



British Embassy  
Bishkek



# **BASELINE ASSESSMENT REPORT**

## **IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE “STRENGTHENING CAPACITY TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC” PROJECT**

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*Bishkek, 2013*

*This report has been produced by the Representative Office of the Search for Common Ground (SFCG) in the Kyrgyz Republic, with the support of the British embassy in Bishkek. The views and opinions expressed in this publication are of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the institutional policies or views of SFCG or the British embassy.*

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December 2013

# **ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS**

|           |   |
|-----------|---|
| 10 SU MIA | – 10 <sup>th</sup> Special Unit, Ministry of Interior Affairs |
| CWG       | – Consultative Working Group                                  |
| EU        | – European Union  |
| HT        | – Hizb-ut Tahrir  |
| KR        | – Kyrgyz Republic   |
| OCST      | – Organisation of the Collective Security Treaty              |
| SAMK      | – Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan           |
| SCO       | – Shanghai Cooperation Organisation                           |
| SCRA      | – State Commission on Religious Affairs                       |
| SCNB      | – State Committee on National Security                        |
| SPS       | – State Penitentiary System                                   |
| NSSD      | – National Strategy of Sustainable Development                |
| TJ        | – Tablighi Jamaat   |

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## PREFACE

This baseline study was carried out by Search for Common Ground (SFCG) from August 1 to November 30, 2013 for the project "Strengthening capacity to prevent violent extremism in the Kyrgyz Republic" funded by the British Embassy in Bishkek. The project aims at building partnership and consolidation of joint efforts to prevent violent extremism in the country.

The project stands out among many other projects implemented by non-governmental organisations, as the Consultative Working Group (CWG) would determine specific activities in each of its three broad dimensions. The CWG consists of 17 members including representatives of the Defence Council under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, the State Committee on Religious Affairs (SCRA), 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (10SU MIA), the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK), theologians of the Osh State University, Arashan Institute, Kyrgyz-Turkish Manas University and Kyrgyz Russian Slavic University, as well as experts on religion and security. The aforementioned three main dimensions include:

1. Building capacity of traditional Islamic religious leaders and creation of a platform for dialogue with different Muslim religious communities under the Muftiate;
2. Promotion of pluralism and modern principles of conflict transformation through religious traditions of Central Asia;
3. Building of dialogue, cooperation and trust between the security sector and Islamic religious communities

As part of monitoring and evaluation of the entire project, the baseline assessment is commissioned to identify the "picture before" prior to project implementation. The baseline assessment aims to identify already existing relationships between key participants who work directly with the Islamic religious sphere - SCRA, 10SU MIA and SAMK (Muftiate) - as well as to identify the existing initiatives or efforts taken to fulfill the above three dimensions. Accordingly, baseline assessment will serve as internal and external accountability of the project and in its interaction with the CWG as well as an instrument for data collection of the "picture after" upon completion of the project implementation. The current data collection and further comparison of the baseline and end- line data will help determine whether the project has achieved its goals and objectives and whether the project had an anticipated impact.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Starting from the period of independence Kyrgyzstan has been experiencing Islamic diversity due to its liberal legislation and activism of Muslims inside and outside of the country. Islam began to hold a strong position in the life of citizens; however, a specific set of problems and difficulties that transformed into a debate between believers and secular groups. This kind of clash of views on how modern society in Kyrgyzstan should interact with religion can also be related to the fact that the government has no clear policy in the religious sphere. Moreover, there is a difference in how the state and the Islamic organisations perceive manifestations of violent extremism.

In Central Asia, and Kyrgyzstan in particular, appearance of different Islamic schools of thought cause concern among government agencies. The situation is complicated by the fact that the countries have started witnessing appearance of informal and non-traditional politico-religious organisations advocating violent change of the constitutional system and replace the existing political regime with pseudo-utopian social religious institutions. Unconventional and informal Islamic organisations began to function and build an alternative system of values and principles that gradually replace existing official Islamic clergy.

Parallel to this, there is no uniform approach in defining problems associated with radicalism and violent extremism among experts the law enforcement. There has never been a national (country) level survey conducted identifying specific positions of different social groups in their relation to - both religion and religious policy of the state and around issues of local concern that lead to polemics and public resonance (such as wearing head scarfs in public education facilities) - that divide the Kyrgyzstani society into religious and secularists.

In order to assess relation and inter-linkages between government bodies and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, this baseline study was conducted to identify how this interaction should be built. To do this, an analysis of existing legislation on religious sphere was conducted. This analysis includes the Constitution (2010), Concept of State Policy in the religious sphere of the Kyrgyz Republic (2006), Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations (2009), the Law on Combating Extremist Activity (2006), Law on Combating Terrorism (2008), Concept of National security of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012), and the National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS) for the period 2013-2017, as well as provisions on and statutes of state institutions working with the religious sphere.

The legal framework analysis revealed major inconsistencies in the legislation of the country. For example, there are contradictions in the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations with the Constitution of the country. Moreover, almost none of the existing legislation does not clearly identify importance and suggests form of inter-sectoral cooperation between government and religious institutions. Out of all legislative acts that touch upon religion only the Law on Combating Extremist Activity and NSDS indicate the importance of cooperation of all sectors - state, security, and religion- to counter manifestations of violent extremism. It should be noted that under the legal provisions and statutes of the government bodies, they have functions controlling the religious sphere and religious organisations, and the main document that identifies government vision and role

in the religious affairs, namely the Concept of State Policy in the religious sphere, does not reflect current challenges and difficulties in the field of religious extremism. Thus, the legal framework of the Kyrgyzstan does not identify means of cooperation and partnerships between government agencies and SAMK in preventing violent extremism.

The results of the legal framework analysis have been incorporated in compilation of methodology of the field research carried out through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The stakeholders working in the sphere of violent extremism consisting of government officials and clergy were interviewed. Namely, four representatives (two from the Northern and two from Southern divisions) of the 10SU MIA, SCRA and SAMK were interviewed; as well as series of focus group discussions were organised with heads of *kazyats* and madrassas, and a separate focus group discussion of indirect stakeholders including local activists and leaders of Islamic religious communities. In view of the sensitivity of the information and the scope of the respondents' work, the project guarantees confidentiality of the source of information. This field research through interviews and focus groups were conducted with a standardised questionnaire elaborated around four main indicators:

1. Relations between key stakeholders on prevention of violent extremism;
2. Muftiate as a platform for dialogue on prevention of violent extremism;
3. Islamic principles and values as a tool in the prevention of conflicts and violent extremism;
4. Relationships in the intra-Islamic sphere on prevention of violent extremism

These indicators were chosen to identify the existing relations between the state authorities, Muftiate and Muslim communities and their leaders, as well as to identify existing capacity for dialogue and research of Islamic principles in conflict prevention and countering of violent extremism. Thereafter, the data gathered during the key informant interviews and focus group discussions was coded to identify patterns in interactions and inter-linkages of key stakeholders. The stakeholder analysis was done through uncovering positions and interests of sides in regards to each of the indicators. This type of analysis shed light upon interests, positions, needs and motivation of each key stakeholder on issues of religion and violent extremism.

**As per the first indicator on relations between key stakeholders on prevention of violent extremism,** the analysis has revealed that not only the parties have different positions on this issue, but also a different understanding and interpretation of what constitutes extremism and how it should be dealt with. While SCRA sees it as a control and accountability of religious organisations, the 10 SU MIA considers Muftiate as a source of information in countering manifestations of violent extremism. For part of the informal Islamic organisations Muftiate is a group of misguided Muslims, and for another more radical part, Muftiate is a 'traitor of Islam' who cooperates with the secular government. It becomes clear that the interaction with all parties studied is possible under certain conditions. However, the most difficult, is to engage in dialogue with representatives of Hizb-ut Tahrir and Salafism since common grounds between state bodies and radical Islamic organisations have not yet been found.

As per interaction between state agencies and Muftiate on countering violent extremism, there is a twofold position: on the one hand, state and Muftiate is willing to cooperate to increase synergies to counter violent extremism, but on the other hand, such

cooperation has not been backed by existing legislation. In fact, any active interaction of Muftiate with state bodies puts Muftiate into the political arena, which is currently prohibited by law. Hence, without realizing it, state agencies themselves politicise the issue and push Muftiate into the political arena. Moreover, none of the legal acts (including regulations and provisions on the activities of state bodies) do not reveal the mechanisms for State-Faith interaction and do not online which institution should bear the primary role in this matter. Position of the state policy in the sphere of religion remains unclear, leading to lack of a common approach to prevent violent extremism in the country.

**On the results on the second indicator on Muftiate as a platform for dialogue on prevention of violent extremism**, the research results have shown that the prevailing Islamic diversity in the Kyrgyz Republic is today's greatest achievement. Currently, Muftiate includes representatives of all interested religious communities by ethnic, gender, age categories. The Muftiate can serve as a platform for dialogue, but it needs support of the state and civil society. As the analysis reveal, a dialogue under the Muftiate is possible provided that the parties hold several rounds of negotiation and they build well-targeted communication strategies. However, above all, the stakeholders indicated that in order to serve as a dialogue platform, there is a need to strengthen capacity of imams in ideological counteraction of violent extremism. Today Muftiate lags behind those of other non-traditional and unconventional Islamic organisations and the existing set of knowledge and experience of local imams do not allow them to join the discussion and debate with representatives of non-traditional and unconventional Islamic organisations. This requires a certain level of reforms, such as the standardisation of education in Islamic schools (currently there is no standardised curriculum in religious education facilities), increasing transparency of funds raised during Hajj and sadaqah and redirection of revenues from these funds to training and capacity building of imams.

**According to the results of the third indicator on Islamic principles and values as a tool in the prevention of conflicts and violent extremism**, all stakeholders agree that Islamic principles can be applied in practice in the field of conflict resolution and pre-emption of manifestations of violent extremism. However, the stakeholders do not have a common approach on how and according to which criteria they would be selected. Development of common Islamic values that will not only help resolve conflicts, conduct mediation and negotiation with the parties, but would also help both Muftiate and public authorities to reduce the level of conflict and the threat of violent manifestations of extremism and radicalism. Here, it is worth noting a nuance: while government authorities welcome the use of Islamic principles in conflict resolution and prevention of violent extremism, they want to be certain that this practice will be applied within the legal field. All analysed parties agreed on the opinion that the implementation and practical application of Islamic principles should involve an initial training of local imams. However, each side has a different understanding of application of Islamic principles in conflict mediation and transformation, which generates competition among different schools of thought, fuels competition of personal behavioural patterns of stakeholders. In the future, it is necessary to try to find common interests of all parties, which is important for peace building in the field of Islamic religious.

**Finally, the fourth indicator on the relationship and interaction between Muftiate and other Islamic organisations and communities to prevent violent extremism** revealed different positions and interests. For example, Muftiate tries to

maintain existing status-quo not only in the eyes of faithful Muslims but also in the eyes of religious organisations and the government bodies. Such dominant position of the Muftiate in the Islamic environment gives them the right to control the resource allocation process, which leads to a struggle for access to finance and resources with non-traditional and informal Islamic groups and communities. Obviously, the relationship and interaction with other Islamic organisations and communities formed not from a position of addressing the phenomenon of violent extremism and terrorism per se, but from the perspective of protection of their own interests, which is rooted in access to resources. However, the non-traditional and informal religious communities and organisations perceive Muftiate as the weakest link that exists thanks to the cooperation with the secular state and therefore, are considered to be 'betraying' the true meaning of Islam.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs is trying to systematise and streamline its work, show self-importance and the need for its institutional existence in front of the state leadership. Interaction of Muftiate with other Islamic organisations in the fight against violent extremism manifestations is undesirable for SCRA, as this process involves strengthening the role and position of Muftiate, enhances the status of the Mufti, and this may adversely affect the positions and interests of the state as a whole. In parallel, the law enforcement system builds its own view of the role of Islamic organisations, where Muftiate is perceived as a source of information and knowledge. However, the security sector has outlined that interaction and relationships among Muftiate and other non-traditional Islamic organisations should not go against the interests of the state and public security. But in fact, the law enforcement system in light of possible future uncertainty in the security of the Central Asian region, is trying to establish a system of protection of national interests and security.

**As a result**, it is clear that the state should define and build a model of state-religious relations, formalizing some sort of State-Islamic agreement and built strategic mechanisms on increasing common efforts in countering manifestations of violent extremism. The state should treat Islamic organisations not only as control and operation tool, but rather treat as a partner in the joint efforts to protect national interests. Interaction between the state and Islamic organisations should be supported by the infusion of the efforts of civil society and the media.

The aforementioned issues of lack of active cooperation of key stakeholders on prevention of violent extremism as well as inconsistencies in the legislation provided a space for identification of key problem areas. Coupled with data gathered from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions, the report suggests following recommendations (the specific recommendations for each of the stakeholder are in the Part 4: Recommendations of the current report):

- Examine existing legislation to synchronise it with the supreme law of the Kyrgyz Republic;
- Initiate introduction of uniform and standardised curriculum to the religious education facilities under the control of Muftiate. Furthermore, it is necessary to increase theological and leadership capacity of religious clergy as well as increase joint efforts of state and Muftiate in establishment and strengthening of the national (local) school of Islam;

- Strengthen capacity of Muftiat as a religious institution and improve the capacity of the local imams and imam-khatibs in establishing a platform for dialogue in the Islamic diversity and the prevention of violent extremism;
- Adopt single long-term strategic plan of action with the union of all key stakeholders (SCRA, 10SU MIA and SAMK) with the definition of roles for each party in improving collective efforts in countering manifestations of violent 10SU MIA dealing with prevention and pre-emption, the SCRA dealing with analysis and expertise, SAMK providing theological challenge to ideologies of violent extremism. Moreover, there is a need to highlight the positive aspects of the interaction of the above key stakeholders as well as to monitor execution of the single long-term strategic plan.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and abolition of the communist ideology, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic was caught in implementation of series of state rebuilding reforms and transitioning to a market economy. During formation of an independent state, ideology was not in a priority list of the country's development, which resulted in the ideological vacuum. Funding from foreign countries commenced for development of missionary activity (Protestantism), as well as for construction of mosques and development of Islam in the country.

Thus, Islamic movements that are non-traditional for the Hanafi Madhab<sup>1</sup> and Protestant movements that are non-traditional for Russian Orthodoxy became active in the country. Due to socio-economic difficulties as poverty, high rate of unemployment, low level of education, lack of economic opportunities, search for ideas alternative to atheism or communism practiced during the Soviet Union were also motivated by financial and economic incentives. However, along with socio-economic reasons, people also felt hunger and appetite for information and knowledge, where many of them fulfilled the aforementioned ideological vacuum through religion. The issue of religion and establishment of Islamic political movements and parties, as well as the use of the religion as a political ideology in the neighbouring countries led to clashes between religious and secular ideas in 1990s political arena of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Following the terrorist attack in September 2001 in the US, the issues of extremism and terrorism became a priority area of cooperation between the U.S. and NATO with Central Asian republics.

Due to the absence of standard understanding of extremism in international practice and international legal framework<sup>2</sup>, for a uniform understanding of extremism, the project proposes the following definition. Extremism (from Latin *extremus* – extreme) is a complex phenomenon that is difficult to see or recognise. In other words it can be defined as an act or an action leading to extreme measures, which are far from the 'generally accepted' or 'ordinary' acts. However, the words '*generally accepted*' and '*ordinary*' can be interpreted depending on the subjective and political positions persistent in a given context. Accordingly, one might distinguish *violent extremism*, which is as an act aimed at violent encroachment of public security and forcible change of the constitutional system by using various extremist ideologies, including religious ones. **Therefore, the problem is not the religion per se, but rather using a religion as an ideological tool in achieving political agendas. Consequently, violent extremism and religion should not be used in interchangeable manner.**

Today, the Kyrgyz Republic faces a myriad of problems and difficulties in the Islamic sphere. On the one hand, religion has acquired great significance in the society but, on the

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<sup>1</sup> Hanafi Madhab – one of four legal schools in Sunni Islam, established by Abu Hanifa and his followers. This madhab is one of the biggest widely spread Islamic madhabs. Hanafi Muslims reside on the territory of Central Asia, Russian Federation, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Analysis of existing definitions has revealed lack of uniform understanding of the term. The definitions in the international legal framework also vary, where the Resolution of Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (2003), Shanghai Convention on combating terrorism, separatism, extremism (2001) as well as legal definitions in such countries as the United States, United Kingdom, and Russian Federation also has different interpretation and understanding of what constitutes extremism.

other hand, various contradictions in respect to certain matters (Islamic clothing in the educational institutions) have been causing dubious public reaction in the society. Moreover, the issues of Islamisation or secularisation of the society has become predominant and, together with the ethno-religious and regional characteristics, they cause social disputes. As a result, there is an increased influence of non-traditional Islamic movements in the Kyrgyz Republic, which differs from the traditional Central Asian Hanafi Madhab. Non-traditional or informal movements and organisations include both moderate Islamists (such as Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), Nurciler also known as the Gulen Movement, although there is no agreement in opinions regarding their status), as well as extremist ones (Hizb-ut Tahrir) and more radical Islamists adhering to Salafism and Takfirism known as the Jihadist ideology.

With the forthcoming ISAF/NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014, various assessments were made by OCST, SCO as well as various experts<sup>3</sup>, expressing concerns associated with extremism in the Central Asian region, which may represent a terrorist threat and threaten the territorial integrity of Central Asian republics and their national security. The issue of religion and its politicisation, as well as the need and demand of religious development in the society are very relevant to the Kyrgyz Republic.

Among many, one of the most pressing issues is the spread of extremism from outside, associated with foreign influence on development of the religious situation in the country and export of non-traditional Islamic teachings. In this regard, some specialists and experts talk about the need for state intervention and monitoring of people who travel outside the country for dawah<sup>4</sup> or religious education. There has also been raised an issue of Muftiate's inability to confront extremist ideology as imams do not have deep theological knowledge and overall dissatisfaction with the low quality of dawah in the country. Moreover, there is no clear understanding and unanimity on the definition of problems associated with radicalism and violent extremism in the country. There are no surveys at the national level, which would find out a specific position of various social groups concerning religion, their attitude to the religious policy of the Government and to the above matters (such as wearing religious head scarf in the education entities), which cause public reaction. Finally, there is no clear state policy or no clear vision of the Government's role in the issues of religion. This results in non-existent weak interaction between governmental structures and religious leaders on prevention of violent extremism.

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<sup>3</sup> For more details, please refer to: 1) scenario development in the post-Soviet Central Asia after ISAF withdrawal from Afghanistan, prepared in the framework of cooperation between MGIMO Institute of international research and Analytical Association of OCST [<http://www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document/240244.phtml>]; 2) Central Asia today: challenges and threats, prepared by Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of Kazakhstan [<http://www.kisi.kz/img/docs/5702.pdf>]; 3) Bishkek declaration of SCO heads of state from September 13, 2013, [<http://www.scosummit2013.org/news/bishkekская-декларация-глав-государств-членов-шанхайской-организации-сотрудничества/>]

<sup>4</sup> Dawah (from Arabic دعوة -invitation) – Islamic preaching from door to door. This does not mean converting people to Islam but rather transmission of the message on following the true path of Islam. Participation in dawah can have different levels.

# METHODOLOGY

The baseline assessment is a qualitative study, which combines legal framework analysis and field research through key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The legal framework analysis includes legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic concerning key stakeholders (agencies or institutions) and their main functions and responsibilities in regards to prevention of the violent extremism in the country.

The legal framework analysis was based on the analysis of the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010), Concept on public policy in the religious sphere (2006), law on freedom of religion and religious organisations (2009), law on countering extremism (2006) and combatting terrorism (2008), National Security Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012) and National Strategy of the Sustainable Development (NSDS) for 2013-2017, as well as provisions and bylaws on government agencies working with the religious sphere.

The analysis of legal documents revealed inconsistencies and problem areas in the work and interaction of key stakeholders on prevention of violent extremism. Based on these gaps a standardised questionnaire<sup>5</sup> was used in conducting key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The key informant interviews consisted of 12 respondents:

- Four staff of 10SU MIA (two from northern and two from southern divisions);
- Four staff of the SCRA (two from northern and two from southern divisions);
- Four representatives of SAMK (two from north and two from south).

There have also been conducted serious of focus group discussions among indirect stakeholders:

- Heads of kaziyats and madrasa (17 respondents);
- Leaders of various Islamic religious communities (8 respondents).

Respondents of the interview and focus groups have representation across the entire country and include all key and indirect stakeholders. In view of a sensitive nature of information and activity of respondents, this report ***envisages and ensures anonymity of respondents.***

The analysis of the legal framework identified problem areas in interaction of key stakeholders, which served for preparation of a unified standardised questionnaire for interview of respondents and focus group participants. The questionnaire is based on 4 main indicators that aim to identify specific interaction and relationships of key participants, agencies or institutions in practice, as well as to identify the current problems and solutions in the Islamic religious sphere to prevent violent extremism:

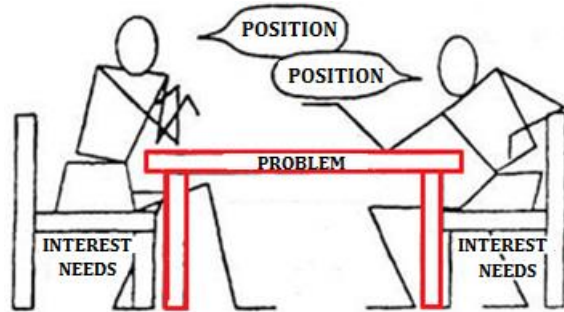
1. Relations of key stakeholders on prevention of the violent extremism;
2. Muftiate as a platform for dialogue on prevention of violent extremism;
3. Islamic principles and values on prevention of violent extremism;
4. Relationship in the intra-Islamic sphere on prevention of violent extremism

These indicators were chosen to identify the existing relationships between the state authorities, Muftiate and Muslim religious communities and their leaders, as well as

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<sup>5</sup> Sample of standardised questionnaire is attached under Appendix 1

to identify the existing capacity for dialogue building and research of Islamic principles to prevent conflicts and violent extremism. Thereafter, the information gathered through field study was processed by **encoding keywords and information** to identify the main patterns in interaction and relationships of the above key stakeholders. The stakeholder analysis was done **to capture positions and interests** in regards to each of the four indicators.



Box 1. Illustration is borrowed from the World Wide Web

are constructed based on needs, system of values, opinions, ideologies and principles of each of the stakeholder.

Baseline assessment results are aimed at identifying the "picture before" in the existing interaction and relationships before the project starts. Accordingly, upon completion of the project evaluation, this data will help compare the progress in the interactions and inter-linkages of key stakeholders and to build the "picture after" the project implementation. By comparing the existing relationships and interaction of key participants on prevention of violent extremism before and after the project, it will be possible to define whether the project has achieved the anticipated outcome and achieved its primary goals and objectives.

Since baseline assessment was carried out as part of the on-going project and was designed to assess relationships with respect to the above indicators, this report is not an academic document but purely an analytical report; it does not include survey and sociological indicators related to the overall Islamic religious situation in the country. Moreover, in view of the specific composition of employees of the aforementioned public authorities, Muftiate, and religious leaders, women are not part of the respondents of the baseline assessment. Accordingly, the baseline assessment was carried out purely for monitoring and evaluation purposes. The findings have internal validity and limited external validity as the report is executed to enhance responsibility and accountability of the project for key stakeholders and partners involved in the project.

# PART 1 | LEGAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS

## Analysis of regulatory legal acts of the Kyrgyz Republic in the area of freedom of religion and religious organisations

### *Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic (2010)*

The new Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic adopted in June 2010 complies with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966), Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1975).

The Constitution bans activity of religious organisations in the political space. Establishment of political parties based on religion, pursue of political aims and inciting of religious discord are banned in the Kyrgyz Republic (Article 4, Clauses 4, 3.5).

However, the law does not ban establishment of a secular political party comprised of ordinary believers who may pursue religious goals. (For e.g. arrangement of "namazkana" (prayer room) in the White House which was initiated by the Parliamentarians). There are attempts to form a political party of active Muslim citizens; but to what extent population and the state is ready to accept such political party is an open question.

According to the Supreme Law of the KR, there are no mandatory and state religions, and each religion bears equal responsibility before the law. Religion is separated from the Government and cannot interfere in the activities of government agencies. (Article 7, Clauses 1, 2, 3).

However, if religion is separated from the state, a religious government official should make a choice: either government service, or belief in God. Hence, the most relevant question on the agenda is the following: Should a civil servant believe in God or renounce his religious beliefs for the period of public service? In the constitutions of other countries it is stated that religious organisations are separated from the government; but not the religion itself as an institution of public consciousness. This means that faith cannot be separated from a person. As a result, this leads to an ambiguous interpretation of Articles of the Supreme Law. Religion is separate from the state and cannot interfere in its affairs, and the state, in turn, should not interfere in the affairs of religion. However, in fact all other regulatory legal acts (which are discussed below) regulate and control the religious sphere. Provisions on functioning of the government agencies are aimed at total control of the religion.

According to the Supreme Law, the Kyrgyz Republic recognises the rights and freedoms of individuals as the highest value, and bans any discrimination based on religion (Article 16, Clauses 1, 2). However, the actions of government agencies regulated by legal acts and bylaws are aimed at not only controlling religious organisations but also at banning their activities. (E.g. Ahmadiyya as a pseudo-Islamic organisation)

According to Article 20, Clause 4 (5.7), expression of religious beliefs and freedom of choice of religious beliefs cannot be banned. In practice, there are cases when representatives of traditional religions cannot pass a state registration through the State Commission on Religious Affairs. (E.g. some Protestant Christians)

The Constitution also bans promotion of national, ethnic, racial or religious hatred, gender and other social superiority calling for discrimination, hostility or violence (Article 31). It also guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, and an individual has the right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion or have no religion, and a citizen has the right to freely choose religious or other beliefs, and no one can be forced to express his/her religious or other beliefs or to deny them (Article 32, Clauses 1,2,3,4).

In conclusion, one can note that the Constitution has given a wide spectrum of rights to the believers and acts as a guarantor in ensuring freedom of consciousness, but with limitations of activities carried out by the religious organisations in the political sphere and in state affairs. According to the Constitution, none of the religious can become a state religion or have an advantage over other religions. However, what happens in reality can be detected through an analysis of other legislations and regulations, which are described below.

### ***Concept of the state policy of the Kyrgyz Republic in the religious sphere (2006)***

The concept of the state policy in the religious sphere<sup>6</sup> is one of the main documents in the state-faith relationships. This concept consists of an introduction and seven chapters. The authors of the concept have identified main principles of state-faith relations, i.e. separation of the religious organisations from the state, which embodies the principles of a secular state, ensuring conditions spelled out below:

- No religion is established as a state religion or an obligatory religion imposed on citizens;
- Religious organisations do not interfere in the activities of public authorities, do not participate in the activities of political parties and movements and do not provide material or other assistance;
- The state does not fund religious activities of religious organisations or associations, but it helps to promote charitable, cultural, educational and other social activities of traditional religious organisations or associations;
- Ensure fundamental rights and freedoms such as the freedom of conscience and religion, right to profess, individually or jointly with others, any religion or have no religion, and, finally the right to freely choose religious or other beliefs, and ensure that no one is forced to or denied of express his/her religious or other beliefs.

Given the historical features of the country, this concept defines traditional religious organisations. According to the document, traditional religious organisations are those that are acknowledged as the central religious organisations of the Kyrgyz Republic, having the following characteristics:

- Influenced formation and development of the Kyrgyz statehood;
- Promoted formation and development of the traditional spirituality and the culture of the people living in the country and made part of the spiritual and cultural heritage of the country;

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<sup>6</sup> Approved by the decree #324 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic from May 6, 2006

- Are among religious organisations or associations, which are preferred by the large portion of the population;
- Currently act as a unifying spiritual power of the society aimed at supporting peace and stability in the Kyrgyz Republic.

The concept also defines key areas of cooperation between the state and traditional religious organisations and associations:

- Promotion of mutual understanding and cooperation between the state, society and ensuring preservation of public morals;
- Support and strengthening of the institution of family, motherhood and childhood;
- Education of children and youth in spirituality, morality, patriotism and providing a legal education;
- Cooperation in the field of crime prevention, taking care of persons held in the penitentiary facilities;
- Support to the sciences, including research in both hard and social sciences;
- Support to the healthcare and provision of social services;
- Support activities carried out by the media formed with the help of the state and religious organisations or associations;
- Support to the other charitable activities.

According to the authors of the concept, traditional religions (Islam and Russian Orthodoxy) have historical roots in Kyrgyzstan and the level of cooperation with the Sunni Islam and Russian Orthodoxy would determine the process of state-faith relations. Another important thing identified in the document is section 7 on the key areas of state activities on prevention and combating of the religious extremism and incitement of a religious hatred, which notes an increased activeness of extremist organisations such as “Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami” and “Ackromiyya” inflicting damage to the national interests. The concept defines key areas, where the constitutional order of the state needs to be protected and strengthened:

1. Prohibit, prevent and repress religious organisations and associations that aimed against the constitutional order and a safety of the state and its citizens;
2. Suppress incitement to the religious extremism, including any involvement in religious activities with the use of violence or threat to the population;
3. Take all necessary measures to prevent and eliminate religious extremism;
4. Prohibit the incitement of religious hatred, insulting religious feelings of believers as well as violent acts and incitement to such acts directed against any group of persons because of their religion, as well as provide any assistance to illegal activity;
5. Promote peaceful coexistence of religious associations, decrease social tensions in the society, maintain respectful relations between believers of different religions and between believers and nonbelievers.

Seven years have passed since the adoption of the concept of the state policy in the religious affairs. This documents needs to be updated, as due to the current realities and challenges, the state approach needs a different approach in order to be compliant with the Constitution adopted in 2010 and a revised law on freedom of conscience and religious

organisations adopted in 2008 and a National strategy of sustainable development for 2013-2017. New destructive forces, including new radical and extremist organisations have appeared that practice ideologies of salafism and takfirism that are not mentioned in the current version of the document.

### ***Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations"<sup>7</sup> (2009)***

The second significant law is the Law on "Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations" was originally promulgated in 1991 by the Supreme Council of the Kyrgyz Republic. On 16 January 2009, a new Article 5 was added describing state-faith relations. According to this Article, the Government implements a policy of freedom of religion in accordance with the following principles:

1. Intervention of religious organisations and members of religious faiths in the activities of government agencies and self-governing authorities is not permitted in the Kyrgyz Republic;
2. Beliefs of religious organisations cannot be set as mandatory for citizens;
3. All religions and religious organisations are equal before the law;
4. Relationships between the state and religious organisations are regulated by law taking into account their influence on formation of spiritual, cultural, state and national traditions.

According to this legislation, the state identifies religious extremism as "an incitement in the religious beliefs to the extreme versions of interpretation of the religion that calls for actions against the constitutional order of the state, incites social, racial, national, religious, and regional hatred, as well as aimed at destructing a human security, health and life."<sup>8</sup>

In addition, the state seeks to prevent religious radicalism and extremism, actions aimed at opposition and exacerbation of relations, inciting of religious discord, and at the same time promotes mutual respect between religions and between believers and non-believers. However, analysis of the activities of public authorities over the past 3 years shows that the Government favours traditional religions (Islam and Orthodoxy) and forms a platform for dialogue with religious organisations in accordance with these religions.

Religious organisations have no right to bring pressure on government agencies and self-governing authorities. However, the state can intervene in the activities of religious organisations to exclude any privileges or restriction of one religion or belief in favor of another religions or beliefs. The Government does not fund activities of religious organisations and activities promoting atheism (Clause 3).

According to Article 5, Clause 4, persistent actions aimed at converting believers of one religion to another (proselytism), as well as any illegal missionary activity are banned in the Kyrgyz Republic. However, this Article contradicts to the Constitution of the Kyrgyz

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<sup>7</sup> Adopted on January 16, 2009. In 2010-2012 this law has been revised. Currently, the State Commission on Religious Affairs has prepared an amendment to the law which are published on its website: [www.religion.gov.kg](http://www.religion.gov.kg)

<sup>8</sup> The definition is borrowed from the Concept of state policy on religious affairs approved by the decree #324 of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic from May 6, 2006.

Republic, Article 20, Clause 4 (5.7) since expression of religious beliefs and freedom of choice of religious beliefs cannot be banned. The Kyrgyz Republic is not the first country in Central Asia that banned proselytism. Proselytism was banned in Uzbekistan (as of May 1998) and Tajikistan (as of 2009) earlier than in the Kyrgyz Republic.

If a clergy member takes government or municipal service, his/her religious service should be suspended. Public and town hall meetings, election campaigning (Clauses 6.7) cannot be held in places of worship. However, this is not followed by civil servants themselves. For example, during the parliamentary and presidential elections, the mosque becomes an election platform and imams become the main campaign agents for a particular candidate.

Reinforcement of Clauses 6 and 7 was caused by the illegal activities of the extremist organisation Hizbut-Tahrir, which actively participated during 2000 and 2007 election of National Parliament and local councils as well offered their services to candidates in exchange for fulfillment of certain conditions.

Elements of interaction between the Government and religious organisations aimed at preventing extremism and radicalism are stated in Clause 2 of Article 22, which specifies that "Import, manufacture, storage, transportation and distribution of religious literature and other printed, audio and video materials containing an agenda to change the constitutional order, moral foundations of the society and aimed at religious intolerance are banned". Clause 3 states that "religious organisations registered under the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic have the right to give explanations about the presence of elements of religious extremism in printed publications, photo, audio and video products and other materials at the request of government agencies and self-governing authorities". Clause 8 specifies that "import, manufacture, purchase, transportation, transfer, storage and distribution of printed publications, photo, audio and video products and other materials containing ideas of religious extremism, separatism and fundamentalism, entail responsibility under the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic." However, this Clause is not clear on the ways of determining extremist literature and carrying out expert examination, as well as there is no information regarding expert examination criteria and the role of religious organisations in the process of examination has not been specified.

Under the Law, the Government acquires control and supervisory functions with regard to religious organisations. Pursuant to Clause 4, Article 26, Chapter 5 of the Law, The religious organisations shall provide the state statistics authorities, tax authorities, government agency for religious affairs and prosecution agencies documents containing a report on its activities, management members, as well as documents on cash expenditure and use of other resources, including those received from international and foreign organisations, foreign citizens and stateless persons. Forms and terms of submission of these documents shall be determined by the government agency on religious affairs.

Government agencies are provided with wide authorities to control religious organisations. As per Clause 6, Article 26 "... With regard to religious organisations, the prosecution agencies, government agency on religious affairs and its territorial agencies, and tax authorities are entitled to:

1. request administrative and financial documents from the heads of religious organisations;
2. Request and receive information on financial and economic activities of religious organisations from the state statistics agencies, tax authorities and other state

supervision and control agencies, as well as from banking and other financial institutions;

3. Send their representatives to participate in the activities conducted by religious organisations;
4. Conduct annual inspection of compliance of religious organisation's activity, including its fund expenditures and use of other resources, with the purposes stipulated in its statutes (regulations);
5. In case of violation of the legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic or actions contrary to the purposes stipulated in the statutes (regulations) of a religious organisation, a written warning shall be issued indicating violation and its rectification period (at least a month). A warning issued to a religious organisation may be appealed to a superior agency or court.

As can be seen from the above, the Law on Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations establishes a system of control over religious organisations and their functional activities. However, it does not provide clauses directly related to interaction of government agencies and religious organisations on prevention of violent extremism.

### ***Law on Countering Extremist Activity (2006)*<sup>9</sup>**

One of the central laws to counteract extremism in Kyrgyzstan is the Law on "Countering Extremist Activity" adopted in 2006; the said law is also of punitive and controlling in nature. None of the articles or clauses, however, contains any actions for building a system of interaction of the state bodies with the official religious authorities to jointly counteract any manifestations of violent extremism.

Pursuant to Article 2, the basic principle in countering extremist activities is "cooperation (but not interaction) of the state with public associations and religious organisations as well as other organisations and citizens in counteracting extremist activities."

At the same time, according to Article 15, "the responsibility of citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, foreign citizens and stateless persons for carrying out extremist activity", a religious organisation may give a rebuttal to previously declared or announced extremist ideas of one of the members of the said religious organisation and to refuse from his services in the future.

The citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic, foreign nationals and stateless persons in accordance with legislation of the Kyrgyz Republic, bear criminal, administrative and civil liability for extremist activity.

In order to ensure the state and public security pursuant to the concept and the procedure stipulated by this Law, the person involved in extremist activities, by the resolution of the court may be restrained from governmental service, military service and service in law enforcement agencies, as well as from working in educational institutions and private detective and security operations.

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<sup>9</sup> At the moment, security sector representatives presented a new draft of the same legislation. This legislation has been approved by the Parliament is pending approval of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic

If a manager or member of the governing body of a public association or religious organisation or any other organisation makes a public statement invoking extremist activities, without indicating that the said statement expresses his personal opinion, as well as in the case of a court sentence entry into force in respect of that person for a crime related to extremist activity, the respective public association or religious organisation or any other organisation shall within five days from the date when such statement was made, to declare publicly its disagreement with the statements or actions of such a person.

If the relevant public association or religious organisation or any other organisation would not make a public statement, this may be construed as a fact indicating attributes of extremism in their activities.

### ***Law On Combating Terrorism (2008)***

The next, no less significant document is the Law on Combating Terrorism, adopted in 2008. According to Article 2, "Basic principles and objectives of combating terrorism", Paragraph 1: "Countering terrorism in the Kyrgyz Republic" is based on the principles of: "... cooperation of the Government with public and religious associations and organisations, as well as citizens in combating terrorism ";

According to Article 13, "Implementation of actions on prevention of terrorism, using the media", media executives are obliged to take measures to ensure that the materials prepared in their companies are neither used to justify terrorist activities, nor call for it, provoke it, and/or contain propaganda of religious, ethnic, and/or racial hostility.

However, the State may exempt a person from criminal responsibility under Article 44. "The responsibility of individuals for their participation in terrorist activities" Clause 3 states that: "A person who participated in preparation of a terrorist act, shall be exempt from criminal liability if he makes a timely warning to the state authorities or otherwise contributed to prevention of a terrorist act, and if his actions do not contain elements of another crime.

Now, based on the initiatives of the security sector representatives, the Parliament has approved a new legislation on countering and combating terrorism. The draft legislation widens mechanisms of control of the security forces and toughens the punishment.

### ***National Security Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic (2012)***

The National Security Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic, approved by Presidential Decree of 9 June 2012 No.120, has a provision for the cooperation of the state and religious community against radical religious movements.

According to the Concept, along with other external threats, there is a threat of an expansion of international terrorism and religious extremism. The concept is one of the new state documents defining the main directions of the protection of national interests.

The document further call for the prevention of religious extremism should be focused on education, awareness-raising activities, analysis and elimination of root causes of radicalisation.

The concept states "religious extremism and international terrorism currently represent a massive threat to the Kyrgyz Republic. Inherently religious extremist and

terrorist organisations, consolidating their forces on a single extremist ideology become more powerful internationalised criminal structure having a wide network of like-minded people in our republic in order to accelerate its plans to increase Islamisation and radicalisation of the Central Asian region, international extremist and terrorist structures with hidden support of some Muslim states, used numerous categories of missionaries and foundations, media, and Internet resources, imported extremist literature and other attributes of the indoctrination of the population. In parallel, they make every effort aimed at co-operation forces of political and religious extremism, terrorism and separatism, drug traffickers and other criminal organisations to destabilise and seize power, especially in the Fergana Valley, and create here a springboard for further expansion in the region. "

Thus, the National Security Concept of the Kyrgyz Republic is a document calling for the joint efforts of the state, religious organisations and civil society to forestall manifestations of radicalism, extremism, terrorism and the protection of national interests.

### ***National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) for 2013-2017***

One of the most progressive documents of recent years is the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSSD) for the period of 2013-2017, adopted in early 2013. Clause 3.2 of the strategy: "Optimisation of interaction between the state and religion and inter-confessional relations," states that "... there are a number of problems: radicalisation of activity of particular religions' representatives, its politicisation, poor interaction between the state and religious organisations, imperfect system of religious education, the lack of state and public control over them". In recent years, the situation is complicated by the rise of religious extremism around the world and the Central Asian region, which entails the risk of terrorist acts, threatens the national security".

It must be emphasised that the religious extremism and the religion itself are not the same thing. Therefore, the problem is not the religion itself, but only those of its radical forms, which for the sake of achieving their own goals transform it into an ideological instrument that justifies any means, including violence. The state authorities' actions to suppress extremism must be directed against certain religious groups or individuals, supporters of extreme forms of interpreting beliefs, conflicting with the Constitution of the Kyrgyz Republic, denying the democratic standards and rules accepted in society, human rights and freedoms. However, it is noted in the NSSD that one of the causes of radicalisation of some religious movements is the poor state of Islamic religious education system, which does not meet the modern requirements and the needs of society, including rights and freedoms.

The goal of the state policy in the sphere of religion is to create a system of cooperation between the state authorities, religious and social institutions in order to strengthen inter-religious understanding, tolerance, development of effective forms and methods to prevent religious extremism. In the course of achieving this goal the following principles must be followed:

- Accountability and transparency of the state and religious denominations in order to build constructive cooperation;

- Ensuring national security in the interest of the entire society, and intolerance of any elements of religious extremism whilst adhering to the rule of law and respect for the citizens' rights.

Achieving this goal involves development of a set of measures aimed at improving the functioning of the state authorities, local governments, supporting the civil society initiatives that will contribute to fulfilling the following objectives:

- Increase the efficiency of interaction of the state authorities and the religious organisations;
- Realisation of citizens' rights to freedom of religion, support the concept of understanding, religious and social tolerance in all spheres of public life;
- Effective counteraction and reduction of religious extremist threats to society along with prevention of the root causes of radicalisation.

Because of implementation of its policy in the sphere of religion, Kyrgyzstan must remain a secular democratic state. However, in order to develop along this direction, the traditional religious views must be carried out in the private sphere without any violations of human rights. On the one hand, state structures try to control activities of religious organisations, and on the other hand, they try to implement mechanisms of interaction and cooperation with the civil society in order to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism.

In order to increase synergies in the cooperation and interaction of the state structures, security sector and the civil society, it is reasonable to say that the existing legislation needs to be revisited and synchronised with the Supreme Law of Kyrgyzstan and revise the concept of the state policy in the religious affairs in order to cope with the current challenges and threats that exist in the country and in the wider Central Asian region.

## Part 2 |FIELD STUDY

After the analysis of legal acts relating to the sphere of religion, a series of focused group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted. Based on the data gathered throughout the field study, an analysis of key stakeholders and institutions and their interaction with the religious sphere were made with a focus on the inter-linkages and interaction to prevent violent extremism.

Current analysis of key stakeholders was compiled in order to reveal existing interaction and inter-linkages, as well as to identify positions and interests of each party. In this section, an analysis of each of the key stakeholders will be done for each of the indicators identified in the framework of the baseline assessment and will be done in the following way:

- a) Stakeholder profile** – description of duties and responsibilities of each party in accordance of the bylaws and regulations that identify their duties and responsibilities. Thereafter, the section will look at what each of the key stakeholders have done or implemented for each of the indicators to prevent violent extremism;
- b) Positions and interests of stakeholders** – what role each stakeholder identifies for itself and what is their position in regards to the indicators, as well as an analysis of interests and needs that determine such positions of key stakeholders;
- c) Conclusion/wrap up** – general conclusions and identification of key problem areas per each indicator.

### INDICATOR 1: Interaction between the state structures and the SAMK on prevention of violent extremism

#### A) STAKEHOLDER PROFILE

As previously discussed, key stakeholders that work in the Islamic religious sphere are the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, State Commission of Religious Affairs, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, as well as non-traditional, informal Islamic organisations and associations. In order to better understand inter-linkages and cooperation of key stakeholders, the section provides an analysis of what has been done by key stakeholders in prevention of violent extremism, in accordance with their regulations (and a charter in the case of the SAMK):

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan<sup>10</sup> – is the biggest Islamic organisation that plays a role of an institution of managing Islamic communities in Kyrgyzstan. Muftiate has a nationwide infrastructure throughout the country in a form of kazyiats on the province level and representatives of imam-khatibs on the district levels.

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<sup>10</sup> For more information on the history of formation and activities of the SAMK, please refer to the Annex 2

Today, Muftiate is not a legally registered religious entity<sup>11</sup>. Even if religions and state are separated by the current constitution, the political processes of 2005 and 2010 have directly reflected on the functioning of the Muftiate. The political upheaval in April 2010 have shown that the post of a Muftiy is not only the highest post in the religious sphere but also represents a dialogue space among different interest groups including both spiritual and political ones.

As per activities aimed at prevention of violent extremism, it was found out that Muftiate does not have a clear understanding and a clear vision of how and in what direction it needs to focus on in order to conduct any actions aimed at prevention of violent extremism. After a careful study of the history of Muftiate, one can note that during the independence period, Muftiate has issued a single fatwa<sup>12</sup> declaring Hizb-ut Tahrir as non-Islamic organisation condemning its preaching and interpretation of Islam as wrongheaded. The representatives of Muslim spirituality have participated in various roundtable discussions and TV shows criticising activities of non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations. Thus, activities carried out by Muftiate can be characterised as single and ad-hoc activities reacting to the various events that took place in the country. It is important to note, that it does not mean that Muftiate does not take any actions; but to note that Muftiate does not have a well-planned approach in tackling violent extremism.

State Commission on Religious Affairs<sup>13</sup> – is a central state structure that carries out a work on building state-faith relations and implements state policy in the religious sphere. According to the regulation on functioning of the SCRA, the Commission can: 1) restrain the activities of religious organisations that bear threat of damaging the health, moral or the rights and legitimate interests of citizen's as well as bears threats to the constitutional order, state security through courts; 2) involves in development of state programs on prevention and combating the spread of religious extremism and terrorism; 3) participates in drafting state programmes and strategies on prevention and combating the spread of religious extremism; 4) assists religious organisations in establishing relationships with the governmental agencies and provides the necessary assistance on matters requiring decisions of the state authorities; and 5) interacts and exchanges information with the international organisations and relevant agencies of foreign countries in the field of religion, prevention and combating religious extremism and terrorism.

Over the entire period of its existence, the State Committee for the first time is being transformed into a body striving not only to control the religious sphere, but also to evaluate the activities of religious organisations and make its decision public. Rigid control and the requirement under the new legislation put the religious organisations in an awkward position. The employees of the State Committee are not only monitoring, but also in cooperation with civil society seek court orders to ban activities of various organisations that harm the national interests of the country. Finally, Commission aims at cleansing the religious sphere from destructive and extremist organisations and make it more comprehensible, transparent and manageable.

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<sup>11</sup> The SAMK charter was adopted on the last kurultai of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan in 2012; however, the organisation has not been registered at the State Commission on Religious Affairs. The official reasons of denying the registration are not known.

<sup>12</sup> Fatwa – a religious decree on any issue or question, decision upon which is issued by Muftiy. Fatwas are based on the Islamic principles and precedents in the Islamic jurisprudence.

<sup>13</sup> For more information on the history of formation and activities of SCRA, please refer to the Annex 3

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the MIA<sup>14</sup> – is an independent structural subdivision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Unit is in charge of developing and implementing actions against extremism, illegal migration, and cyber threats<sup>15</sup>, preventing terrorism, monitoring public and political situation in the country; the unit tries to foresee any public turmoil<sup>16</sup>.

**«Nobody trains us. There are regional divisions and departments of the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit that do not know how to review and analyze confiscated literature. We know only the names of the books and DVDs, and if they contain words such as caliphate and (images of) different flags then we consider these materials as extremist literature. Nothing is being done to include a course on analyzing such materials into a training curriculum of the police. The universities have theology departments but civilians don't work at the police»**

*- An interviewee*

Main objectives and functions of the Special Unit are to revitalise the other divisions' activities, to combat extremism, illegal migration, cyber threats, to prevent terrorist activities and interethnic and interregional conflicts, to monitor political situation and prevent its destabilisation. The Special Units also conducts investigations and takes preventive measures to monitor and curb the activities of extremist and terrorist organisations, prevent ethnic and inter-regional clashes, eliminate illegal migration and cyber threats, the unit identifies and searches for individuals who are preparing to commit or have committed cybercrimes.

As per its activities on countering violent extremism, the Unit interacts and cooperates with all religious organisations, including Islamic organisations and their connection with their foreign funders. The Unit managed to establish contacts with the Muftiate, which were spelled out by the interviewees and focus group participants. The officers of the 10 SU MIA are thoroughly studying local and foreign experience on combating violent extremism and terrorism. It is worth noting that the education facilities of the MIA (police academy and local police schools) do not have a special preparation of cadets on combating violent extremism and the Unit itself trains officers through short term courses or through coaching and transmission of acquired knowledge and skills through experience. Throughout the field study, it was found that the Unit does not differentiate and delineate extremism into violent and non-violent ones. Because of specificity of work carried out by the Unit, it has a punitive and retributive approach and oftentimes uses such terms as "strictly prevent", "prevention measures", and "fight against extremism."

Non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations<sup>17</sup> – are those organisations and associations that follow non-traditional to the Hanafi madhab interpretations of Islam. Based on the activities carried out by the non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations, the report differentiates several categories of Islamic non-traditional and information organisations and associations: 1) apolitical

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<sup>14</sup> For more information on the history and activities carried out by 10 SU MIA, please refer to the Annex 4

<sup>15</sup> Carries out monitoring and blocking of all extremist, terrorist and hackers webpages.

<sup>16</sup> Controls and supervises activities of destructive agents.

<sup>17</sup> For more information on the history and activities carried out by non-traditional and informal religious organisations and associations, please refer to the Annex 5

organisations as Tabligi Jamaat, Nurciler<sup>18</sup>, though there is no uniform opinion on their functioning and existence in the country; 2) extremist organisations as Hizb-ut Tahrir that have political goals; and 3) radical organisations that follow jihadi ideologies.

Overall, non-traditional Islamic organisations do not interact with each other and each of them considers itself as the better organisation or association that allows believers that follow canons put forward by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). However, all of them think that official Islamic structures, mainly the Muftiate fails to ensure conditions for Islamic practices in Kyrgyzstan, especially on the issue of ensuring protection of the rights of Muslims to wear Islamic clothing, namely hijab, in public spaces. Although, each of these informal non-traditional associations

and communities condemn Muftiate and its actions, they all try to be included and represented in the Muftiate. Finally, it is worth noting that internal competition for resources and charitable funds coming from other Muslim countries and access to power increases the struggle and creates an incentive for more radicalised groups in planning and execution of their violent actions.

**«We collaborate with Muftiate very well, our guys attend Friday prayers, interact with imams. They report us if any suspicious individuals show up in the mosques. We also observe who hangs out and organises groups of people after the prayer. And we work with the Commission on Religious Affairs on conducting expertise of confiscated literature. We do not have well established contacts with them»**

- *An interviewee*

## **Building relations on prevention of violent extremism between SAMK, SCRA and 10 SU MIA**

As per interaction and cooperation of key stakeholders, the data gathered from the key informant interviews and focus group discussions revealed that the Muftiate has a different level of interaction and cooperation with other stakeholders. For example, respondents have characterised relationship between SCRA and the Muftiate as “weak”, “single and ad-hoc”. It was also noted that before 2010, the parties were in a closer cooperation on the prevention of violent extremism where the Muftiate also signed forensic theological conclusion made available by the SCRA employees on the examination of seized materials and literature disseminated by non-traditional and forbidden Islamic organisations in the country. It is worth noting that the “golden age of liberalism” in the friendly relations between the parties ended with the transfer of the Hajj<sup>19</sup> from the prerogative of the SCRA to the control of the Muftiate. Current aspirations of the SCRA to streamline and systematise religious sphere have encountered misunderstanding and rejection from the Muftiate’s side. The Commission seeks to go to another level of interaction with the Muftiate, where it will not only be accountable for its operations, but also starts functioning differently. Attempts to reform the Muftiate and the rejection to adopt its new statute have not found a complete understanding of all state agencies.

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<sup>18</sup> These are poorly studied groups and associations. There are certain assumptions claiming that Nurciler are the followers of Fethullah Gulen; however, his followers are known as gulenists. Others claim that Nurciler represent the official Muftiate of Turkey, which can also be a wrong lead

<sup>19</sup> Hajj is a Muslim pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca and its surroundings

Inter-linkages and cooperation of the Muftiate with the 10 SU MIA was characterised as a "closer cooperation". For the 10 SU MIA the Muftiate is not only the object of attention

**«We need common prevention activities, and a desire to work. As I have previously told you, last summer we worked with the Muftiate and the SPS. It is only because we want to work and take the initiative. Instead, we could have sat at home and say, there is no money, no staff, and that no one appreciates us. As per your question on should we have a dialogue with Hizb-ut Tahrir and Salafis, then the answer "yes" and "no". On the one hand, if you contact them, then they will think about their significance. And if you don't do it, then we will not know what they want, how they think, and cannot do our job. Right now, we examine things only after they happen- this has nothing to do with the prevention»**

*- An interviewee*

cooperation. For example, local imams reported the officers of the Special Unit of the occurrence of suspicious persons or mosque during Friday prayers; while the Special Unit officers also have attended Friday prayers and watch the crowds of young people communicating outside the mosque after the prayer. Moreover, it was noted that in the summer of 2013 10 SU MIA and the Muftiate in conjunction with the representatives of the state penitentiary system conducted a series of preventive measures with prisoners in prison.

Regarding the relationship of the SCRA and the 10 SU MIA, the interviewees indicated that the parties cooperate in the process of detaining suspects, affiliated with banned Islamic organisations, who disseminate banned literature or audio and video materials either physically or via the Internet. In particular, cooperation lies in transmission of the seized materials to the examination of the SCRA staff, before the case is sent to the State Committee on National Security and the judiciary. This type of cooperation shows a reactive cooperation to the already occurred events. With regard to collaboration in the prevention of violent extremism, the parties issued a booklet as a preventive measure, but respondents noted that this kind of cooperation is done on ad-hoc basis, and that the parties do not have sustainable or long-term joint measures to prevent violent extremism.

As per relations of the Muftiate with the non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations, they are characterised as "weak"; hence, lack of cooperation in the prevention of violent extremism. This is explained by the fact that the parties have a different understanding of the role and activities of the Muftiate. Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations believe that the Muftiate is not fulfilling its duties. According to them, the Muftiate became a corrupt body with a deficiency of transparency in their work. According to them, the Muftiate should undergo constant check-ups and should

be carefully controlled. "Such statements are oftentimes expressed by Muslims who have previously been excluded from the Muftiate" - said one of the employees of the SCRA during the interview. Moreover, other respondents noted that moderate non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations see the Muftiate as an organisation that collaborates with the secular government, and ones that are more radical criticise the Muftiate and see it as a "collaborator" with the secular government. Therefore, due to the fundamental differences in views and perceptions, the sides do not have any level of cooperation in preventing manifestations of violent extremism.

## B) POSITIONS AND INTERESTS OF STAKEHOLDERS

On the first indicator called "inter-linkages and cooperation between the parties," it became clear that the parties have different views and interests. All parties agree that there is a need to improve the interaction between the parties in preventing violent extremism. But understanding of what is necessary to increase interaction and cooperation differs depending on the positions and interests of the parties who try to obtain favourable terms in the interaction. Moreover, the question of how and what mechanisms are necessary to build these interactions is still not fully disclosed to all key stakeholders. The following are the positions and interests of each of the key parties to the first indicator:

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan believes that there is a need for closer communication and cooperation with state authorities in order to raise its credibility as an institution that represents Muslim community of the country. With regard to enhancing cooperation in preventing violent extremism, the Muftiate's position is to be a supporting entity, but never as the leading entity. This explains the interest in preserving their own status, and avoidance of closer cooperation, which, according to respondents, may result in reform, and increased control of activities and in the internal affairs of the Muftiate. However, at the same time, it should be noted that the statute of the Muftiate does not have a predefined role for the Muftiate in efforts to prevent violent extremism. This is explained by the fact that the Muftiate feels that it should not interfere in the affairs of state, and prevention of the manifestations of violent extremism is the prerogative of public authorities, in particular prerogative of the SCRA.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs considers that a more close relationship and interaction with the SMMC and other government agencies to expand their powers of

**«...we, as a state body and from the position of a state representative cannot engage in a dialogue. But, the Muftiate can and should be interested in putting an order in the Islamic sphere. SCRA and the Muftiate need to work in a closer cooperation. SCRA should reflect state policies and explain it to the Muftiate, and the Muftiate should give a direction and provide an ideological work»**

*- An interviewee*

control over all processes in the religious sphere. It should be noted that the SCRA aims at preserving processes within the existing legal framework and save having influence and status quo. Concerning cooperation in preventing violent extremism, SCRA believes that it is the prerogative of the Muftiate. During the interviews, it was suggested that the Muftiate should bring order and be interested in restoring order in the Islamic sphere, including in dealing with violent extremism. Moreover, SCRA believes that it is an ideological work that is directly related to

the field of Muftiate's activity.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the MIA believes there is a need for close coordination with other government agencies and the Muftiate to establish clear communication with all interested parties to obtain more precise information on the prevention and anticipation of violent extremism and to facilitate their own activities in the field of CVE. Compared with other key stakeholders, the position of the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit is more transparent with respect to this indicator. Nonetheless, at the same time, the Special Unit seeks to become the leading authority in this process in order to expand its authorities and powers that should exceed those of other security agencies. As a result, the Special Unit hopes this will improve the image of law enforcement agencies among the population and the improvement of legislation in the sphere of prevention of violent extremism.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations believe that the level of close cooperation of other government agencies and the Muftiate depends on their own acceptance by the public authorities and the Muftiate. First, they are interested in increasing their influence on public consciousness of Muslims through the cultivation of their ideas among different populations. Concerning cooperation in preventing violent extremism, interests are diverged: if more moderate groups and communities are ready to cooperate in the field of prevention of violent extremism, more radical ones ready to engage in a dialogue, if the supremacy of their ideology and outlook prevail, including replacement of the constitutional order to Sharia. This would, according to them help fight the "secular extremism."

### C) CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP

Emerging picture on the first indicator shows that the parties have not only different positions on this question, but also a different understanding and an interpretation. If public authorities, namely the State Commission see it as a way of controlling and increasing the accountability of the Muftiate, the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit treats Muftiate yet another source of information to curb the activities of extremist organisations. For part of the informal organisations the Muftiate is just a group of misguided Muslims that are trying to establish themselves in life, and for another, more radical part, the Muftiate is a "traitor of Islam", who went on to co-operate with the secular regime. As can be seen from the above analysis of the positions and interests of the parties, the interaction with all parties studied are possible under certain conditions. However, the most difficult is to engage in a dialogue with representatives of Hizb-ut Tahrir and Salafism, as common grounds with them are not yet found.

The twofold interaction is revealed: on the one hand, the state is ready to cooperate and wants to interact with the Muftiate, and on the other hand, the existing laws and regulations do not designate such interaction and collaboration. Any active interaction drives the Muftiate into the political sphere, which is actually prohibited by law. Without realizing it, the public authorities themselves politicise the issue and disturbs a traditional balance in separation of state and faith. Moreover, none of the legal act (including

**«We need a clear state policy on this issue. Insofar, the position of the government as per the religious extremism is not clear. In order to work together, there is a need for a 'top-bottom' approach, and only then things would start moving»**

*- из конфиденциального интервью*

regulations and bylaws on the activities of state bodies) reveals the mechanisms for interaction- especially on who should play the leading role in this matter. The position of the state in the sphere of religion remains unclear, leading to lack of a common approach to prevent violent extremism in the country.

## **INDICATOR 2: Capacity of the Muftiate to serve as a space for dialogue among Islamic organisations and associations to prevent violent extremism**

### **A) STAKEHOLDER PROFILE**

In this section, an analysis is provided on what each of the parties undertook to create the conditions for dialogue between the Muftiate and other Islamic groups and communities, according to the provisions (the statute in case of the Muftiate) upon which they operate.

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan aims to become a true spiritual centre for the Muslims of the country. If viewed from the perspective of ethno - religious representation, the Muftiate successfully incorporated representation of different ethnic and age groups as well as opened women's division at the Muftiate and in local mosques. Regarding the non-traditional and informal Islamic groups and associations, the question is twofold: Muftiate is willing and is already interacting with the moderate unconventional Islamic groups as the Tablighi Jamaat; and as per interaction with the more radical ones, it does not have clear and common understanding of how to approach and work with them. Although, based on the nature of its activity, the Muftiate should serve as a nexus for all Islamic organisations and associations; in reality neither the statute nor the practice does not show how it should be implemented.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs said that the Muftiate has the right and the potential to become a platform for dialogue. According to respondents from government agencies, the Muftiate has the infrastructure and representation throughout the country. Moreover, it was emphasised that the potential of the Muftiate will depend on the level of knowledge of the clergy - both theological knowledge and leadership capacity, and the managerial skills in the promotion of Islamic diversity. In this case, the diversity in the religious sphere has been especially emphasised by the State Commission, as it seeks to implement a strategy to optimise the state-faith and interfaith relations, development of tolerance to each other within the framework of the NSSD for 2013-2017 . It should be noted that the SCRA actively enters into negotiations on domestic and local conflicts between Kyrgyz Muslims and Kyrgyz Christians

**«At the moment, everyone wants to see the Muftiate as a unifying entity; however, the capacity, specifically, ideological and in terms of human resources needs strengthening. One needs a complex approach in creation of a space for a dialogue. We, as representatives of the state, which is a secular one, cannot engage in a dialogue directly with the informal Islamic organisations and associations, including the moderate Salafis. In this case, the Muftiate should serve as a bridge between the state and religion.**

*- An interviewee*

that shows the creation of a dialogue platform on interfaith issues and religious diversity. However, regarding Islamic diversity and creating or facilitating dialogue platform among Muslims, the SCRA's position is not entirely clear.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the MIA said that the Muftiate has the potential for becoming a platform for dialogue, if the representatives of the Muslim Board will enhance their knowledge and if the mechanisms of accountability and responsibility of Muftiate are worked out. According to the law enforcement, the Muftiate is also an institution with "post-Soviet thinking," does not want to be responsible and take risks, and prefers to wait for initiatives from the state. With regard to the work done by the Special Unit to create a platform for dialogue, it is worth noting that the law enforcement has no duties identified in their respective provisions and bylaws. Nonetheless, the work carried out in the field by the staff of the Special Unit and local imams with various Islamic communities indirectly leads to the creation of a dialogue platform.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations are not officially registered in the country. Furthermore, although active in the field (e.g. Tablighi Jamaat), some of them are not prohibited by law, but they are also not registered as a legal entity at the state registration facilities. Nevertheless, there are also those that are banned in the country (e.g. Hizb-ut Tahrir) that are active in spite of their ban on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Accordingly, in the absence of any working documents, determining their activities through non-existent statutes or regulations is difficult. One cannot certainly say what they are obliged to do in relation to the matter under the discussion. It turns out that the analysis of their relationship to the issue will be based on their specific activities. Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations have a dual attitude and understanding of the interactive platform. If ones that are more moderate interact and cooperate with the Muftiate on the issues of dawah, the more radical of them enter into dialogue with the purpose of debate and controversy. They know that the local imams not versed in theological and secular knowledge, and enter into an argument with them in order to increase their own prestige.

## **B) POSITIONS AND INTERESTS OF STAKEHOLDERS**

On the second indicator "the Muftiate as platform for dialogue," the information gathered through the interviews and focus groups has revealed that almost all participants agree that the Muftiate can become a platform for dialogue among all stakeholders in combating manifestations of the violent extremism. All parties agree that there is a need to improve the interaction between the parties in preventing violent extremism. Nevertheless, understanding of what is necessary to increase interaction and cooperation differs depending on the positions and interests of the parties to obtain favorable terms in this interaction. Moreover, the question of how and by what mechanisms need to build these interactions is still not fully disclosed to

**«We should have strong imams that know the state policies as well as the sharia, hadith and Quran in order to be able to satisfy an information hunger of a person who became a believer. There is a need for an outreach and work with the communities and explain what is fatwa, jihad, hijab – this way the believer him/herself will be able to identify the right from the wrong»**

*- An interviewee*

all key stakeholders. The following are the positions and interests of each of the key parties per second indicator:

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, as discussed above, wants to become a true spiritual centre for all Muslims in the country. The Muftiate's position lies in strengthening itself as a spiritual, ideological, and educational centre in order to consolidate Hanafi madhhab as the only traditional and correct interpretation of Islam. Hence, the Muftiate choose whom to cooperate with and engage in a dialogue with in order to achieve the aforementioned. According to the results of focus groups and interviews, the views of clergy are divided into three. First, the Muftiate should not engage in a dialogue with all to convince non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations in wrongness of their beliefs and interpretations of Islam. Second, the Muftiate's engagement in a dialogue with non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations may mean that the Muftiate recognises them and that it would push for more action on their part to spread of violent extremism. Finally, the Muftiate should not engage in any sort of relationship with non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations in order not to artificially increase their significance. These views show an unwillingness of the Muftiate to engage in a conflict and confrontation, which also reveals a low theological capacity and leadership skills of traditional Islamic clergy.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs believes that the Muftiate can become a platform for dialogue, provided that, it will be reformed in an open and a transparent body. On the one hand, SCRA claims that the Muftiate must serve as a bridge between Muslims and the state and become a body that unites various Islamic groups and communities; but, on the other hand, SCRA puts a condition to reform the Muftiate as SCRA fears losing control of the Islamic Ummah. Thus, insisting on reform of the Muftiate, the State Commission is trying to control the activities of the Muftiate.

**« You see, before people wanted to join radical Islamic groups because of financial incentives. Now, what we can observe is that they are leaving the country to fight the 'holy war'. Before people needed money, and now our youth is ready to die for an idea. The person who does not know the religion in its entirety cannot oppose the radicalised forms of interpretation of Islam. Hence, the role of the Muftiate is very crucial, as the punitive approach is not very effective. One needs to fight an ideological problem through an ideology»**

*- An interviewee*

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of the MIA expresses an open position with respect to this indicator, as it believes that the Muftiate can and should become a platform for dialogue in the ideological countering of violent extremism. During the interviews and focus groups, it was suggested that violent extremism is an ideological crime and one must fight it ideologically. Given position of the Special Unit explained because this will bring effective control of public safety. Moreover, the Special Unit believes that dialogue is necessary only to touch upon the ideological work and to understand the logic of their behavior and develop tactics to counter and prevent, but in any case, it is impossible to negotiate with them. To reiterate, the Special Unit has stressed an importance of conducting an

ideological work and engage in a dialogue with those citizens or communities who are willing but have not yet joined the radical and extremist organisations. In their opinion, through persuasion and ideological work, one can prevent others from further

radicalisation. This way, without potential adherents and followers, the leaders of radical groups become obsolete.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations have a different position depending on the degree of radicalism of their interpretation of Islam. For example, more moderate of them (e.g. Tablighi Jamaat) notes that the Muftiate is already a platform for dialogue, but, according to them, no one has noticed it. This position is motivated by the fact that they are interested in expanding their influence by becoming a part of Muftiate and participate in the decision making process of the Muftiate. The more radical of them claim that the dialogue with the Muftiate is possible provided if the Muftiate gets back to the path of "true Islam." This position shows an interest in destroying the Muftiate as unclaimed and unwanted body that interferes in their activities.

### **C) CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP**

The existing Islamic diversity in Kyrgyzstan is today's greatest achievement. The Muftiate incorporated in itself representatives of all interested communities (ethnic, gender, and age categories). Coupled with an existing infrastructure put in places, the Muftiate can serve as a platform for dialogue; however, in order to become one it also needs a support of state bodies as well as the support of the non-governmental organisations. As seen from the analysis of the positions and interests of the parties, this is possible through certain rounds of mediation with all stakeholders and through building well-targeted communication strategies.

The parties agree that dialogue can take place under one condition – improving knowledge and skills of Muftiate workers and local imams in the ideological struggle against extremism. Today Muftiate lags behind those of other religious and non-official Islamic organisations and the existing set of knowledge and experience of the Muftiate does not allow them to join the discussion and debate with representatives of unofficial Islamic organisations. This requires a certain level of reform such as the development of common training standards in Islamic schools (while working standards throughout the country do not exist), increasing transparency of funds raised during Hajj through sadaqah and redirect revenue from these funds for training and capacity building imams.

### **INDICATOR 3: Islamic principles and values as a tool in conflict prevention and in prevention of violent extremism**

#### **A) STAKEHOLDER PROFILE**

In this section, an analysis is provided on what each of the parties undertook to use Islamic principles and values in order to prevent conflicts and violent extremism, according to the provisions (the statute in case of the Muftiate) upon which they operate. Due to the separation of the religion from the state, the state entities do not have special clauses of using Islamic principles and values in their activities; hence, this section will analyse if state

bodies might be interested in cooperation with the official Islamic clergy to use Islamic principles in preventing conflicts and violent extremism.

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan believes that Islamic principles are universal and accepted by all madhabs in Islam. Various clergy members applied Islamic principles, as certain behavioural and mediation tools at different times. At the same time, certain Islamic principles apply under certain circumstances and cases. Representatives of the Muftiate use Islamic principles in everyday family and social (between neighbours) issues. Wider application of Islamic principles- such as there is no ethnic divisions in Islam- were used during the tragic events of 2010 in Osh and Jalal – Abad by the representatives of local kaziyats where local imams tried to negotiate with the conflicting parties.

The Muftiate identified key areas where Islamic principles and values could be used in conflict prevention and mediation. For example, the Muftiate is interested in using these principles in prevention of: 1) school bullying; 2) outreach and communication between local imams and local self-government entities on hijabs; 3) serving citizens in engaging in dialogue with them on important faith related issues; 4) practicing resolving community level conflicts through dialogue which is known as a tradition left by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

In matters of prevention of violent extremism, the Muftiate would like to develop special courses for imams given special selection Islamic literature authored by reputable ulema and elaborate a strategic program to counter the ideology of violent extremism. As noted by the ulema, followers of violent extremism are specially prepared to be able to conduct theological debates and discussions with representatives of the traditional school of Islam and specifically to engage them into the discourse. Thus, the following principles can be used that were written in the Quran and the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): 1) there is no violence and coercion in Islam; 2) there is no division into ethnic and national characteristics in Islam; 3) every Muslim must obey the leadership of the country; 4) negotiation and dialogue is the tradition of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) , and 5) a Muslim must be able to forgive, and should not hold a grudge for more than three days.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs shares the view of the Muftiate that there is a need to work on the Islamic principles of conflict resolution and prevention of violent extremism. But any activity aimed at prevention of violent extremism based on Islamic principles should be controlled by the state, namely, by the SCRA. "The state can use Islamic principles in conflict resolution as it is practiced in neighbouring countries. But this requires ulemas to write scholarly books, develop training manuals, only then the state should support such initiatives"- said SCRA employees.

**« We should not be scared of risks of engaging in a dialogue because such dialogues are necessary. The quality of a dialogue depends on the intentions of people engaging in a dialogue. Look at Afghanistan, Americans fought with Taliban and only ten years later they decided to sit down at the same table»**

*- An interviewee*

According to the SCRA, the Muftiate should not deviate from the Hanafi School and that the norms outlined in the Hanafi School should be incorporated in writing of the Islamic principles of conflict resolution and prevention of violent extremism. Unfortunately, due to financial and logistical difficulties, SCRA can only provide an on-

going analysis and monitoring the activities of extremist and terrorist organisations. Monitoring and analysis are displayed on the website [www.religion.gov.kg](http://www.religion.gov.kg) and the State Commission cannot yet develop training materials, analytical papers on incorporating Islamic principles of conflict resolution.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Department of MIA believes that Islamic principles are needed and necessary to resolve conflicts. However, insofar the Special Unit has not worked with the Islamic principles. Although it has never used Islamic principles of conflict resolution, the Special Unit is ready to implement such principles, if methodologies and training manuals on such principles are made available. According to the staff of the Unit, the operatives are open for cooperation and strive for transparency in their work. According to respondents from the Interior Ministry, special training manuals can be developed based on the Islamic principles for local authorities, district police officers and local imams, schoolteachers to work in reducing contentiousness among the Muslim population.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations admit that there is a set of Islamic principles which can be used for conflict resolution. In the tragic events of 2010 in Osh and Jalal-Abad oblasts, local imams tried to promote Islamic values during Ramadan. Representatives of the Tablighi Jamaat created mixed dawah groups composed of different ethnic groups<sup>20</sup>. As the analysis of interviews with representatives of informal Islamic communities reveal, Islamic principles of conflict resolution are applied universally. For example, the Tablighi Jamaat does not recognise ethnic and national identity, for they have one identity - a Muslim identity. In their work, they adhere to the principle of dialogue with all the people on the basis of the Sunnah of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). According to them, "lying, cheating, separation of people based on ethnic and social origin are the sins for which you will need to answer before Allah."

Parallel to this, Hizb-ut Tahrir attempted to build a dialogue between conflicting groups of young people in Uzgen in 2006-2007<sup>21</sup>. They practiced the Islamic principles of conflict resolution at the everyday social issues among secondary school teachers in Jalal- Abad as well. Nevertheless, at the same time, they have come into conflict with the existing formal structures of the Muftiate, namely with local level imams in a competition for spheres of influence and issues of sermon. On the part of the Salafis, there is also a dual approach in the interpretation and application of Islamic principles to resolve conflicts. On the one hand, they recognise that there are certain principles, and those they must be followed, but on the other hand, they think that these principles cannot be used in confrontation with government authorities and official clergy. To sum up, the analysis shows that different informal and non-

**«Radicalism and religious extremism has come from outside. This means that by granting a wide spectrum of religious freedom and without a proper control, we have contributed to flourishing of radical organisations as Hizb-ut Tahrir, Salafis and, most recently those that follow takfiri and jihadi ideologies. We need to nurture our own madhab. It is considered to be the most tolerant of all madhabs»**

*- An interviewee*

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<sup>20</sup>Dilmurad Orozov and Kadyr Malikov have travelled throughout the Southern Kyrgyzstan to conduct prayers and dawah during the holy month of Ramadan through the FTI project in 2010

<sup>21</sup>From the banned CD of the Hizb-ut Tahrir from 2007

traditional Islamic organisations and associations have different understanding and interpretation of what constitutes Islamic conflict resolution and who it should be applied to.

## **B) POSITIONS AND INTERESTS OF STAKEHOLDERS**

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan seeks to position itself as the dominant party and positions itself to increase in the number of his supporters, and tries to become the central authority in interpreting Islamic principles. Given that attitude to Islamic principles different from different parties, the Muftiate seeks to find a universal interpretation to satisfy all, and implement Islamic principles in practice, but is afraid to go out in the political space, which then would increase a level of responsibility.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs aims to strengthen its position as the dominant state body that implements the state policy in the sphere of religion. Implementation and use of Islamic principles in practice must be supervised by the Commission and should not breach the law. But how to implement and use Islamic conflict resolution principles in practice and in prevention of violent extremism should be identified by the Muftiate as, according to the State Commission, it is the prerogative of the Muftiate. Commission staff believes that the Muftiate must first raise the level of knowledge of imams, and then work on Islamic principles, so that there are no ambiguity and controversy in interpretation and implementation of such principles.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of MIA has positioned itself as an open and transparent part of the Ministry of the Interior, but so far has no idea what are the Islamic principles and how to apply them in practice. However, it believes that if the using Islamic principles allow them to reduce the level of terrorist and extremist threats and help resolve conflicts, such principles should be applied. Development of methods of application of Islamic principles into practice should engage the Muftiate and theologians of the country. But such position of the Special Unit coincides with the position of the SCRA, that the Muftiate should increase its theological and leadership capacity before applying such principles in practice.

**«The most tolerant madhab has been developed in our country, which is directed at a moral upbringing and criticism against the principle of kufr. This provides as a potential to oppose an ideology of the religious extremism and prevent conflicts»**

*- An interviewee*

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations have a different position depending on their own interests and understanding of Islamic principles of conflict resolution, especially in understanding of when these principles can and cannot be used (e.g. jihad with the 'infidels'). Tablighi Jamaat believes and is positioning itself as a supporter of daily application of Islamic principles in practice during dawah, however, understanding of these principles differ with those interests put forward by the state. However, for the Hizb-ut Tahrir, the Islamic principles are acceptable only when the sharia law is introduced and a caliphate is built. In addition, for the Salafis, the Islamic principles can serve as a tool in the fight against the constitutional order and the Muftiate.

## C) CONCLUSION/WRAP-UP

There is a consensus among parties that the Islamic principles can be applied in practice - in conflict resolution and pre-emption of manifestations of violent extremism, but there is no common approach on how and by what criteria to select them, and what is included in the principles of Islamic conflict resolution. Development of common Islamic values and principles in conflict resolution and mediation, negotiation with the conflicting parties could help both the Muftiate and public authorities to reduce the level of conflict and the threat of violent extremism and radicalism. However, the analysed parties agreed that the Muftiate should increase its own capacity before the implementation and practical application of Islamic principles.

However, each side has a different understanding of their own purpose and relationship with each other. Different approaches and attitudes toward the application of Islamic principles as a tool to resolve conflicts, also generates personal behavioural patterns, transforming them into solid position and interests of each party. In general, on all sides there is a desire to use or to learn how to use Islamic principles in conflict prevention. But the positions and interests do not coincide due to the lack of common grounds among stakeholders. In the future it is necessary to try to find common interests and grounds, which is important for peace-building in the Islamic religious sphere.

**INDICATOR 4: Inter-linkages and relations between the Muftiate and other Islamic organisations and associations in prevention of violent extremism**

## A) STAKEHOLDER PROFILE

In this section, an analysis is provided on what each of the stakeholders undertook to build a relationship and interactions between the Muftiate and other Islamic organisations and associations to prevent violent extremism, based on the provisions of regulations and bylaws (the statute, in the case of the Muftiate) according which they operate. Due to the separation of the religion from the state, the state entities do not have special clauses of engaging or contributing to the relations between the Muftiate and other non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations and associations; hence, this section will analyse if state bodies might be interested in cooperation with the official Islamic clergy and non-traditional informal Islamic organisations and associations.

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan in the face of Muftiy Egemberdiev open to all comers Muslims as the Muftiate does not practice the principle of secrecy or confrontation with other non-traditional informal Islamic organisations and associations. The Muftiate recognises Islamic diversity, but follows the canons (akiyda) of "Ahl al-Sunnah wa al Jamaat" of the Hanafi madhab. During the years of its existence, the Muftiate has established cooperation with various international Islamic centres and organisations, as well as Muslim communities.

At country, regional and local levels imams established relations with all Islamic organisations and associations. But every imam knows which Muslim community

represents which Islamic association or organisation. Imam cannot ban a particular believer from going to the mosque only because the believer represents the interests and positions of other Islamic organisation. The Muftiate had a close relationship with the representatives of the Tablighi Jamaat on dawah as it is, according to the Muftiate, does not pose a threat to the interests of Islam and the state, as they are only pursuing the work that was commanded by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). To note, Tablighi Jamat, according to its internal rules and principles, does not interfere in the affairs of the mosque and Muftiate that receives approval from the Muftiate. In order to increase accountability of Tablighi Jamaat, the Muftiate issued a fatwa (decree) on creation of a special "department of dawah" within the Muftiate.

But the Muftiate does not have any relations with other informal organisations, such as Hizb-ut- Tahrir and the Salafis. There is an ideological and practical controversy; back in the mid-1990s the Muftiate issued a special fatwa "On countering extremist activities of Hizb-ut Tahrir," and in 2004 a former Mutiy Jumanov has issued a book called "What is Hizb-it Tahrir." The Muftiate, in conjunction with the SCRA and MIA, had special meetings and seminars where it criticised and condemned the actions of HT members. As per Salafis, the Muftiate does not have a clear countering strategy. Unlike the representatives of Hizb-ut Tahrir, the Salafis do not conduct outreach in public places and do not distribute their materials to the population. Salafism is a poorly studied phenomenon for the Muftiate.

In an effort to counter the ideology of extremism and terrorism, the Muftiate has a huge potential, both human and theological ones, but has no authority and mechanisms for action. An analysis of statements and recommendations focus group discussion participants, the Muftiate staff has three diverging opinions. First, there is a need to build a platform for discussion with the Salafis and show the fallacy of their ideology. In practice, in everyday life such dialogue often occurs, but not in public. The representatives of ulemas, imams oftentimes face the radical, extremist organisations in the public, but are not exposed to them and do not debate with them. Second, they think there is no need to build a dialogue with them, and there is no need to pay attention to them and show their significance because, otherwise, they would have a "weight and importance" and would think, "they all fear". There is also an opinion that "they would never recover from their vision and interpretation of Islam". Finally, some think that they need to work together with government and law enforcement agencies to develop a strategy to counter extremist ideology and actions. The Muftiate would be given a role of developing an ideological platform, and the state authorities would use coercive methods of work and suppress activities of such organisations.

Attitude to various informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations comes from everyday interaction and a personal experience. If an perceptions around Tablighi Jamaat is built around their theological weakness and unpreparedness, the other organisations (e.g. HT and Salafis) are known for upbringing adepts with high level of fanaticism and radicalism. Tablighi Jamaat is not prepared for discussion and debate, because it does not have this desire or aim to prove itself as the only true follower of Islam. But, in contrast, Hizb-ut Tahrir and the Salafis specifically prepare their members for discussion and theological disputes, and only trained theologians and ulema representatives can counteract, who also know the specifics of their worldview.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs monitors and evaluates the activities of all Islamic organisations. According to Commission staff, the relationships of the Muftiate

and other Islamic organisations on the prevention of violent extremism should be built for reasons of national security. The Muftiate may interact with moderate traditional Islamic organisations, but not with radical extremist organisations, such as HT or Salafis. The SCRA considers the Muftiate as a representative of traditional Islam, and thinks that other Islamic organisations should accept this fact. According to the employees of the State Commission, the Muftiate should establish close relationships with other moderate Islamic organisations to counter violent manifestations of extremism and terrorism, but under the state control. Finally, the Muftiate should not show itself as a consumer of foreign ideas and opportunities, and should develop its own approach.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of MIA believes that the Muftiate may interact with moderate Islamic organisations to counter violent extremism, but should not enter into discussion and dialogue with extremist and terrorist organisations for several reasons. Because: 1 ) all extremist and terrorist organisations are prohibited by law and any contact would be regarded as a violation of the law; 2) the level and quality theological training of the Muftiate is lower than the Salafists and HT; 3) engaging in a dialogue with them may artificially inflating their self-esteem and importance, which may subsequently affect the image of the Muslim Board; and 4) there is no assurance that extremists and radicals depart from their ideas, in fact, they can try to attract the employees SMMC .

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations have different views. Tablighi Jamaat strives to comply with all requirements and regulations of the Muftiate. Throughout 2006-2009, the Muftiate has developed a special uniform for the representatives and adherents of Tablighi Jamaat that conduct dawah throughout the country. TD members can participate in the process of combating the manifestations of violent extremism, but the level of their knowledge and the quality of their skills is much lower than of those that can be offered by the HT and Salafis.

HT repeatedly went against the Muftiate and its activities on two main issues: 1) the days of the Muslim holidays Eid differ from the calendar of Saudi Arabia, and 2) dissatisfaction associated with the Muftiate's cooperation with the secular regime and compliance with the Constitution. In the period from 2004 to 2008, HT has repeatedly tried to take the place of imam khatibs in the districts and entered into conflict with existing local imams of mosques in Osh and Jalal-Abad provinces. The salafis do not recognise Muslim teachings and schools, and do not recognise the Muftiate as Islamic organisation and believe that it should not exist in a secular country, and if it were to exist, it must seek to establish Sharia norms and fight the "infidels."

## **B) POSITIONS AND INTERESTS OF STAKEHOLDERS**

Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan seeks to dominate the Islamic organisations and build a common policy across the country. However, due to the fact that structural and regional offices, as well as local imams lack knowledge and experience and lag behind other Islamic organisations, the Muftiate has to find mechanisms to attract all moderate Islamic organisations, groups and communities on their side. Not having the status and authority in countering violent extremism, the Muftiate employees have different approaches and opinions in this matter.

The State Commission on Religious Affairs seek to acquire the status of the regulator and supervisor of the Islamic sphere. Prohibitions and repressions among the informal and

non-traditional Islamic organisations that are against the traditional Hanafi madhab is the dominant position of the State Commission, which comes from the interest in preserving national security. The Muftiate can engage in dialogue and interact with the moderate Islamic organisations and groups that abide existing secular constitution.

10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of MIA seeks to clear the religious sphere from the "unnecessary" Islamic organisations and believes that the Muftiate is a main partner in this process. The Special Unit is categorically against the Muftiate's interaction with extremist and radical organisations. This is because the main goal of the Unit is the

elimination and eradication of extremism and radicalism in the Kyrgyz Republic. This Unit is promoting its own interest, which is to increase its own image among other law enforcement agencies as well as in the eye of the public. Fighting violent manifestations of extremism and terrorism has become one of the priorities of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the entire system, not only in the present but also in the near future.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations and associations position themselves as followers of true Islam and build up their own alternative system of relationships and values that they try to project on the public. They see their purpose as a way to convey their ideology and values to the public no matter what obstacles and difficulties they might encounter. This means that to the more radical ones, the Muftiate and the state can never be viewed as a partner or associate.

**«We should not be afraid of criticism and should invite other into the dialogue. This is needed to understand the importance of cooperation, without which the situation would get only worse. It is important to show common interests. Common interests are to live in a developed and fair country»**

*- An interviewee*

### **C) CONCLUSION/WRAP UP**

It is very important for the Muftiate to preserve the status-quo not only in the eyes of the faithful Muslims, but also in the eyes of other Islamic organisations and government agencies. Dominant position of the Muftiate in the Islamic environment gives them the right to control the resource allocation process (mainly Islamic charity funds) and be in the interests of both the state and society. Obviously, the relationship and interaction with other non-traditional and information Islamic organisations formed not from a position of addressing the phenomenon of violent extremism and terrorism, but from the perspective of protection of their own interests, which is rooted in access to resources.

The State Commission is trying to systematise and streamline its work, to show its own importance to the country's leadership. As per interaction of the Muftiate with non-traditional and information Islamic organisations in the fight against violent extremism such interaction and a very close cooperation is not desirable for the SCRA, as this process involves strengthening the role and position of the Muftiate and enhances the status of the Muftiy. This may adversely affect the positions and interests of the state as a whole. Separating religion (Islam) from the state is of benefit to the State Commission as it tries to put forward its own policies to regulate the Islamic sphere in its sole discretion.

The vision of the law enforcement system is a bit different; it builds its own view of the role of Islamic organisations and the Muftiate as a source of information and

knowledge. Interaction and relationships of the Muftiate with non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations should not go against the interests of the state and public security. In fact, the law enforcement system in light of possible future uncertainty in the security of the Central Asian region, is trying to establish a system of protection of national interests and security.

Informal and non-traditional Islamic organisations pursue their own interests. Every organisation strives to strengthen its "conquered" positions and expand their reach to the ordinary believers. In their eyes, the Muftiate is the weakest link, which is held only due to the state support and therefore is "betraying" the true meaning of Islam. Informal Islamic organisations are pursuing very different interests, namely access to resources (internal and external), increasing the number of their supporters, and the expansion of its sphere of influence. The more radical ones, ultimately, pursue the rise to power and the replacement of the constitutional regime based on their own understanding of the state. Hence, the Muftiate is rather treated as an obstacle in cultivating their ideas among the population.

## **PART 3 | ANALYSIS OF PROBLEM AREAS AND POSSIBLE SCENARIOS**

### **Analysis of the main issues of relationship between key players and their consequences**

The above-described situational analysis as well as the analysis of the key and indirect stakeholder interests and positions on each of the indicators revealed six specific problems of the relationship between the key players and their understanding of roles in dealing with Islamic religious sphere:

1. Interactions of state bodies and Islamic organisations on combating violent extremism are not provided at the legislative level. On the one hand, there are the rights and freedoms guaranteed for the believers in the Constitution and other legal acts of the country, but on the other hand Islamic organisations like any other religious organisations are separated from the state and cannot go beyond the legislation. The authorities creating the conditions for freedom of religion under the existing law cannot use the potential of Islamic religious organisations for political purposes. But at the same time, the government can use the potential of Islamic organisations through state-faith partnerships. There are a number of such agreements already signed in many countries such as Russian Federation, Israel, and Turkey.. The State Commission on Religious Affairs of Kyrgyz Republic and civic organisations working in Islamic sphere may become a bridge between all parties. In expert circles there is an opinion that the mufti and imam can become civil servants based on state-faith agreements;
2. Islamic diversity in Kyrgyzstan is shaped not only because of liberal legislation, which allows the Islamic organisations to conduct internal and external activities, but also thanks to personal initiative of Muslims, their desire to get foreign Islamic education regardless of the trends and schools in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Syria, Libya, Kuwait, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Turkey, and Russia. In Kyrgyz Republic, unlike other Central Asian countries, there is no uniform domestic Islamic school and single, unified educational standards that urge MPs and experts to initiate a draft law "On religious education and religious educational institutions";
3. Relationship of government bodies and official Islamic organisations remain on a conservative (post-soviet) level and they are behind the development of informal Islamic organisations' socio-political initiatives. Informal Islamic organisations thanks to their activity managed to build an alternative value system. Kyrgyzstan became a center of Islamic diversity in Central Asia, but there is no unity in diversity, as it is practiced in other countries;
4. The government and Islamic organisations at the local and regional level encounter conflicts as the administrations of secondary schools and female students have opposite stand relating religious outfit in public places. Obviously, the conflict should not go into the political discourse, it can be resolved only by interaction of Islamic organisations and government agencies and by adoption of constructive agreement between the parties.

5. Only the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan can provide a platform for a dialogue between parties interested in countering violent extremism provided that there is a state consent and adequate capacity building (knowledge, experience) of ulemas. The ulemas are not ready for the discussions and debates with the representatives of informal Islamic organisations.
6. However, the government agencies and law enforcement bodies are ready to cooperate on combating violent extremism by developing and designing a comprehensive strategic action plan with a clear division of roles. Obviously the State Commission on Religious Affairs under the President of Kyrgyzstan should initiate such work.

Based on the foregoing analysis and conducting an analysis of internal and external factors affecting the entire Islamic sphere in Kyrgyzstan, the report concludes that the situation will change regardless of what happens in the Islamic sphere. If the state and the Muftiate will not take any action, the external factors can have a negative impact on the Islamic sphere and then the state and the Muftiate will face unpredictable consequences. Given the current situation in Kyrgyzstan, following scenarios are possible:

***Scenario #1: State-Faith agreement on the most important issues including countering violent extremism***

| Positive changes  | Negative changes   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There will be a clearly defined framework of Islamic organisations and the state;</li> <li>• Revision of existing laws and adopting amendments and changes;</li> <li>• Muslim community administration institute will have order and discipline;</li> <li>• Domestic Islamic school will be formed;</li> <li>• There will be a single educational standard for Islamic universities and colleges;</li> <li>• There will be established ideological platform to combat extremism and terrorism;</li> <li>• Engaging Islamic organisations for joint actions and campaigns;</li> <li>• Establishment of spiritual (Islamic) elite, the intelligentsia</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sabotage by informal (radical, extremist) organisations;</li> <li>• Lack of understanding by the authorities in the provinces.</li> </ul> |
| Consequences  |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transparency of Islamic organisations and the government in relation to each other;</li> <li>• Improving accountability of the state and Islamic organisations to each other;</li> <li>• Forming partnerships;</li> <li>• Clear delineation of responsibilities and status</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism of the official Islamic organisations ("traitors") by the radicals and extremists.</li> </ul>                                   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| of Islamic organisations, their place and role. |  |
|---|--|

***Scenario #2: Uncontrolled flow of situation (isomorphic/natural course of events)***

| <b>Positive events</b>  | <b>Negative events</b>   |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State strengthens control over the Islamic sphere and requires continuous reporting</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of control over the Islamic sphere by Muftiate;</li> <li>• Loss of national reputation and Muftiate;</li> <li>• Continuous cyclic conflict between official and unofficial Islamic organisations;</li> <li>• Violation of the laws and regulations;</li> <li>• Disobedience to the state.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Consequences</b>   |  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The deepening contradictions between the state and the Islam;</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underground resistance due to increased state control;</li> <li>• Strengthening the role of unofficial Islamic organisations, the radicalisation of groups;</li> <li>• Complete loss of reputation by the state.</li> </ul>   |

***Scenario #3: Strengthening the role of the state, and government's attempts to format the Islamic sphere (Islam in the service of the State)***

| <b>Positive events</b>   | <b>Negative events</b>  |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control and forming own state system of Islamic organisations;</li> <li>• Muftiate accountable and reporting to the State;</li> <li>• Mufti, kazi, imams-Kkhatibs become state or municipal employees and shall be accountable to the government bodies.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Underground resistance of other Islamic organisations that disagree with the government policies;</li> <li>• The emergence of the system (radical) Islamic opposition (political parties) to the authorities and Muftiate (for example, Uzbekistan in 1990s);</li> <li>• Protests from other religious (Protestant Christian) organisations;</li> <li>• Strengthening the repressive, punitive measures by the state.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Consequences</b>  |   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved accountability of muftis and kazis to the government and the public;</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Criticism of international and Christian organisations demanding to grant the Christian and other religious organisations the same status;</li> <li>• Muftis and kazis turn away from the needs of the population to strengthening public policy.</li> </ul>   |

## PART 4 |RECOMMENDATIONS

Taking into account the aforementioned main problem areas due to the lack of active interaction of the key stakeholders to prevent violent extremism, inconsistencies of existing legal framework of the country, and on the basis of interviews and focus groups, the project is able to provide generic recommendations on the issue of violent extremism, as well as specific recommendations for each of the key players. It should be noted that some of the recommendations are consistent with the proposals made by the parties during separate meetings and the official launch of the Consultative Working Group (CWG).

### **A) General Recommendations:**

- Since the legislation has inconsistencies and does not have any regulations on cooperation of state bodies and Islamic organisations to combat violent extremism, it is necessary to conduct an overview of the legislation for the harmonisation of legal acts with the supreme law of Kyrgyz Republic;
- Since there is no unified Islamic education system and standard for religious educational institutions, it is necessary to initiate the introduction of uniform educational standards in Islamic religious organisations under the Muftiate control;
- At this point, non-traditional and informal Islamic organisations have managed to build an alternative system of values. As a result, Kyrgyzstan has become a centre of Islamic diversity, without existing common understanding of Islamic religious diversity. Accordingly, it is necessary to enhance the capacity of Muftiate as a religious institution and improve the formal training of Imams and Imam khatibs throughout the country. Moreover, it is necessary to improve cooperation between the government and Muftiate at establishing and strengthening a national school of Islam;
- Diversity in Kyrgyzstan is manifested not only in the religious sphere, but also manifests itself in a clash between religious and secular communities. Moreover, because of the unclear interpretation of the legislation, there is a conflict arising at national and local levels. Along with the harmonisation of the legal acts with the supreme law of Kyrgyz Republic, it is necessary to resolve conflicts in schools (the wearing of headscarves and hijabs in schools) through a dialogue and joint educational campaigns by Muftiate and the secondary schools administrations;
- According to the interviews and focus groups, only Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan can provide a platform for a dialogue between all parties interested in countering violent extremism. This can only be done if the government gives its consent, and that ulemas are better prepared and trained. The ulema are not ready for the discussions and debates with the representatives of informal Islamic organisations. Accordingly, it is necessary to enhance the capacity of Muftiate as a religious institution and improve the capacity of Imams and Imam Kkhatib throughout the country in order to build a platform for a dialogue on the Islamic diversity and the prevention of violent extremism;
- Violent extremism using religion as a political ideology is an urgent problem in Kyrgyzstan. However, neither public authorities nor the law enforcement bodies, or

Muftiate have any long-term clear vision for solving this problem. Therefore, it is necessary to design a uniform long-term strategic plan of actions with the participation of all key players (SCRA, 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit of MIA and SAMK). The strategic plan has to have clear division of roles for each stakeholder in preventing violent extremism. Moreover, it is necessary to highlight the positive aspects of interaction of key players and introduce monitoring of implementation of a uniform long-term strategic plan.

## **B) Specific recommendations for each of the players:**

### ***Recommendations for Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan***

According to interviewees and focus-group participants, it is necessary to do following in order to strengthen the capacity of Muftiate to prevent violent extremism:

- Closely interact and cooperate with all government bodies. Muftiate should not remain on the side-lines;
- Introduce a monitoring mechanism and timely response on the information flow in media about religion and Islam in particular;
- Conduct regular trainings for imams on preventing violent extremism and promoting traditional Hanafi Islam;
- Improve collaboration of Muftiate with the 10th Special Unit of MIA to prevent extremism;
- Muftiate must develop a joint strategy to combat radicalism and extremism;
- Muftiate must conduct regular lectures and seminars at the universities, schools on religious non-violence.

### ***Recommendations for the 10th Special Unit of the Ministry of Internal Affairs***

In order to improve the quality of the 10th Special Unit's work on prevention of violent extremism, following needs to be done:

- It is necessary to introduce special training courses for the regional staff of the Special Unit throughout the country. Therefore, it is necessary to open training, methodical and analytical centre at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Trainings should be conducted jointly with Muftiate and SCRA;
- Improve communications and collaboration with the National Security Committee and SCRA to forestall and prevent violent extremism. To create integrated mobile teams to prevent and respond to extremism
- It is necessary to develop a comprehensive strategy on prevention of violent extremism with the clear division roles and purposes of each involved institution: Ministry of Internal Affairs is liable for proactive prevention and prophylaxis, SCRA should be responsible for analysis and expertise, SAMK should carry out ideological countering.
- Improve technical base and human capital of the Special Unit staff, especially in the regions.

### ***Recommendations for SCRA***

In order to improve ability of SCRA to prevent violent extremism following needs to be done:

- Carry out a nationwide sociological research on the role of religion in public life;
- Conduct regular trainings for the clergy, and to increase their capacity;
- Improve the interaction of state bodies, civil society and Islamic organisations in order to prevent extremism.

# ANNEX 1 | SAMPLE SURVEY

## *Main indicators:*

- A. Inter-relations between state organizations (10<sup>th</sup> Dept. Of Ministry of Interior, State Commission on Religious Affairs) and Muftiate
- B. Ability/Capacity of Muftiate to serve as a dialogue space between Islamic organizations/groups in preventing violent extremism
- C. Islam as a tool in conflict prevention and prevention of violent extremism
- D. Inter-relations between Muftiate and other Islamic organizations/groups in prevention of violent extremism

## **1. General questions:**

- How would you assess developments in (Islamic) religious sphere in the country since 2008? What are they main successes and challenges?
- Do you think that Kyrgyzstan needs to revisit legislation on religion? If yes, what exact changes would you recommend?

## **2. Specific questions on indicators**

### **A) Inter-relations between state organizations (10<sup>th</sup> Dept. Of Ministry of Interior, State Commission on Religious Affairs) and Muftiate**

- How would you assess current inter-relations between the State Commission and Muftiate in prevention of violent extremism, given that the country has separation of state and religion? What concrete actions have been taken and what actions should additionally be taken?
- How would you assess current inter-relations between the 10<sup>th</sup> Dept. and Muftiate in prevention of violent extremism, given that the country has separation of state and religion? What concrete actions have been taken and what actions should additionally be taken?
- How would you assess current inter-relations between the State Commission and 10<sup>th</sup> Dept. in prevention of violent extremism, given that the country has separation of state and religion? What concrete actions have been taken and what actions should additionally be taken?

### **B) Ability/Capacity of Muftiate to serve as a dialogue space between Islamic organizations/groups in preventing violent extremism**

- Can Muftiate serve as a space for a dialogue between Islamic religious organizations/groups in prevention of violent extremism?
- In your opinion, what should be the role of Muftiate in prevention of violent extremism?
- What Muftiate has undertaken in violent extremism prevention and what needs to be improved?

### **C) Islam as a tool in conflict prevention and prevention of violent extremism**

- Are there any principles and values in Islam that can be used in prevention of conflicts? If yes, can you give examples?
- Do you know if these Islamic principles and values are being used in the country to prevent conflicts? Can you give examples?
- If Islam has principles and values that allow conflict prevention, what are the reasons of them not being widely used? What are the difficulties?

### **E) Inter-relations between Muftiate and other Islamic organizations/groups in prevention of violent extremism**

- What do you feel about the existing Islamic organizations/groups in the country and how would you assess their influence in the country?
- What are the obstacles in working collaboratively in prevention of violent extremism?
- In your opinion, is it possible to find common grounds and cooperate in prevention of violent extremism?

## ANNEX 2 | INFORMATION ON THE MUFTIATE

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (SAMK) was established on the basis of Kaziyat<sup>22</sup> within the Soviet Central Asian Muslim Spiritual Directorate (CAMSD). The first independent Kyrgyz Mufti Mullah Abdusattar Mazhitov was elected at the first kurultay (council) of Muslims in 1996. The second Muslim Mufti Kimsanbay Abdurakhmanov was elected on 8 April 2000 at the second kurultay. The third Mufti Murataly Zhumanov was elected on 10 August 2002 at the third kurultay. From late 2010 to December 2012 Chubak Zhalilov was in the post of Mufti, and from 17 December 2012 Azreti Rahmatullah Egemberdiev became the Mufti of Kyrgyzstan. Until 2002 the post of Mufti was given to representatives of the so-called "Soviet Islamic school", in the post- 2005 the Muftiate saw a new generation of Ulema trained during the years of independence. Some of them were educated by representatives of the "Soviet Islamic school", and the others were educated in foreign Islamic universities.

During the years of independence the three generations of Ulema were formed in Kyrgyzstan: (1) Generation of the 90s, which is now in control of the Muftiate (2) Generation of the 2000s trying to find their own social and theological niche, both domestically and abroad, and (3) Generation of modern youth considering its destination outside the Muftiate. The younger generation tends not only to get Islamic education, but also to implement their own projects.

Communication and understanding between the generations of Ulema is looked at several levels:

1. **Attitude towards Islam, Muslims, the state and other religions:** the difference in relation to these concepts comes from a level, place, time and quality of Islamic education. For example, a Kyrgyz citizen educated in Pakistani Madrasa or theological Turkish university or Kyrgyz Madrasas from a remote district will have a different understanding of the nature and role of Islam, the state as well as the nature and role of other religions;
2. **Attitude toward oneself:** development of their positions and interests in regards to their own future. Their perception of their future and the routes of such perception depends on the objectives they set for themselves, which are not always and necessarily clear;
3. **Attitude towards the global geopolitical and economic processes:** each generation has its own understanding of the essence of globalization. Some are trying to build their own understanding and adapt to the ongoing processes, while others are attempting to develop their own counter strategy or alternative actions.

The current political processes in Kyrgyzstan (2005 and 2010) are directly reflected on the status and activities of the Muftiate. The April events in the country had demonstrated that the post of Mufti is not just a highest spiritual position, but a platform for a variety of interests, including both spiritual and political ones. The Muftiate is the largest Islamic organization and administration of the Muslim community; it represents a broad multidivisional network across the country. In the oblast (regional) centres and cities of Bishkek and Osh it operates such structural units as Kaziyaats and at a district level - Imam Kkhatibs. Since 2012, SAMK introduces new structural subdivisions:

1. Halal Committee (implementing the possibilities of expanding Islamic catering, production);
2. Youth and women division (there are so many issues in regards to the place and role of women in Islam, as well as opportunities for youth in Islam);
3. Department of Islamic Economic Development (introduction and expansion of Islamic principles of finance and banking);
4. Department of Education and Madrasas (registration and control of the Islamic universities, madrasas);
5. Legal department dealing with legal issues of SAMK.

Some departments that previously existed:

1. Fatwa Department (Decrees);
2. Dawah Department (preaching from door-to-door);
3. Department of mosques and construction;
4. Secretariat;
5. Administration of Muftiate

<sup>22</sup> According to the Muftiate's documents, the first Kaziyat was established in 1943.

## ANNEX 3 | INFORMATION ON THE SCRA

Since independence of the Kyrgyz Republic, there was an urgent need for the state policy in the sphere of religion. The Presidential Decree of 4 March 1996 No 45, "On the structure and membership of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic" established the State Committee on Religious Affairs under the President of the Kyrgyz Republic".

The State Committee on Religious Affairs under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic was transformed into the State Agency for Religious Affairs under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic by the Presidential Decree of November 11, 2005 No 533 "On Amendments and Additions to the Presidential Decree" on improvement of the structure of government of the Kyrgyz Republic dated October 15, 2005 No 462.

The reform of the public administration system of the Kyrgyz Republic in accordance with the Presidential Decree "On measures to ensure implementation of the Law" On the structure of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic ", issued on 26 October 2009 No 425 withdrew the State Agency for Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic from the executive branch of the government and transformed it into the State Committee on Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic with its definition as a body reporting directly to the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Presidential Decree "On transfer of certain state bodies under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic" dated 21 January 2011, The State Committee on Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic was transferred under the administration of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic On amendments and additions to the Decree of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic "On transfer of certain state bodies under the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic" dated 21 January 2011, The State Committee on Religious Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic was transferred into the administration of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The State Committee on Religious Affairs (hereinafter - SCRA) is the central body of the Kyrgyz Republic, operating on formation and implementation of the state policy in the sphere of religion and coordinating the activities of the state bodies of the Kyrgyz Republic in the sphere of religion.<sup>23</sup>

The Presidential Decree of 23 March 2012 No 71 approved the "Provision on the State Committee on Religious Affairs", according to which SCRA is accountable to the President of the Kyrgyz Republic.

The Provision states that the Committee: "... forms the relations between the state and the confessions and restrains the activities of religious organizations that bear threat of damaging the health, moral or the rights and legitimate interests of citizens, the basis of the constitutional system, the national security, in accordance with the current legislation. The Committee shall develop cooperation between the state authorities in order to prevent religious extremism in the territory of the Republic.

The Committee "is involved in development of state programs on prevention and combating the spread of religious extremism and terrorism, with the activities of pseudo-religious groups, as well as religious groups, damaging or threatening the rights and legitimate interests of citizens, the constitutional system and the national security."

On the issue of the religious sphere regulation, it is stated that the Committee "assists religious organizations in establishing relationships with the governmental agencies and provides the necessary assistance on matters requiring decisions of the state authorities."

In terms of control, coordination and monitoring of the activities of religious organizations, the Committee intends to: "interact and exchange information with the international organizations and relevant agencies of foreign countries in the field of religion, prevention and combating religious extremism and terrorism."

In order to realize its objectives and functions, the Committee is authorized to:

- Assist citizens of the Kyrgyz Republic in countering attacks by extremist religious organizations, other destructive groups ... detrimental to the physical and moral condition of the person, report to the relevant authorities to facilitate bringing them to justice and ban their activities;
- apply to the courts to ban or suspend the activities of religious organizations involved in the spread of religious extremism, fundamentalism, violating the laws of the Kyrgyz Republic, posing a threat to the rights and legitimate interests of citizens and the security of the state, and to ban or suspend the

<sup>23</sup><http://www.religion.gov.kg/ru/node/28>

activities of pseudo-religious groups, aggressive religious groups, causing harm or threatening the foundations of the constitutional system, the national defence and national security;

In order to exercise control over the activities of religious organizations, the Committee has developed a special Provision<sup>24</sup> "On the forms and terms of religious organizations reporting on their activities," the main purpose of which is "the exercise of a more complete interaction of the state bodies and religious organizations, for implementation of activities by the religious organizations and ensuring the rights to freedom of religion in the Kyrgyz Republic. Reports by the religious organizations must be submitted in the form of a written report with the appropriate attachments and tables.

Over the entire period of its existence, the State Committee for the first time is being transformed into a body striving not only to control the religious sphere, but also to evaluate the activities of religious organizations and make its decision public. Rigid control and the requirement under the new legislation put the religious organizations in an awkward position. The employees of the State Committee are not only monitoring, but also in cooperation with civil society seek court orders to ban activities of various organizations that harm the national interests of the country.<sup>25</sup>

The status of the State Committee and its legitimate demands meet passive resistance on the part of religious organizations who are not accustomed to such harsh treatment. Evidently, the staffs of the State Committee strive to build new state-confessional relations, but so far there is little success due to the lack of established ways and mechanisms of interaction. The SCRA considers religious organizations as the object of control, regulation and its own policy that contradicts own concepts of the religious organizations. As noted by representatives of religious organizations, the "golden era of liberalism" when there were friendly relations, has now ended. The targets set for the State Committee aim to clear the religious sphere from any destructive, extremist organizations, make religious environment more transparent, clear and manageable.

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<sup>24</sup> The Order of the Director of the State Committee on Religion dated 28 January 2012:

<sup>25</sup> The SCRA publishes evaluations to the activities of the Tengri religion adepts, those of San SenMun and others.

## ANNEX 4 | INFORMATION ON 10<sup>th</sup> SU MIA

A law enforcement system has the 10<sup>th</sup> Special Unit, which is an independent structural subdivision of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Unit is in charge of developing and implementing actions against extremism, illegal migration, and cyber threats<sup>26</sup>, preventing terrorism, monitoring public and political situation in the country; the unit tries to foresee any public turmoil<sup>27</sup>.

Main objectives and functions of the Special Unit are to revitalize the other divisions' activities, to combat extremism, illegal migration, cyber threats, to prevent terrorist activities and interethnic and interregional conflicts, to monitor political situation and prevent its destabilization. The Special Units also conducts investigations and takes preventive measures to monitor and curb the activities of extremist and terrorist organizations, prevent ethnic and inter-regional clashes, eliminate illegal migration and cyber threats, the unit identifies and searches for individuals who are preparing to commit or have committed cybercrimes.

The Unit interacts and cooperates with foreign agencies and local religious denominations on issues of religious and interfaith relations, activities of foreign religious missionaries as well as those sending people abroad to study at religious schools. The Unit also conducts operational check-ups on individuals and organizations inviting foreign citizens with the purpose to reveal any violation of migration regulations, including those foreign citizens coming to study at educational institutions of Kyrgyz Republic. The Unit works with the government bodies in charge of labour, employment and migration, it carries out check-ups of employment legal status of foreign citizens and stateless individuals as well as organizations and individuals engaged in bringing foreign labour and in sending the citizens abroad.

Thus, within its mandate the 10th Special Unit of the Ministry of Interior (SU MIA) works with all religious organizations, but the main focus is on major Islamic organizations and their relationship with their foreign centers and sources of funding. Moreover, the main office monitors activities of NGOs and international organizations that work with the religious sphere. However, the main office strives to implement joint projects with international organizations.

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<sup>26</sup> Carries out monitoring and blocking of all extremist, terrorist and hackers webpages.

<sup>27</sup> Controls and supervises activities of destructive agents.

## ANNEX 5|INFORMATION ON NON-TRADITIONAL AND INFORMAL ISLAMIC ORGANISATIONS AND ASSOCIATIONS

Since 1991, there are several informal Islamic (communities) Jamaats have been formed in Kyrgyzstan. By the nature of their activities unofficial Islamic groups can be divided into several categories:

1. Apolitical organizations such as the Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), Nurdzhiler<sup>28</sup> (although there is no consensus about existence and definition of these organizations);
2. Extremist organizations – *Hizb ut-Tahrir*;
3. Radical Jihadi ideologies – Salafists, Takfiris.

At the moment it's not clear how to define Tablighi Jamaat (TJ), and to which category it belongs to and what are the criteria to evaluate it.

According to some, TJ is a global movement of Muslim educators that go "door-to-door" to educate people and preach Islam. However, groups in Kyrgyzstan do not constitute a coherent TJ movement; there are different perceptions of the purpose of *dawah*, its meaning, ways and roles among the population, specifically, on how to treat family, children, relatives, etc. However, TJ cannot be called an organization as it does not have a program, charter, clearly defined goals and objectives which leads to confusion among law enforcement bodies.

In Kyrgyzstan, TJ is more likely to be characterized as an Islamic social network. All decisions are taken by a convention (*mashwara*), which includes representatives of all members of the organization except women. All issues are resolved collectively with appointment of an implementing party. Connection with other groups in the regions is supported via regional, provincial, national level conventions. Each TJ member recognizes other members as colleagues; helps each other if possible (with food, travel, accommodation).

For certain people TJ became some sort of a "social elevator": some opened their businesses, visited other parts of the country and built networks. It should be noted that there are many TJ members that come from different social groups: rich businessmen, doctors, teachers, educators, law enforcement officers who are on equal terms with other TJ members. TJ managed to attract criminal groups, which many other Islamic organizations could not do. It seems that criminal organizations like austerity and simplicity of the TJ lifestyle, including those of denial of luxury and extravagance. Criminal organizations use TJ philosophy as a cover-up for their own purposes.

Thus, TJ is not a political organization and does not seek to change the constitutional order, but only trying to spread Islam among the population, regardless of race, sex and religion. However, a complete disregard of the political system by TJ may also have negative implications for the state.

One of the most influential banned religious extremist organizations is Hizbut- Tahrir (HT), which entered the territory of Kyrgyzstan through Uzbek part of the Ferghana Valley in 1994. Until 2010, HT had strong cells in the south of the country and constantly criticized actions of official spiritual institutions such as Spiritual Directorate of the Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, *kazyats*. Currently, more and more HT members appear in the reports of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and in the northern parts of the country.

However, for several reasons HT members are not politically active as they were in 2000-2008. First of all, forceful and repressive actions of law enforcement agencies across the country after the famous Nookat events in 2008 had some positive impact. Most of the adherents ceased operations and publicly renounced the party. Such cases occur in Batken and Osh provinces. Secondly, most of the HT leadership fled to other countries anticipating massive repression by the police. Thirdly, part of HT members simply moved to other organizations and movements such as the Tablighi Jamaat. Such trend is observed in Uzgen, Nookat and Aravan districts.

Another jamaat which raises a lot of concerns in law enforcement authorities and the official clergy

<sup>28</sup>Poorly studied phenomenon in the Kyrgyz Republic. There are certain stereotypes that *Nurjular* are supporters of teachings of FethulaGulen, but they are called *gulenists*. According to another stereotype, *nurjular* are official spiritual institutions of Turkey itself, which is not quite correct.

are Salafits. They are a fairly new phenomenon in the religious sphere of Kyrgyzstan. Salafism in Kyrgyzstan is studied very little; most experts refer to conclusions of foreign theologians, Islamists. Currently, there is no widely accepted definition of Salafism in Kyrgyzstan.

Most of the experts and theologians in the Kyrgyz Republic see Salafism as one of the trends in Islam, while public figures see it as a radical movement, which is driven by jihadist ideology. For the third part of the country's population Salafism is just a group of believers calling to Islamic traditions of the times of Prophet Muhammad. Representatives of law enforcement agencies view Salafism as another tool of foreign intelligence services to format the Islamic community and to split the Muslim world.

Salafits claim that their way is the only way of the Prophet, and according to Salafits, the traditional four *madhhabs* are wrong. They argue that every Muslim must independently comprehend Quran and Hadith and not follow the procedures of *madhhabs* (schools). Thus they mistakenly believe that the Quran and *madhhabs* are different things. And the fact that people call themselves Salafis without studying the Arabic language and reading the *hadiths* indicates that they do not adhere to any of the *madhhabs*. Their "ideology" is no more than a manifestation of religious illiteracy and narrow-mindedness.<sup>29</sup>

Opinions on how to treat and what to do with Salafis are also divergent. Experts in Kyrgyzstan do not have a clear idea of what must be banned: "Salafism movement", "Salafi ideology", "Salafi group" or "Salafi party". Some Ulema view Salafits as just a receding Islamic sect. In theological terms, according to "Religion, Law and Politics" center, headed by Kadyr Malikov, salafism is a threat to the most traditional school of Islam (Abu Hanifa), while in political terms, there is not real threat to the country.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, Salafism is a threat to the traditional Central Asian *hanafism* and can be an effective mechanism of pressuring secular foundations in Kyrgyzstan. Given the type of activities carried out by Salafi jihadists in Syria, the Kyrgyz Republic needs to develop a clear strategy to counter the ideological concept of Salafism.

In general, informal Islamic organizations in Kyrgyzstan do not interact with each other and all consider themselves as the best believers and followers of precepts of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). But each of them believes that the official Muslim structures fail in their duties to protect the rights of the Muslims, for example, the rights to wear Islamic attributes (hijab) in public places. Every informal jamaat tries to criticize the work of the Spiritual Directorate and tries to become part of it. However, internal confrontation over access to government resources provides additional incentive for radical groups in implementing their violent actions.

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<sup>29</sup>Kairat Joldybai. There is no moderate salafism // <http://conference.antiterror.rsbi.kz/index.php/pressaabout/41-salafism>

<sup>30</sup>Theoretical and political assessment of salafists activities in Kyrgyzstan // <http://analitika.org/107-20091202065802539.html>