and worksheets needed for implementation of educational programs of higher and secondary professional education in these areas of training.
3. Training of teaching staff for these areas of education.
4. Determination of the need for specialists in the areas of training in the Volga, North-Western, Central and Southern federal districts.
5. Development and testing of regulatory and methodological support of educational programs of higher and secondary professional education in these areas of training, etc.⁵³

In subsequent years, new 'Action Plans' on the implementation of the Federal program with lists of priority actions were adopted.

Thus, the plan was to streamline the system of Islamic education, within the framework of Islamic educational reform and in cooperation with traditional Islamic institutions, in order to ensure the possibility of training a sufficient number of specialists of proven loyalty to the government and able to work in its institutions (clerics, teachers, employees of spiritual administrations and publishers). Part of the envisioned reform was a significant reduction in the number of officially-registered Islamic educational institutions through merger or consolidation. Thus, given the existence of Islamic universities in Moscow, Kazan, Ufa, Makhachkala and other cities, the plan was to create five to six Islamic university centers (with higher and secondary educational institutions). It was supposed to provide significant financial, organizational and methodological assistance to these centers, to accelerate finalization and approval by the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation of the Islamic component of the state standards in education for the specialty of 'Theology'. Islamic educational institutions were to be granted the right to pass state accreditation, implement some secular state educational standards, for example in Arabic Philology, Oriental

53 Ibid., pp. 22-24.

Studies, Religious Studies, and Theolog , and to issue state-recognized diplomas to graduates. Islamic universities were to create departments teaching secular social-humanitarian disciplines (Russian History, Social Studies, Regional Studies, Theolog , etc.).⁵⁴

The Ministry of Education and Science developed a ‘Comprehensive program to promote development of the sphere of religious education in 2005-2015’. It provided training at secular state programs of higher education for about 600 specialists for the Muslim spiritual administrations and the Islamic educational institutions in state universities (in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar, Tyumen). This was to support field research and situational monitoring and the development and implementation of a system to promote Islamic educational institutions. To implement this comprehensive program and promote reform of Islamic education, an Interuniversity Consortium was established at the Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation. It allows higher education institutions to prepare and co-ordinate programs, as well as direction of training for specialists on Islam, to monitor the needs for them in religious organizations and state institutions, as well as to provide organizational and methodological assistance to Islamic institutions.⁵⁵

Within the framework of the program, the Ministry of Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture and Mass Communications and the Ministry of Regional Development have been tasked with ensuring implementation of the project on the basis of the existing Islamic educational institutions of two major Islamic educational centers in the Southern Federal District: in Makhachkala, on the basis of the Northern Caucasus University named after Muhammad Arip, and in Nalchik, on the basis of the Islamic Institute. The possibility of establishing similar centers in the Volga Federal District on the basis of the Islamic universities of Kazan and Ufa was also considered.⁵⁶

State funding for the federal program comes from the federal budget and regional budgets through programs funded under state policy in the fields of demography, culture and education, as well as from programs related to countering extremism and terrorism that finance activities on closed budget lines. Financing is also executed through a specially formed Foundation for the Support of Islamic Culture and Education and Science, which consists of representatives of Islamic organizations and government agencies. The well-known academician, Evgeniy Primakov, heads the board of trustees. The Foundation was established with the aim of providing additional funding for reform of Islamic education and to pool funds received from the Organization of the Islamic Conference and Islamic charities. According to an employee of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation and the Foundation, Alexei

54 Ibid., pp. 34-35.

55 Ibid., pp. 35-36.

56 Ibid., p. 36.

Grishin, in 2008-2009, the Islamic Development Bank was to allocate \$ 1.5 billion for humanitarian projects.⁵⁷

The algorithm for cooperation between religious and secular universities in the consortium is as follows. Funding is to be allocated for a given state institution, determined on as a partner of a specific Muslim university. These two universities jointly carry out the tasks from the plan of activities for various fields (scientific, educational and methodological). Under a decision of the Ministry of Education and Science, five Islamic universities were attached to five state universities. The universities include the Moscow State Linguistic University, Kuban State University (Krasnodar), Nizhny Novgorod State University, the Smolny College of Liberal Arts and Sciences of St. Petersburg State University, and the Northern Caucasus State Technical University. The non-state Islamic universities participating in the project are the Moscow Islamic University, Russian Islamic University (Kazan), Russian Islamic University (Ufa), Northern-Caucuses Islamic University named after Abu Hanifa (Nalchik), and Northern-Caucuses Islamic University Center (Makhachkala). These state universities accept target applicants under quotas (on religious grounds), based on recommendations of the Muslim spiritual administrations.⁵⁸

The results of reform

It is to be noted that the Federal program for training specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam has received contradictory assessments, both within the Muslim community and beyond it. For example, a lawyer and member of the Moscow City Public Chamber on Education, Igor Ponkin draws attention to how the program contradicts constitutional norms regarding the secular nature of the state and its noninterference in religious affairs. In his opinion, even by initiating and sponsoring the program, the state is violating the balance within Russia's multicultural society. According to him, the state

not just brought Muslim education from zero to a level unattainable for the Orthodox Church (the number of Islamic universities is much greater than the number of Orthodox institutions of higher education), but also gave an intense impetus to what is envisaged as a large-scale and imminent Islamization of Russia.⁵⁹

57 Ponkin I.V. O sodержanii, napravlenosti i posledstviyakh realizatsii Plana meropriyatii po obespecheniyu podgotovki spetsialistov s uglublennym znaniiem istorii i kul'tury islama v 2007-2010 godakh. Analiticheskaya zapiska

58 Igor Alekseev, "Traditsii i novatsii v prepodavanii islama v Rossii", pp. 39-40.

59 Ponkin I.V. O sodержanii, napravlenosti i posledstviyakh realizatsii Plana meropriyatii po obespecheniyu podgotovki spetsialistov s uglublennym znaniiem istorii i kul'tury islama v 2007-2010 godakh. Analiticheskaya zapiska

Islam, he says, thus *de facto* becomes a state-funded religion, enjoying unprecedented preference in the fields of education, training, and the organization of religious pilgrimage. The organizers of the project, Ponkin notes, intend to cultivate, ‘incubator-style’, a large body of Islamic functionaries in an unprecedentedly short period of time – theologians, philosophers, linguists, administrators and other staff for Muslim religious organizations, journalists, editors of Muslim media, professionals in publishing, etc. As a result, he believes, Islam’s potential to penetrate and spread to traditionally Orthodox territories will increase.⁶⁰

Within the Muslim community of Russia, the program’s existence is perceived primarily as positive and as something necessary and important for the Ummah. The prevailing attitude is close to that expressed by Damir Mukhetdinov, namely that

without fundamental support from the state, Muslim education, which is only now finding its feet, will certainly face new challenges, including from the supporters of anti-Russian ideas, critics of the government, and non-systemic opposition⁶¹.

Prolongation of the program is therefore certainly needed and to decide otherwise would be ‘a huge mistake and tragedy’.

At the same time, there is criticism of how the Federal program has been implemented, as indeed of the results achieved. This criticism was most obvious in 2012-2013. Its epicenter was in Moscow and, in pride of place, the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the European part of Russia (from 2014 – the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Russian Federation), led by Mufti Ravil Gainutdin. The staff of the Spiritual Administration and other affiliate institutions launched a harsh public attack on how the program has been implemented and how state-allocated funds were distributed.

In June 2012, the rector of the Moscow Islamic University, Damir Khairetdinov, noted that (five years from the start of the program) it was still not clear what kind of specialists were to be prepared at *madrasas* and Islamic universities in the country. He said:

Today, we need to define conceptually our priority: the development of religious education, with emphasis on teaching religious disciplines and the revival of domestic religious schools, or the development of secular theological education, which can incorporate graduates into the system of secular sciences and open up appropriate career prospects. As a result, there are still ongoing debates about who an Islamic educational institution is supposed to prepare – imams, ulama and theologians or secular specialists with an Islamic outlook and training?

60 Ibid.

61 Damir Mukhetdinov: Bez podderjki so storony gosudarstva musul'manskoe obrazovanie nepremenno stolknulos' by s novymi vyzovami [Damir Mukhetdinov: Without state support, Muslim education will inevitably face new challenges]: <http://www.dumrf.ru/upravlenie/speeches/10571>

In his opinion, the Muslim community of Russia needs all these kinds of specialist and it should be possible for each educational institution to find its niche within this variety, as was the case in the pre-revolutionary period. Khairtadinov also drew attention to the need to assess the effectiveness and benefits of the Federal training program for specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam, stating that:

In 2011-2013, about 900 million rubles was allocated from the federal budget, but more than half of these funds remained at secular universities – partners, who often produce anti-Islamic product in the form of atlases, field studies and other projects, which in fact profane science. All these products contribute to the spread of Islamophobia, especially in the form of Caucasophobia, and undermine the unity of the Russian civil nation. Today, we all need to ensure that the money will go to education, to our common needs.⁶²

In 2013, Sergey Markus, a journalist and staff member of the information and analysis center of the Council of Muftis of Russia, also noted that if you look at the program's results, it is clear that domestic approaches in Islamic education are still not fully formed. He points out that very few of the graduates with a high-quality professional religious education are going on to work in the field. In each institution, he says,

Islam is taught in line with the qualifications and integrity of the teachers and individual programs. There are no clear educational standards, not to mention high-quality textbooks. Even the length of training varies from one to six years.⁶³

One of the reasons for the poor results of the reform, according to Marcus, is the low level of training of the leadership and teaching staff at the Islamic universities. Nor is it possible to evaluate the social impact of training Islamic cadres at secular universities, in his view. He asks:

How many professionals have been trained since the beginning of the project in 2007? What areas do they go on to work in? Who among them has become an imam or works at the interface between 'society-state-Muslims' and 'business-society-Muslims'? There are more questions than clear answers. And this is despite the fact that so much money has already been spent. The state allocates heavily for the development of Islamic education. According to reports, financing for the program amounts to one billion and eight hundred million rubles.

Those who should, in his opinion, answer these burning questions include, first of all, those engaged in distributing funds at the Ministry of Education and, secondly, the universities that have spent their last penny on reforms.⁶⁴

62 Doklad rektora Moskovskogo Islamskogo Universiteta Damira Khairtadinova na Mejdunarodnoi nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 'Formirovanie dukhovnogo prostranstva sovremennoi Rossii'

63 Markus S. A est' li v Rossii islamskoe obrazovanie? Vopros ne ritoricheskii, a ostro jiznenniy: <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-140581.html>

64 Ibid.

The question of the low effectiveness of the Federal program was also raised in spring 2013 by Damir Mukhetdinov. According to him, the Ministry of Education annually allocates 100 million rubles for this program, but most of the money goes to secular universities, while religious ones received only 20 million a year. These funds are not enough to purchase textbooks and equipment and send students for training abroad. Damir Mukhetdinov argued that secular universities do not produce well-trained specialists in Islam. During the years of the program the Russian universities prepared some 300 graduates with an in-depth knowledge of Islam, but only 10 per cent of them found employment in the system of spiritual administrations and religious institutions. According to Mukhetdinov, the activities of the secular universities in this sphere might be considered effective if graduate employment reached at least 50 per cent.⁶⁵

Rafik Mukhametshin presented a more balanced view on the results of reform in Islamic education, noting in 2015 that there have been positive developments in the field of Islamic education in recent years and that complex underlying problems are being addressed. Thus, a system of joint confessional-public management of Islamic education is emerging. Moreover, mechanisms for developing and implementing religious education policy in Russia that provide for the integration of Islamic education within a single educational and legal space are being developed. The preparation of pedagogical and administrative staff for Muslim educational institutions is taking on systemic shape, and their training and professional retraining is taking place. This includes both scientific and methodological Islamic education within theological and legal frameworks. The organizational and administrative mechanisms ensure the availability of Islamic education, given the growing religious needs of the population.⁶⁶

According to Mukhametshin, since the Federal program began, secular and Islamic universities have created a significant number of syllabi, teaching materials, textbooks and anthologies, as well as developing new methods for teaching Arabic, designed specifically for Islamic educational institutions. Many university professors and *madrasa* teachers, imams, employees of state agencies and law enforcement agencies have been trained in the fields of the history and culture of Islam and state-confessional relations in multicultural regions. Still, Mukhametshin admits, developing Islamic education is a complex process, which is why problems in conceptual development and knowledge creation still exist and require further attention.

Thanks to the efforts of representatives of the Muslim Spiritual Administration in the Russian Federation, a new paradigm has been operating within the Federal program since 2014. According to Mukhetdinov, it has been possible

65 Lyalyakina A. V Rossii sozdatut edinoe islamskoe vysshee obrazovanie [A unified system of Islamic higher education will be established in Russia]: <http://izvestia.ru/news/545703>

66 Rafik Mukhametshin, "Strategicheskie napravleniya razvitiya musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii" [Strategic directions in the development of Muslim education in Russia], *Islam in the modern world*, 11:4 (2015), 37-39.

significantly to improve the educational and ideological level of several thousand imams from all over Russia in a short time, particularly with regard to religion-state relations. Several major events,

including international ones, have taken place within which it has become possible to change the image of our Islamic universities, the image of our country in the eyes of the world's most influential Muslim scholars and functionaries.

In his view, particularly significant results have been achieved in active co-operation with *Muftiyats* and Islamic universities of the CIS countries, in the form of the joint development of curricular and training courses for imams from CIS countries. To do this, it was, he admitted, necessary to revise the action plan, as it relates to secular universities, and introduce a mechanism for a more equitable distribution of funds within the Federal program.⁶⁷

A major issue troubling the leaders of Islamic educational institutions is the development of uniform educational standards. Despite the actualization of the Federal program throughout the whole period of activity, Muslim institutions continue to apply their own standards in their operations. As Rafik Mukhametshin has noted, colleges and *madrasas* across the country continue to operate largely independently – they themselves develop educational programs, curricula, training programs, etc. The scientific councils of institutions often initiate the development of educational programs and monitor their implementation and quality of training themselves. In practice, they do not coordinate their activities with each other. As a result, Russian Muslim educational institutions, particularly the *madrasas*, carry out their educational processes on two, three, four, or five-year programs, while universities do so on either a four or a five-year program. Work has not been carried out on identifying the optimal training systems. According to Mukhametshin, implementation of the action plan for 2007-2013 did not introduce any major changes to the situation.⁶⁸

Damir Khairtdinov agrees with his colleague. He believes that standardization of the educational system could increase horizontal cooperation and the exchange of experiences between Islamic educational institutions. It would allow for optimization of the modest possibilities Islamic universities have in terms of methodological support for the educational process. Moreover, Khairtdinov points out, standardization does not mean total uniformity:

It is impossible and totally unnecessary, given the richness and diversity of the Islamic tradition developed in different regions of Russia, as with the differences in the *madhhab*.

67 Damir Mukhetdinov: Bez podderjki so storony gosudarstva musul'manskoe obrazovanie nepremenno stolknulos' by s novymi vyzovami

68 Rafik Mukhametshin, "Strategicheskie napravleniya razvitiya musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii", p.38.

The work on curriculum standardization has, he thinks, been hampered by complications in the work of the Council on Islamic Education. In particular, he notes that:

Meetings of the heads of Islamic educational institutions within the CIE in recent years have become irregular and are not always well planned. The geographical factor also has an impact: the rectors of Islamic universities and *madrassa* directors live in far-flung parts of the country and it is not easy to get them together, especially in Kazan, where the chairman of the CIE, the rector of the Russian Islamic University, Rafik Mukhametshin, is located.⁶⁹

The issue of the standardization of Muslim education was raised again in spring 2015, during an extended meeting of the Council on Islamic Education, held in Kazan. The participants discussed the prospects for the creation of uniform educational standards, issues of oversight over the activities of Muslim universities, and a draft proposal for the development of Islamic education in Russia. For the Volga region, the Urals and Northern Caucasus, experts suggested aligning programs to schools of thought as part of the reform to create higher standards in education: one to be in accordance with the Hanafi *madhhab*, which is traditional for Tatar Muslims, another in accordance with the Shafi'i school, which is traditional for the Caucasian republics.⁷⁰ As Mukhametshin noted during a conference in Kazan in December 2016, the standards for higher Islamic education and the proposal for Islamic education in Russia have been developed by members of the CIE and already distributed to the major Islamic educational institutions of the country. It was his hope they would be approved by the leadership of the institutions in early 2017.

Future development plans

Damir Mukhetdinov has prioritized several areas of work within the updated action plan of the Federal program for the coming years. One is training specialists in the area of 'Theolog'. Here, he says, Muslims are behind their Orthodox colleagues. Islamic universities primarily have undergraduate programs. Only the Russian Islamic Institute in Kazan offers an MA in Theolog, which has not yet passed accreditation.⁷¹ To create a complete training cycle of Bachelor's and Master's degrees in the first place, one must create a database of textbooks on Islamic

69 Islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii: Problemy i perspektivy. Interv'y u s rektorom MII Damirov Khairtdinovym [Islamic education in Russia: Problems and perspectives. An interview with the rector of the MII, Damir Khairtdinov]. *Islam minbare*, 8 (2014): <http://idmedina.ru/minbare/?6056>

70 V Kazani proshlo zasedanie po islamskomu obrazovaniyu Rossii [A meeting dedicated to Islamic education in Russia held in Kazan]: <http://islamdag.ru/news/17654>

71 In July 2016, the Dagestani Humanitarian Institute received state accreditation for BA and MA training programs in 'Theolog'. It is now the only institution in Russia with an accredited MA program in Islamic Theolog.

theology for Master's level. According to Mukhetdinov, this is a very difficult task, because

you cannot just automatically translate textbooks from Oriental languages, without adapting them from the theological point of view, as many classic works display a medieval mentality, with its hate speech.

It would be ideal, he believes, for modern Tatar and Dagestani theologians to write works in beautiful Arabic, as they did for centuries before the twentieth century. Then Russian Islamic education would be competitive. Mukhetdinov admits, however, that this is merely a dream, for the present. In the meantime, Russian undergraduate programs at Islamic universities are recognized as *ibtidaiya* (entry-level) for Al-Azhar, as agreed in March 2016.⁷²

The absence of an accredited graduate level within Islamic education is, according to rector Damir Khairtdinov, mainly due to a lack of teachers with degrees. In his words,

most problematic is the fact that diplomas issued in Arab and other Muslim countries cannot be formally recognized in Russia. PhD diplomas in Theology obtained at leading Islamic universities in the Arab world are not equivalent in Russia even to BA diplomas.

This is due to the fact that the relevant authorities, and in particular the Russian Federal Ministry of Education and Science, lack experts capable of comparing the Islamic theological programs at foreign Islamic and secular universities with the programs at Russian Islamic universities. He believes a commission should be set up, as a special body to deal with the issue and allow graduates of foreign universities in Muslim countries to validate their diplomas in Russia.⁷³

Among other areas of work, Mukhetdinov also mentioned the further education of imams and their final recertification, Russian and international conferences, and working with CIS countries and Muslim minorities in Europe. Regarding the need to optimize the program, he also proposed revising the list of participants from secular universities to make it more effective.⁷⁴

In autumn 2015, at a meeting of a working group on the organization and supervision of implementation of the 'Action plan on ensuring the training of experts with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam in 2014-2016', held at the Federal Ministry of Education and Science, the proposal for training such specialists was approved. The proposal is designed to address problems in implementing the program, including the uneven development of Muslim schools in different regions

72 Damir Mukhetdinov: Bez podderjki so storony gosudarstva musul'manskoe obrazovanie nepremenno stolknulos' by s novymi vyzovami

73 Islamskoe obrazovanie v Rossii: Problemy i perspektivy. Interv'yu s rektorom MII Damirom Khairtdinovym

74 Damir Mukhetdinov: Bez podderjki so storony gosudarstva musul'manskoe obrazovanie nepremenno stolknulos' by s novymi vyzovami

of the Federation, the poor competitiveness of formal educational institutions in comparison with foreign centers and domestic informal religious schools, the lack of effective standards for programs and curricula, and a unified system for monitoring and supervising the activities of religious educational institutions, etc.⁷⁵

The Strategy for the Development of Muslim Education in Russia, published at the end of 2015 and authored by Rafik Mukhametshin, identified three main options. The first is the quality of education. It stressed that education at Muslim educational institutions in the Russian Federation must be competitive with foreign religious schools in Islamic countries. Graduates from Muslim institutions must have sufficient competence in religious and secular subjects and Arabic, as well as the skills required for religious work in the Russian context. The second is the ideology of education. Ideologically, the Muslim educational institutions should guide students to align with the interests of the Russian state and society, cultivate their sense of patriotism and continue national traditions of Muslim theology. Finally, the third is the demand for education. Muslim educational institutions must tackle the problem of the lack of personnel in the field of Islamic religion in Russia.⁷⁶

Opće karakteristike islamskog obrazovanja u savremenoj Rusiji

Sažetak

U ovom članku se analiziraju glavne karakteristike islamskog obrazovanja u savremenoj Rusiji. Obraduju se pitanja kao što je status islamskih obrazovnih institucija unutar ruskog pravnog sistema, njihove forme i problemi sa kojima se suočavaju u tom sistemu, kao i karakter reformi koje su, uz podršku države, pokrenule vođe ruske muslimanske zajednice i postignuti rezultati. Autorica tvrdi da razvoj islamskog obrazovanja u savremenoj Rusiji nije tekao bez problema, ali su, bez obzira na to, ostvareni značajni rezultati, što se ogleda i u broju i u raznovrsnosti obuhvaćenih institucija. Cilj reformi je da pretvore kvantitet u kvalitet i da podignu standard nastave u ruskim obrazovnim institucijama kako bi u tome dostigli najbolje centre islamskih nauka u svijetu.

Ključne riječi: islamsko obrazovanje, Rusija, pravni sistem, problemi, reforma.

75 Kontseptsiya podgotovki spetsialistov s uglublennym znaniem istorii i kul'tury islama [A proposal for training experts with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam]: *Islam in the modern world*, 11:4 (2015), pp. 39-40.

76 Rafik Mukhametshin, "Strategicheskie napravleniya razvitiya musul'manskogo obrazovaniya v Rossii", pp. 39-40.