

Chapter 6

The Role of Securitization in the Relationship Between State and Religion—The Example of the Kyrgyz Republic



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Abstract In this paper, we discuss the challenges of developing secular framework in relation to religion in Kyrgyzstan, the first Central Asian republic where democratic institutions were established after the collapse of the Soviet Union and which has been strongly challenged in maintaining its democratic achievements during the Tulip Revolution and other revolts in 2010 and 2020. The question we aim to answer is how processes of securitization shape the relationship between state institutions and religious organizations, knowing that Kyrgyzstan is still influenced both by the Soviet understanding of secularism and by models of secularity and governance from countries and societies with different histories and conditions of development. We look at different phases of the relationship between state and religion starting with the regime change and the establishment of a democratic state. Secondly, the establishing of a legal framework for state policy on religious organizations. Thirdly, the time of the adoption of measures to protect the interests of all citizens, believers and non-believers, and the beginning of the process of active influence of state policy on the situation in the religious sphere. And finally, the new (mis)understanding of the relations between the state and religion, both on the side of the state and religious organizations. Our theoretical point of departure is the concept of securitization, and from there on we take a discursive approach focusing on the different actors in this arena, such as state institutions and the various religious organizations and groups.

Keywords Securitization · Kyrgyz Republic · State · Religion

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6.1 Introduction

The interlinkage between religion and security is an emerging area of study within securitization theory, and its implications for research are still open. Apart from securitization theory, we introduce the normative approaches of “spiritual security” and “human security”, as they shape both the context of the main discourses as well as the perception and the action of different actors in Kyrgyzstan.

Since Buzan et al. and the theoretical approach of the Copenhagen School three main concepts have been developed and discussed: securitization, sectoral security and regional security complex theory.¹

Securitization was first embedded in theories of international relations (IR), looking into the role of identity and culture for security.² Within this school, there is a strong focus on speech acts. It can be paraphrased as such: “by labeling something a security issue [...] it becomes one”.³ Other authors claim that, “when an issue or problem has been securitized, the issue gets additional values such as threats and defense, and is often associated with solutions that come from the state only”.⁴ Hence, classical concepts of security put the state on the frontline of guaranteeing the safety and security of its citizens, with the concept of securitization this focus shifts toward other actors and stakeholders, such as civil society and religious organizations.

Consequently, the Copenhagen School has opened the following questions for analyses, namely, who defines what is and is not a security issue, and secondly, where does the securitization take place? Securitization can take place at the level of state, society or international systems; and in a diverse set of sectors such as economic, military, political and educational. This approach based on discourse has been criticized by Thierry Balzacq, who introduces the structural argument and claims that “securitization theory can capture that the power of the elite can shape certain issues as threats and determine how to deal with these issues”.⁵

According to Claire Wilkinson, the critique of the securitization theory is based on the question of whether it is suitable for analyzing the situation in countries like Kyrgyzstan at all. Some voices point to the fact that although new epistemologies are introduced into the IR theories, the underlying assumptions on which these are built are rarely questioned.⁶ Consequently, securitization theory does focus on identity and culture but in a very specific way based upon Euro-American-centric views of

¹ Buzan, Barry/Ole Wæver (2003): *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*. Cambridge University Press.

² Buzan, Barry/Wæver, Ole/de Wilde, Japp (1998): *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

³ Carsten Bagge Laustsen/Ole Weaver, 2000: In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization, *Millennium—Journal of International Studies* 2000 29, p. 708.

⁴ Buzan, B. O. (1998). *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Colorado: Lynner Rienner, p. 62.

⁵ Balzacq et al. 2015. “Securitization” revisited: “theories and cases.” *Sage Journals International Relations* 201, Vol 30 (4) 494–531.

⁶ Wilkinson C. (2007). The Copenhagen School on Tour in Kyrgyzstan: Is securitization theory useable outside Europe? *Security dialogue*, 38 (1), 5–25.

Westphalian assumptions that put the nations as the main identity of a state and national identity as collective identity.⁷ Wilkinson claims that “the focus on state-level politics means that the analysis is in danger of obscuring informal politics and their dynamics, which can possess significant influence and legitimacy”.⁸ This is highly relevant for Central Asia. Nevertheless, she concludes that “securitization theory is [...] ideally suited to an exploration of security discourses and their relative successes”.⁹

When religion is analyzed in the context of threat and security, there are two perspectives. The first is when religion and religious freedom are exposed to a threat, as in Weaver.¹⁰ The second perspective analyzes how religion is framed as a threat in itself.¹¹ Sune Lægaard does not differentiate between religion as theology, religion as identity and religion as politics—to mention only a few. According to Lægaard, securitization processes in relation to religion are “processes where political actors put single religion out for special political concern. This opens the way for political measures in relation to religiously defined objects that would otherwise not be considered permissible”.¹² In both perspectives, namely religion under threat and religion as a threat, the question of freedom of religion or the question of what consequences the process of securitization has for certain internationally guaranteed rights is decisive.

6.2 Spiritual Security

In the context of Central Asia, most of the countries including the Kyrgyz Republic are defined by the influence of the Soviet and post-Soviet heritage when it comes to dealing with religion. One of the elements of this heritage touches upon the legal position of Churches and religious communities and the idea of “spiritual security”. According to the historian Julie Elkner: “The concept of spiritual security [...] can be traced to the March 1992 Russian federal law on security [...]. At the time, an emphasis on ‘spiritual values’ [...] was intended to flag a shift away from Soviet militant atheism and from state persecution of religious believers”.¹³ Another point by

⁷ Ibid., p. 10.

⁸ Ibid., p. 10.

⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

¹⁰ Carsten Bagge Laustsen/Ole Weaver, 2000: In Defence of Religion: Sacred Referent Objects for Securitization, *Millennium—Journal of International Studies* 2000 29: 705–739

Balzacq et al. 2015. “Securitization” revisited: theories and cases.” *Sage Journals International Relations* 201, Vol 30 (4) 494–531.

¹¹ Sune Lægaard (2019): Religious toleration and securitization of religion. In: *Spaces of Tolerance. Changing Geographies and Philosophies of Religion in Today’s Europe*. Edited By Luiza Bialasiewicz, Valentina Gentile, Routledge.

¹² Ibid., p. 2.

¹³ Julie Elkner: Spiritual security in Putin’s Russia <http://www.historyandpolicy.org/policy-papers/papers/spiritual-security-in-putins-russia>.

Elkner is that the government's focus on spiritual security is designed "to preserve and strengthen traditional Russian values". The traditional values "invoked in connection with Russia's spiritual security often turn out upon closer inspection to have their roots [...] in the Soviet past, and in the Soviet regime's attitude towards ideological subversion in particular".¹⁴

According to an OSCE report, "in Russia [today], for example, many officials rely on the term 'spiritual security', when they mean that the state must defend a religious foundation for the public welfare. Sometimes this may result even in the expulsion of foreign missionaries, whose preaching has nothing to do with violence or hatred [...]".¹⁵ As we will show, both traditionalism and spiritual security are important elements when dealing with the legal position of religious organizations in Kyrgyzstan. The concept of spiritual security has been criticized intensely. According to Patricia Duval: "The very concept of State "spiritual security" violates international human rights law and standards that countries have committed to". She claims: "Although religions are totally legitimate in ensuring the orthodoxy of beliefs and practices of their followers, the intervention of States in this matter is illegitimate under international human rights standards and the principle of State neutrality in religious matters. [...] It is interesting to note that religious minorities considered as a threat to the spiritual security or health or wellbeing of citizens continue to be systematically labeled as "cults" and repressed".¹⁶

6.2.1 *Human Security*

Another normative framework on the issue of security is focusing on identifying existential threats to individual human security. According to Rita Floyd, "[it] offers an outlet to all those dissatisfied with security analysis, who are more interested in achieving securitization than simply analyzing it".¹⁷ Here we concentrate on the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Aleksandar Verkhovsky: Discrimination against religious groups in the context of security concerns Address to the Advisory Panel of Expert. <https://www.osce.org/cio/15606?download=true>.

¹⁶ Patricia Duval: The Concept of Spiritual Security and The Rights of Religious Minorities <https://freedomofbelief.net/articles/the-concept-of-spiritual-security-and-the-rights-of-religious-minorities>. Article 9.2 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides for very specific limitations which can be allowed to restrict the right to freedom of religion or belief. Those limitations have to be prescribed by law and necessary in a democratic society in the interests of public safety, for the protection of public order, health or morals, or for the protection of the rights and freedoms of others. Similarly, Article 18.3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights provides that "Freedom to manifest one's religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health, or morals or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others".

¹⁷ Floyd, Rita: Human Security and the Copenhagen School's Securitization Approach: Conceptualizing Human Security as a Securitizing Move. *Human Security Journal*, Volume 5, Winter 2007, p. 45.

documents provided by the OSCE and especially by the Council of Europe through the activities of the Venice Commission.

In the publication “Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security. Policy Guidance” of 2019, the OSCE/ODIHR defines the relationship between religion and security as follows: in OSCE terms, security is understood as “comprehensive, co-operative, equal, indivisible and grounded in human rights [...] and has three complementary dimensions: politico-military, economic and environmental, and human”.¹⁸ In discussing security-related issues in the human dimension, the OSCE policy paper offers an example from Kyrgyzstan. From the comments by the Venice Commission on the provisional Kyrgyz laws on the freedom of religion, it can be seen what kind of limitation of these rights is at issue.¹⁹ Even though the OSCE does not address these individual problems in Kyrgyzstan explicitly in the main text, but rather in a footnote, it does filter issues relating to (a) the registration of new religious communities, (b) “extremist” speech and literature, (c) screening, monitoring and searches in places of worship and meeting places, and (d) restrictions on conversion and limitations on religious or belief community activities that have a foreign connection. As we will show below, the state in Kyrgyzstan has detected these issues as potentially problematic for national cohesion and thus for the national security of the state.

6.3 Phase One: New Political Structures and New Religious Rights in 1991

At the time of the collapse of the USSR, The Republic of Kyrgyzstan introduced a democratic regime and built institutions led by a multi-party system, a constitution that embraced fundamental freedoms and rights, and free elections. On 12 October 1991, Askar Akayev was elected president and in May 1993 a new constitution was adopted. The president took a clear course toward democracy and liberalization of the legislation. Consequently, the Supreme Board of the Kyrgyz Republic, only a few months after independence, adopted the Law “On Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations” on 16 December 1991,²⁰ which aimed to restore the position and role of religion in society and to establish relations between state institutions and religious organizations.²¹ This law, based on the norms of the Final Document of the Vienna Meeting of 19 January 1989, minimized state and legal interference in the activities of religious organizations regardless of their provenance, ensured their

¹⁸ OSCE/ODIHR: Freedom of Religion or Belief and Security. Policy Guidance, p. 9.

¹⁹ Ibid, “Joint Opinion on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations in the Republic of Kyrgyzstan”, OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission, CDL-AD(2008)032, 28 October 2008. [http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD\(2008\)032-e](http://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/?pdf=CDL-AD(2008)032-e).

²⁰ The Law of the Kyrgyz Republic “On Freedom of Religion and on Religious Organizations” of December 16, 1991. Laws and regulations adopted by the eighth session of the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic of the twelfth convocation. Chap. 1. Bishkek, 1993, pp. 251–259.

²¹ Ismayilov N.A. Constitutional and legal framework for religious organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic. Bishkek, 2008, p. 28.

full participation in public life and, for the first time in the history of the Republic, provided for the effective independence of religious organizations from the state.²² Moreover, the law also guaranteed freedom of religion to all religious movements, enabled free missionary activities and open access to foreign religious educational institutions. According to official data, at the time of the Declaration of Independence there were 103 actively operating religious organizations, the largest of which were the Russian Orthodox Church (26) and various Islamic organizations (40).²³ By the end of Akayev's presidency in 2005, about 1,800 Islamic organizations, 300 Christian organizations as well as Jewish, Buddhist and other new religious movements and institutions were registered. At that time, each religious group must have registered separately and must have at least 10 resident founding citizens.²⁴ The only restriction here was the establishment of political parties based on religion. As a result of this development, reports from organizations such as the US State Department and the Helsinki Committee have stated that Kyrgyzstan guarantees the highest level of human and ethnic minority rights in the whole of Central Asia.²⁵

6.3.1 Securitization Through Religious Organizations

In the first decade of political and institutional transition of the country, representatives of various churches and religious communities showed themselves to be those who gave the discourse a special character. Already in 1994 both the leadership of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK, declare to represent Sunni Islam, Hanafi school), represented by Mufti Kimsambai Azhya, and the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC), represented by Father Vladimir Savitsky, appealed to the government. They demanded a change to the existing Law on Religion to restrict the activities of “non-traditional” religions.²⁶ According to Nazira Kurbanova, the reason given was that the new religious movements represented an unwelcome “religious and cultural expansion through the tradition of alien. Moreover, they are said to be “a factor of threat to state and national security and a source

²² Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 25.

²³ Cited by: Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 23.

²⁴ Kabak D., Esengeldiev A. Freedom of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic: overview of legal provision and practice. Bishkek, 2011, p. 15.

²⁵ Kyrgyzstan. Political conditions in the post-soviet era. Alert series. September, 1993. Washington DC, p. 4.

²⁶ Kimsambai azhy, father Vladimir Savitsky. To the government of the Kyrgyz Republic. Sects—a threat to peace/Appeal of the leaders of the Muslim clergy and the Russian Orthodox Church in Kyrgyzstan. Word of Kyrgyzstan. 04.10.1994, p. 4.

of tension in society”.²⁷ Such dictates were widely disseminated in the mass media and public discourse.²⁸

As a result of this discourse and the insistence of “traditional” religious organizations, in August 1995 the government adopted a resolution “On the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the role of the authorities in shaping state policy in the religious sphere”. The document notes that “there is indeed a deliberate introduction of various religious denominations and movements, which affects not only the public, but also official religious centers and associations. While Christian missionaries of a Protestant nature aim at a continuous evangelization of the population of the Republic, including the indigenous population, the missionaries of “holy Islam” are obsessed with the idea of building an Islamic state”.²⁹ Consequently, the government has recognized the missionary activity of Islamic preachers and preachers of so-called “non-traditional religions” as the main cause of instability in the religious sphere.

As a consequence of the growing sentiment against the so-called sects, a number of important legal and administrative acts have been adopted with the aim of systematization the activities of religious organizations and establishing control over “destructive phenomena” in the religious sphere.³⁰ A number of religious organizations, such as Akramya and Hizb-ut-Tahrir,³¹ were banned because they pose a “threat to state and public security and social stability”. Another consequence of the initiatives was the establishment of the State Commission for Religious Affairs (SCRA) by Presidential Decree in 1996. The main tasks of this Commission were the formulation and implementation of the State’s religious policy.

²⁷ Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 151.

²⁸ Look at: Sects—a threat to peace. Word of Kyrgyzstan. 04.10.1994, p. 4; Kakhanov N. Word about longevity. Komsomolskaya Pravda. 26.07.1996, p. 8; Kakhanov N. Crumbs of conquered truth. Word of Kyrgyzstan. 19.12.1996, p. 13; Andreeva V. What did Adam and Eve sow in the garden of Eden? Vecherniy Bishkek. 13.12.1996, p. 3; Psychological portrait or secrets of totalitarian sects. Vecherniy Bishkek. 10.10.2000, p. 4; Pletneva M., Skorodumova E. Afraid of Alien Prophets. Vecherniy Bishkek. 08.09.2000, p. 10. etc.

²⁹ Resolution No. 345 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic of 10 August 1995 “On the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the tasks of government bodies in shaping government policy in the area of religion”.

³⁰ Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic of 14 November 1999 «On measures to implement the rights of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic to freedom of conscience and religion»; temporary regulations: Temporary Regulations on the registration of religious organizations; Temporary Regulations on the registration of missions of foreign organizations; Temporary Regulations on religious education. Government Decision No. 20 of 17 January 1997 on the implementation of Government Decision No. 345 of 10 August 1995 “On the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic and the tasks of the authorities in shaping State policy in the religious sphere”. Resolution of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated February 19, 1998 “On the organization and implementation of pilgrimages to Mecca (Hajj Umra)” and others.

³¹ Thomas Kunze, Michail Logvinov: Islamistische Bedrohungen für Zentralasien, P. 141, Hizb ut-Tahrir lehnt politische Kompromisse ab und akzeptiert als einziges Ordnungsmodell allein einen auf der Scharia basierenden islamischen Staat. Jeder Verfassungsartikel und jegliche Rechtsprechung sollen aus der Scharia abgeleitet werden. OSCE Jahrbuch.

However, these processes of opening up toward religious freedom were first seen as ambivalent and finally as negative by individual public figures and by the academics. Policy makers, media and some intellectuals criticized the “excessive liberality” of the law and the “simplified registration system for different faiths, movements and sects, and the almost unlimited freedom of action”.³² As a result, the position that described new religious actors as destructive, extremist and occult began to spread in the country. In addition, the propaganda of Islamic fanaticism, which is mainly represented by Hizb-ut-Tahrir, was increasingly perceived.³³

The conversion of ethnic Kyrgyz as well as representatives of other ethnic minorities to some Christian free churches (different Pentecostal denominations, Seventh Day Adventists, Baptists, etc.) and Jehovah’s Witnesses as a result of active missionary activity was discussed in a socially extremely critical manner. The converts were regularly perceived by the local population as traitors not only to the “religion of the fathers”³⁴ but also to the people as a whole.³⁵ This is not surprising, since official data on the number of believers in the country were also based on the ethnic component—the statement of over 80% of the Muslim population of Kyrgyzstan.³⁶ At this point, it becomes clear that many people in Kyrgyzstan make no distinction between ethnic and religious identity and often perceive them as one identity. This provides not only a direct link between religion and ethnicity, but also fertile ground for discourse on “traditional – non-traditional religions” and for the prejudiced use of terms such as “destructive sects”, “totalitarian cults” in the media and the speeches of officials.³⁷

³² Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 26.

³³ Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010. Murzakhalilov K., Mamataliev K., Mamayusupov O. Islam in conditions of democratic development of Kyrgyzstan: comparative analysis. *Central Asia and Caucasus*, 2005, No. 3 (39), pp. 53–65. Maltabarov B.A. Religious organizations as a special form of volunteerism in the Kyrgyz Republic. *Bulletin of KNU*. 2014. <http://arch.kyrlibnet.kg/uploads/KNUMALTABAROV.B.A.2014-2.pdf>.

³⁴ T. A. Abdyrakhmanov, N. U. Kurbanova. Problems of ethno-confessional relations in modern Kyrgyzstan: search for solutions/Islam in CIS. 03.11.2010. http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/opinion/404#_ftn2.

³⁵ T. A. Abdyrakhmanov, N. U. Kurbanova. Problems of ethno-confessional relations in modern Kyrgyzstan: search for solutions/Islam in CIS. 03.11.2010. http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/opinion/404#_ftn2.

³⁶ Alisheva A. Religious situation in Kyrgyzstan. *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 1999. https://cac.org/journal/cac-05-1999/st_09_alisheva.shtml.

³⁷ Look at: Sects is a threat to peace. *Word of Kyrgyzstan*. 1 October 1994, p. 4; Lytkin Y. Hypocrisy. *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 10 February 1995, p. 3; Skorodumova E. Will God save us? *Epicercenter*. *Vecherniy Bishkek*, 24 November 1997, p. 2.

6.3.2 *Local and Regional Standards on Security*

In the first years of the new republic, there were a number of local and regional events that shaped the way security and religion were dealt with and understood. For example, the Batken Conflicts, caused by the militant “Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan” (IMU), of 1999 and 2000, gave new impetus to the legal situation. The Kyrgyz government adopted an action plan to combat religious extremism and prevent the politicization of Islam. A number of local scholars considered Afghanistan and the Taliban and their support for the IMU and the Uighur separatists as a direct threat to Kyrgyzstan and predicted the destabilization of the entire region.³⁸ The politicization of religion was seen in line with religious extremism, moreover, as its manifestation. Related to this is the recognition of Hizbut-Tahrir as an extremist organization and the prohibition of its activities in Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian states. The main sources of Islamist ideas were considered to be the strengthening of the influence of “external” Islam and preachers from Saudi Arabia and other places.

The urgency of the fight against religious extremism and terrorism was also made clear by the processes taking place in the international arena. As a result of the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in 2001 and the subsequent military actions in Afghanistan, international organizations and governments in a number of countries have been forced to review existing approaches to ensuring international and national security. The concept of securitization received more attention in the aftermath of the attacks and the wars that followed. Some researchers stated that at the time of these events there was a “stable tendency in the world to shift the focus of the fight against terrorism toward “hard” measures, forced tightening of legislation and the introduction of various types of restrictions on civil rights and freedoms”.³⁹

At the regional level, two actors are of relevance to security policy in Central Asia: the Russian-dominated Collective Security and Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Russian and Chinese-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Within the framework of both organizations, the actors have modified and signed various treaties in accordance with the new need to guarantee regional security. For example, the Collective Security Treaty signed in 1992 was transformed into the Collective Security Treaty Organization in 2002. One of the main areas of cooperation of the CSTO was the “fight against terrorism, political and religious extremism”.⁴⁰ Another important document is the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism of 15 June 2001,⁴¹ which established cooperation in

³⁸ Knyazev A. A. Security problems in Kyrgyzstan and Central Asia in the context of the Afghan war history, 1990s. Summary of the thesis. Bishkek. 2001. Scientific Library of Theses and Abstracts disserCat. <http://www.dissercat.com/content/problemy-bezopasnosti-kyrgyzstana-i-sentralnoi-azii-v-kontekste-istorii-afganskoi-voiny-199#ixzz4hbTo9C56>.

³⁹ Ostroukhov V.V. Actual challenges of countering international terrorism at the present stage. Law and security. No. 3–4 (8–9) December 2003. http://dpr.ru/pravo/pravo_6_1.htm.

⁴⁰ CSTO Secretary General Nikolay Bordyuzha: We are a single security space. 22.05.2008. http://old.redstar.ru/2008/05/22_05/1_01.html.

⁴¹ Shanghai Convention on fight against terrorism, separatism and extremism. <http://eng.sectsc.org/documents/>. It is worth mentioning the previously signed agreements such as the Bishkek

the regional anti-terrorism field, defined terrorism and other fundamental concepts necessary for the criminalization of terrorist acts and proposed an institutional system for their implementation.⁴² Although they were of paramount importance for the region, they were criticized mainly by non-governmental organizations. For example, reports by the International Federation for Human Rights state that “the tragedy of 9 September 2001 gave new impetus to the justification of a strict security policy, often leading to repressive measures against civil society and to serious violations”.⁴³ Another report by the same organization claims that human rights violations result directly from the norms of regional cooperation and from the implementation of relevant agreements. In concrete terms, human rights violations include “violations of the right to privacy, freedom of expression, peaceful assembly and association, the right to asylum and protection from torture, which are increasingly documented. The victims of these violations have little or no access to effective remedies at national level”.⁴⁴

6.4 Phase Two: Religious Extremism Versus Securitization

During the presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, who won the elections after the so-called “Tulip Revolution” in March 2005, the laws that are still in force today were passed. During this period, the state intensified its activities related to the problems that “require urgent solutions: problems of proselytism, interdenominational conflicts, the intensification of extremism in society”.⁴⁵ To address these problems, in May 2006 the Government adopted Resolution No. 324 “On the Concept of Public Policy in the Religious Sphere of the Kyrgyz Republic”. The Concept emphasized the Sunni Islam of Hanafi school and the Russian Orthodox Church as the traditional religious associations of the country and stressed that “interreligious and state-religious relations in Kyrgyzstan depend largely on the state’s relations with these religious

Memorandum on Cooperation and Interaction of Law Enforcement Agencies and Special Services of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the People’s Republic of China, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation and the Republic of Tajikistan dated 2 December 1999, the Agreement on Cooperation of the Member States of the Commonwealth of Independent States in Combating Terrorism dated 4 June 1999, and others.

⁴² Chernyadieva, N. A. Antiterrorist agreements of CIS and SCO: the main problems of intercontractual coordination (in Russian). *Eurasian Security*. 3 (82)2015. https://www.eurasialaw.ru/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=7280:2015-04-23-05-57-58&catid=557:2017-03-14-14-06-29&Itemid=821.

⁴³ Publication of a report: “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: a vehicle for human rights violations”. <https://www.fidh.org/en/region/europe-central-asia/publication-of-a-report-shanghai-cooperation-organisation-a-vehicle>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ Kurbanova N. U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX–XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 29.

organizations.⁴⁶ The significance of “The Concept” lies above all in the fact that a broad social discourse about so called traditionalism of religions has been initiated.

In June 2006, during the Kyrgyz national conference of legislation on religion in Bishkek, the State Secretary of the Kyrgyz Republic A. Madumarov proposed to tighten legislation in the religious sphere and to put all financial flows from abroad in support of religious communities under strict control of the state.

The aim was to minimize religious extremism in the country. In this context, he said: “This is in the interest of the security of the Kyrgyz citizens. A large number of religious personalities are coming to us. What do they teach? What are they raised with? The state is obliged to know all this”.⁴⁷ The background of these statements reflects the Soviet understanding of secularism, which is still widely in place in the post-soviet Central Asia, today, namely prioritizing state control over freedoms and individual responsibility, and which overlap with the current notion of security. At the same time, the obligatory registration procedure for all entities from the religious sphere was discussed and appropriate reforms were introduced in the legal framework of Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, the first document signed by President Bakiyev three days after his inauguration, on 17 August 2005, was the law “On Combating Extremist Activities”.⁴⁸

There are different interpretations of this anti-extremism law. According to the lawyer Leyla Sydykova, the response of the Kyrgyz government and other governments in the region to the rise of religious extremist groups since 2002 shows “a fairly high degree of urgency in the fight against extremism, which is actively gaining strength and is taking on not only a regional or local, but also an international character of propagation”.⁴⁹ She also points out that this circumstance formed the basis for the development of the Model Law “On Combating Extremism” by the Inter-parliamentary Assembly of CIS Member States in 2009.⁵⁰ However, the political analyst at the National Institute for Strategic Studies in Kyrgyzstan Iqbol Mirsaitov assumes that China, in particular, had a major influence on Kyrgyz policy in the drafting and adoption of the law.⁵¹ The reason for this lies in the Uighur minority in China, who from the Chinese perspective are considered separatists and who are said to have been involved in secret activities in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan. Mirsaitov paraphrased that “The law was passed primarily to please a strategic partner and

⁴⁶ Concepts of state policy in the religious sphere in the Kyrgyz Republic. Approved by Resolution No. 324 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic on 6 May 2006 (expired). <http://Cbd.minjust.Gov.kg/Handeln/anshen/Ru-Ru/57409?Cl=ru-ru>.

⁴⁷ The Kyrgyz leadership intends to tighten its legislation on religion. <https://24.kg/archive/ru/community/4118-2006/07/12/4414.html/>.

⁴⁸ Zhusupaliev E. Kyrgyzstan has adopted a law on combating extremism. 07.09.2005. <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/3951>.

⁴⁹ Sydykova L.C. Fighting extremism in Kyrgyzstan: problems of legislative regulation. KRSU Newsletter. 2016. Volume 16, No. 6, pp. 84–87, p. 84.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ From an interview with Iqbol Mirsaitov to the news agency “Fergana”, 07.09.2005. Zhusupaliyev E. V. Kyrgyzstan adopted a law on combating extremism. <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/3951>.

neighbor like China”.⁵² This opinion shared some other analysts who stated that there are still no serious extremist structures in Kyrgyzstan that could threaten the state order. However, it should be noted that the accelerated adoption of the law was also influenced by armed attacks by extremist groups that took place in the south of the country from March until July 2006, when disparate clandestine groups, splintering from the IMU, attacked law enforcements and important services in Osh and Djalal-Abad regions.⁵³

Further legal measures to combat extremism followed shortly, such as the 2006 law “On Countering Extremist Activities”. It lays down the basic principles of counter-terrorism and the organizational and legal framework for preventing and combating extremism and the subsequent terror that could come from extremist groups. To implement and monitor the law, an anti-terrorism center was established under the authority of the National Security Body of the Kyrgyz Republic.⁵⁴ The terms “extremism activities” and “anti-terrorism center” indicate that the state law lacks differentiation between extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism. Although the Law on “Countering Extremist Activities” does not define “religious extremism”, the list of the extremist and terrorist banned organizations indicates that all of them have a religious background.⁵⁵ Moreover, at that time this list was published solely on the website of the State commission for religious affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The former head of the State Department for Religious Affairs of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic, Toigonbek Kalmatov, claimed that “about 500 religious organizations operate illegally, including the already forbidden radical Hizbut-Tahrir party, Satanists, the White Brotherhood, the Maharishi cult and others”.⁵⁶ He proposed further tightening state control over religious organizations by developing the relevant legal framework. The way was paved for a new law. Consequently, the Kyrgyz Parliament, also called the Supreme Council or Jogorku Kenesh, adopted a “Resolution on the Establishment of a Parliamentary Commission to Investigate the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic” (NR. 409-IV) on 22 May 2008. This resolution emphasized, the members of Jogorku Kenesh noted that on the basis of appeals by citizens, politicians and scientists various totalitarian groups, reactionary sects and extremist movements were operating illegally in the countries. These “illegal operations” included the participation of Kyrgyz youth in Protestant organizations, the activities of missionaries, preachers of Islam, also called daavatists, the uncontrolled and non-approved construction and opening of mosques, madrasas and churches, and also the lack of control of religious education as well as of the Hajj

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ “Hot” Spring and Summer 2006 of the law enforcement agencies and special services of Kyrgyzstan. 23.08.2006. <https://24.kg/archive/ru/news-stall/5705-2006/08/23/6027.html/>.

⁵⁴ Law of the Kyrgyz Republic No. 178 dated 8 November 2006 “On Combating Terrorism”. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/1971>.

⁵⁵ For the list of organizations whose activities are prohibited in the Kyrgyz Republic see: State commission for religious affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic. http://religion.gov.kg/ru/religion_organization/blocked.

⁵⁶ Kyrgyz authorities intend to strengthen control over the activities of religious organizations. Interfax-Religion. 12 July 2007. <http://www.interfax-religion.ru/?act=news&div=19219>.

organization.⁵⁷ They all posed a threat to inter-ethnic harmony. The Parliamentary Commission had one month to inquire on the religious situation and the relations between state and religion and to make proposals for improving the legislation.

The results of the analysis formed the basis for the Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organisations, which was approved in December 2008. The main provisions of this law were: the prohibition of proselytism, the transfer of the legal authority of registration of organizations and missionaries to SCRA, and the increase in the number of initiators in the registration of religious groups from 10 to 200.⁵⁸ Government officials made no secret of the fact that the new law was an attempt to “protect society from the existence of small sects”⁵⁹ The counter-terrorism law has been subject to constant criticism. Ever since, human rights organizations have considered the increase in the number of believers as discrimination against religious minorities, as it significantly limited their ability to obtain registration. Some experts noted that it was possibly precisely the state’s “measures that could lead to the state being the main cause of the radicalization of the religious part of the Muslim population”.⁶⁰ Due to the lack of distinction between religious radicalization and political terrorism within the legal frameworks, counter-terrorism raids have been misused to deal with radicalization in the country (HRW report <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/17/we-live-constant-fear/possession-extremist-material-kyrgyzstan>).

6.5 Phase Three: New Polarizations, New Clashes

Since the change of constitution and shift of political system in 2011 after dramatic and violent clashes in 2010, a new episode in the relationship between state and religion was marked by the presidency of Almazbek Atambayev, from 2011 to 2017. He started using stronger nationalistic rhetoric. The president publicly positioned himself against religious extremism, allegedly imported from outside the country. He condemned the so-called Arabization of the population and the wearing of the headscarf, and strongly opposed any “harmful” influence of Western culture such as LGBTIQ rights, or of other sexual minorities. The president also left a train of inconsistent policy of introducing secular values, which seemed to have the opposite effect

⁵⁷ Resolution of the Jogorku Kenesh of KR “On establishing a parliamentary commission to study the religious situation in the Kyrgyz Republic” dated May 22, 2008, # 409-IV. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/50383>.

⁵⁸ Law No. 282 of 31 December 2008 on Freedom of Religion and Religious Organizations in the Kyrgyz Republic. <http://cbd.minjust.gov.kg/act/view/ru-ru/202498>.

⁵⁹ Kurbanova N.U. Religion in social and political life of Kyrgyzstan at the turn of XX-XXI centuries. Bishkek, 2010, p. 30.

⁶⁰ Expert assessment of risks and security based on the results of a study of the religious situation in the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic. 05.11.2008. <http://www.easttime.ru/analitic/3/11/516p.html>.

and intensifies opposition between secular and religious positions in the country.⁶¹ Similar to the religious-traditionalist positions, one can find foreshortenings in the secular positions: an increased rejection of religious lifestyles and the manifestation of any form of religiosity in public life, as well as the perception of any religious activity as attempts at proselytizing.

With regard to religion, the concept of state policy in the religious sphere (2006) as well as the Law on Religious Freedom (2008) continued to apply. In the meantime, however, both have come under criticism from human rights organizations and religious organizations. There was an active debate in the media whether these documents should be understood as too “liberal” or as “reactionary”. Local human rights organizations such as “Open Viewpoint”, “Kylym Shamy” and others have sometimes spoken of a tightening of legislation and its implementation, which has resulted in a preference for traditional religious organizations.

Meanwhile, so-called “traditional religious organizations”, which had long been regarded as religious communities loyal to the state, also found themselves in growing tension with the government and, in particular, with SCRA. The tensions between the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), the largest religious organization in the country, and SCRA are particularly striking. The trigger for these tensions since 2010 was the question of whose competence the organization of the Hajj lies—SAMK or SCRA. In 2011, there was an open confrontation between the Director of the State Commission, Ormon Sharshenov, and the Muslim-led Muftiate, in which both institutions lost much of their public credibility.⁶²

Tensions also arose with the second “traditional organization”—the Russian Orthodox Church in Kyrgyzstan. It had, up to then, been loyal to all state initiatives in the field of religion. Here the trigger was the question about the new registration of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Russian Orthodox Church encountered difficulties in re-registration due to a change of name of the diocese in connection with the revival of the principle of territorial division of metropolitan areas, which was applied in pre-revolutionary Russia. After introducing a new religious law in 2008, all changes in religious structure must go through SCRA, and all organizations that have “head offices” were automatically understood to be a mission. So Russian Orthodox Church in Kyrgyzstan faced a challenge not to belong to the local “traditional” religious organization any longer, but to be understood as a missionary of foreign Russian religious organization.

⁶¹ Indira Aslanova. Challenges and Achievements in The Implementation of the Concept of State Policy in the Religion Sphere in Kyrgyzstan. Cabar Asia, 06.12.2016. <https://cabar.asia/en/indira-aslanova-challenges-and-achievements-in-the-implementation-of-the-concept-of-state-policy-in-the-religion-sphere-in-kyrgyzstan/>.

⁶² Bakyt Nurdinov: We have a record where the head of the State Commission for Religious Affairs proposes to slaughter the Supreme Mufti, 2011. K-news. <http://knews.kg/2011/12/bakyt-nurdinov-u-nas-est-zapis-gde-glava-goskomissii-po-delam-religiy-predlagaet-zarezat-verhov-nogo-muftiya/>; Mufti of Kyrgyzstan has sued the director of the Commission on Religious Affairs. Islam in CIS. <http://www.islamsng.com/kgz/news/3587>; Ormon Sharshenov: “I have never called anyone to ‘kill’ Mufti Chubak azhy Jalilov”. K-news. <http://knews.kg/2011/12/ormon-sharshenov-ya-nikogo-i-nikogda-ne-prizyival-raspravitsya-s-muftiem-chubakom-ajyi-jalilovyim/>; There are millions around the Hajj organization. May 14, 2015. <https://rus.azattyk.org/a/27015292.html>.

6.5.1 *Public Discourse and Media*

In comparison to other Central Asian countries, Kyrgyzstan enjoys thus far a relative free media. Therefore, media analysis can be used to analyze the public perception of religion. Media content analysis on religious issues for 2012–2013 shows that the reporting was mainly related to the requirements to strengthen the control of religious organizations and to the fight against and prohibition of so-called sects and cults.⁶³ In particular, the nature of the Unification Church's activity and the connections of important politicians to it were the subject of heated debate. Another main topic was the influence of the so-called Islamic factor.

Overall, the rise of extremist religious groups, the increase in the population's religiosity and the wearing of visible religious symbols in secondary schools were discussed among citizens and religious activists groups. Muslim NGOs raised the question of banning the wearing of headscarves for the leaders and teachers of some secular schools. This problem contributed to social division not only along religious but also along ethnic lines. For example, representatives of indigenous ethnic groups have a rather neutral view when it comes to wearing traditional Islamic clothing, which is often a requirement for girls from the ninth grade upwards. These groups see this not only as an expression of ones' own religious but also as an ethnic identification as a guarantee for a good moral education. On the other hand, representatives of other local ethnic groups tend to see this as a manifestation of religious extremism and an attempt to impose Islam on children. This problem is most acute in the northern part of the country in the Kyrgyzstan provinces of Chui and Issyk-Kul and in the capital region of Bishkek.

The specific context in which the idea of the "Islamic factor" became a particularly sensitive issue was the (intended) projections of two foreign-produced films.

The movie "I am gay and Muslim" depicting a young Moroccan man and his struggle for identity, and that was supposed to be screened in 2012 at the Human Rights Festival in Bishkek, was banned by the local district court as a film with "extremist views" because it depicted homosexuality among male Muslims.⁶⁴ Another film that caused massive discontent was the screening of "Muslim Innocence" in 2012. The film was criticized for its presumably blasphemous content.⁶⁵ Both films had been produced abroad, the first in the Netherlands and the second in the USA, and both led to widespread negative public response—often without having watched it because the films had not been screened broadly. Even if these

⁶³ Indira Aslanova, Galina Kolodzinskaya. Forecast of the Development of the Religious Situation in the Kyrgyz Republic until 2017 (non-Islamic sector). Analytical note, AUPKR, Bishkek 2013. Unpublished manuscript.

⁶⁴ The film "I am gay and a Muslim" was declared extremist in Kyrgyzstan. September 28, 2012. <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/268114>.

⁶⁵ Protest against the film "Innocence of Muslims" in Bishkek. September 25, 2012. <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/24719174.html>. Innocence of Muslims: a dark demonstration of the power of film. September 17, 2012. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2012/sep/17/innocence-of-muslims-demonstration-film>.

films did not reach a broad audience, the responses at that time also reflected the extent to which Islamization of society had already taken place.

6.5.2 *The State Concept and Its Revision*

State bodies, including the SCRA, regulating the constitutional setting on freedom of religion noted the need to revise “The Concept”. They argued that it no longer meets the new threats and is not consistent with the new version of the Constitution (2010) in a number of provisions. In the countries’ Sustainable Development Strategy for 2013–2017, this revision was expressed as a necessity to revise the concept of state policy in the religious sphere of the Kyrgyz Republic as stated in the Law No. 324 from 2006 and to provide for necessary changes in the legislation on the religious sphere. In essence, development strategy focuses on ensuring security and combating radical religious movements. It is also indicative that the Defence Council, although it does not fall within the direct competence of this body, approved of this strategy.

In assessing the government’s new initiatives to reform the religious sphere, the political scientist Nurgul Esenamanova noted that thus far “no serious or clear state policy on religion was pursued throughout the independence of Kyrgyzstan”.⁶⁶ She argues that the consequences of these processes were manifold. First, the penetration and development of radical ideologies among different population groups; Second, the stratification of Islamic society under the influence of various currents that emerged from outside; Third, religious illiteracy leading to dogmatism and a maximalist understanding of the principles of Islam; Fourth, the manifestation of extremist organizations with the main purpose of overthrowing constitutional power and building a theocratic state; Fifth, the active, sometimes intrusive attempts to convert other citizens to their own forms.⁶⁷ In this context, the government decided to publish a new concept of state policy in the religious sphere for the period from 2014 to 2020 that was developed along with representatives of civil society and religious organizations and signed by the President in 2014 and which emphasizes the coordination between state and religious organizations in preventing extremism.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said the process of entanglement of the development of a secular state and the freedom of religion is counteracted by the interlinkage of ethnicity with religion in Kyrgyzstan. During the transition period in the 1990s, the

⁶⁶ Nurgul Esenamanova. To what extent the Concept in the religious sphere can solve the problem of radicalization of Islam? <https://cabar.asia/ru/nurgul-esenamanova-naskolko-kontsepsiya-v-religioznoj-sfere-sposobna-reshit-problemu-radikalizatsii-islama/>.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

country not only saw a change in the religious landscape of Kyrgyzstan, but also the first legal regulation of religious organizations. Religious freedoms that were guaranteed to all religious actors were enshrined in law in 1991. This phase also saw the beginning of the discourse on the threat of “the spread of non-traditional religious movements”, such as foreign missionary groups of Christian and Islamic origin. The climax of the development is the initiative of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims and the Russian Orthodox Church to withdraw religious rights from the new religious movements, cults and Islamic extremists. This was followed on the one hand by the banning of various Islamic and Protestant organizations, and on the other hand by the establishment of a State Commission for Religious Affairs, in order to outsource religious affairs from the highest state authorities. These divergent developments, which were already evident in the first phase, laid the foundations for ever-increasing ambivalence in this area. It is striking that security problems are being addressed both by politicians and by representatives of “traditional” religious organizations in similar ways. Moreover, both sides find in the same actors the danger for national and inter-religious cohesion.

This is followed by a phase of strengthening conceptual and legal security, and bringing in the concept of securitization, namely by looking into how religious norms contradict or reconcile with the state’s interest for safety and security in the country. During the Presidency of Kurmanbek Bakiyev from 2005 to 2010, several laws were passed with the intention to combat extremist activities. These laws make it possible to prohibit financial support for religious institutions from abroad, review religious content in religious media, and reform the registration procedure to the detriment of religious communities in terms of numbers. At the same time, however, the question of which authority can judge what or who is a “sect” and/or an “extremist” remains open. The Law on Religious Freedom and Religious Organisations of 2008 reflects an extremely negative attitude toward small organizations of Protestant origin, whose religious rights were minimized accordingly.

The state Concept on public policy in the religious sphere adopted in 2006 supported the idea that the Islamic Hanafi school represented by SAMK and the Russian Orthodox Church are traditional religions and close to the state. The discourse on traditionalism, which had begun in the first phase, experienced not only a continuation but also a practical anchoring in the mentioned policy. Analytically speaking, there are different opinions about what aggravated the security threat at this phase. On the one hand, this lies in “authoritarianism and regionalism”.⁶⁸ On the other hand, it lies in external factors, discourses and actors who provide decisive impulses.⁶⁹

In the third phase, after the political shifts and reforms in 2011, further elements can be identified that call for more security and at the same time polarize society. In his official speeches, the then president linked Sunni Hanafi religious identity with the Kyrgyz national identity. On the other hand, he tried to strengthen a secular position by condemning the wearing of religious symbols. By this, the president

⁶⁸ Personal interview with *Ikbol Mirsaitov*. 20.05.2017.

⁶⁹ Personal interview with *Emil Juraev*. 22.05.2017.

understood above all the wearing of headscarves. His statements, in which he tries to combine different positions in the secular state, have ambivalent effect. Even in the third phase of government policy,⁷⁰ and in corresponding decrees and discourses on religion as a factor of threat to national security, the state names and repeats the same problems as at the beginning of the Republic: lack of control of religion by the state, missionary work, extremism and terrorism, and “non-traditional” religions.

The results of the analysis point to that the political and the religious field, defined as traditionalist, are hierarchically related to each other, but that they overlap to some extent and pursue similar interests. Structurally, politics and religion meet at the place of the highest decision-makers. On the one side there are the state institutions, such as courts, councils and law makers and on the other side, influential leaders of religious communities, which have shown a high affinity to each other, too. In terms of content, they overlap at the point where risks and necessary safeguards are interpreted into society as they assume a similar understanding of the risks and threats. By minimizing the number of stately acknowledged “small religious groups”, religious missionaries but also politicians in state bodies which do not share the “traditional” positions, the representatives of the state and stately acknowledged religious institutions can shape the political processes and structures solely among themselves. One of the results is that state security measures strongly supported by different religious actors have increased with every phase of the state. However, the desired security effects are not achieved. On the contrary, the threat to the freedom of religion has been criticized by human rights organizations but has not been discussed thoroughly at any governmental level.

As illustrated above, both governmental institutions and parliament on one hand, and the representatives of “traditional” religious organizations acknowledged by the state (here SAMK and ROC) on the other, have not only similar understanding of the meaning of “religious” threats but also similar understanding in regard with the concept of the state.

At this point, it can be concluded that the question of religious freedom is defined solely at the position of the highest political and religious power. This confirms Balzaq’s statement that the power of the elites (political, religious) has a strong influence on the notion of securitization. In theoretical terms discussed in the introduction, in Kyrgyzstan we do not find either or situation: Either religion is under threat, or religion is a threat for society. The case study shows that at the same moment when certain religious groups are perceived as a threat by the religious actors with the highest religious power, such as SAMK and ROC, the very idea of religious freedom is immediately under threat.

Additionally, securitization discourse is representative for the discourse on the formation of the nation state, with challenges such as high internal and external heterogeneity, and the struggle to shield the state from threats of any kind. This “search” for a state *ex negativo* may be motivating for the state elites for a while, but it does not offer any further prospects for the future along which development can

⁷⁰ Compare the Government Decision of 1995, the Security Council Decision of 2007 and the Defence Council Decision of 2014.

bring changes in this respect. Both in engaging with the threats through radical religious groups and with the conception of the state, religious and political stakeholders deal solely with collective identities. Consequently, this understanding creates simplifications in the understanding of current issues. The result is that in spite of a local tradition of ethnic and religious plurality, the nation state that only defines one or two religions as “traditional”, leads to one in which ethnicity, national and religious identity overlap. Following this, the state neither allows enough room for the originally intended religious rights, nor does the state put a stop to religious extremists.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that the control of selected religious organizations such as Jehovah’s Witnesses, The Local Church of Jesus Christ, The Church of Scientology and The Unification Church, which are understood as sects, radical groups and hence threats to national security, is not well thought out. Firstly, it is not clear on the basis of which elements of numerically small religious organizations can be understood as a threat to national security. The most important argument is that their origin is claimed not to be national. Secondly, it is not clear how religious extremism is exactly defined by the government. The current arguments range from the wearing of a headscarf to calling for an Islamic state. As a result, an increasing number of Islamic religious organizations, such as Tablig Jamaat and Yakyn Inkar, and individuals are perceived as a threat to national security, leading to increased security activities that affect more and more people. Since this argumentative multiplication of threat scenarios is fed by local, regional and international discourse, it is constantly gaining new legitimacy.

This lack of fit between problem and solution has far-reaching consequences: it underpins the split between different positions in society and leads to ever more violations of religious rights. Consequently, the question must be asked whether the one-sided perception of specific religious groups as a threat that entails more and more securitization—is the right way. Or whether the securitization is rather functionalized in order to circumvent other still outstanding questions.

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