STRENGTHENING FREEDOM OF CONSCIENCE IN THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL AND SECULAR STATEBUILDING IN UZBEKISTAN

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Abstract: *This article analyzes the issues of strengthening freedom of conscience within the framework of the concept of building a social and secular state in Uzbekistan from a socio-philosophical and legal perspective. It reveals the essence of freedom of conscience, its role in a democratic society and its importance in the human rights system. It also highlights the mechanisms for ensuring freedom of conscience in national legislation and their practical expression. The author substantiates the inextricable link between religious tolerance, interfaith harmony and the development of civil society institutions with freedom of conscience. The results of the study are of significant theoretical and practical importance in forming a stable social environment in the country and improving the legal culture of citizens.*

Keywords: *conscience, freedom, secularism, state, society, tolerance, religion, law, democracy, legislation, stability, culture.*

The reforms and modernization processes being carried out in the era of New Uzbekistan are fundamentally different from the previous stages in terms of their scale and systematicity. At the heart of this process is the principle of ensuring the interests of the person, his rights and freedoms, honor, dignity and social protection. The main goal of the reforms is to create a competitive, open and modern socio-economic space, improve the well-being of the people, and ensure the active participation of every citizen in the life of society. Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has been consistently moving along the path

of building a democratic legal state and civil society. To this end, the legal, social and secular foundations of state governance have been formed, and mechanisms guaranteeing the constitutional rights and freedoms of citizens have been strengthened.

After all, building a social state aimed at ensuring the well-being of citizens is one of the priority areas of the country's policy. Strengthening the atmosphere of tolerance, mutual respect and harmony in a multinational society, deepening the values of humanity and kindness are the basis of social stability and spiritual harmony. In this sense, religion is a phenomenon that expresses the inner world of a person and freedom of belief, and the laws fully protect it and protect the religious feelings of every citizen from discrimination.

Uzbekistan has long been known as a country where representatives of different nationalities, ethnic groups and religious confessions lived in peace and harmony, famous for its traditions of tolerance. Even today, the consistent, tolerant policy pursued in our country is highly recognized not only by our people, but also by the international community. In this regard, the New Uzbekistan model is recognized as a socio-philosophical system in which interethnic harmony, religious tolerance and human dignity are paramount.

In the history of philosophy, some ideas of such movements as pantheism, deism, and dualism were also reflected in the work of thinkers of the Islamic world. Their works clearly demonstrate the process of struggle and harmony between religious and secular views. For example, scholars such as Zakariyya ar-Razi, al-Mutanabbi, Abu Ala al-Ma'arri put forward ideas based on independent thinking that contradicted religious dogmas, and critically analyzed some ideas in religious doctrine[1]. Also, great thinkers such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Al-Biruni, and Omar Khayyam developed the principle of free thinking, relying on reason and experience, and formed an independent path of scientific and philosophical knowledge. In particular, the "two truths theory", which was widespread in the Muslim world, laid the foundation for religious

belief and scientific thinking to be viewed not as contradictory, but as complementary phenomena. As a result, these views served as the philosophical foundation for the free development of secular and scientific thought.

Secular ideology refers to a worldview that does not rely on divine forces to explain man and the universe, but on the laws and logical foundations of the material world itself. It represents a set of ideas, values, and concepts that explain human life and the development of society based on experience, reason, scientific evidence, and rational thinking.

Religious ideology, on the contrary, interprets the essence of existence and human life in relation to a divine source, and on this basis appears as a system of ideas and ideals that express the moral, spiritual, and social interests of society or certain groups.

Throughout historical development, religious ideology has also undergone processes of change and renewal. However, in the present era, its evolution and interaction with secular ideologies have their own characteristics, and there is a complex but natural philosophical connection between them. Religion, as an integral socio-philosophical system of human civilization, performs the function of forming and directing the balance between various interests, social strata and ideological currents existing in society. Throughout history, the relationship between religious and secular ideologies has taken various forms: sometimes they complemented each other, and sometimes they entered into a conflictual struggle. The absolute supremacy of one side has always provoked the struggle of the other direction to preserve its identity, as a result of which human thinking has been enriched by the harmony of both factors[2]. In countries where freedom of religion is not guaranteed, there are restrictions on human rights, beliefs, and views, and persecution and repression of those who hold different views.

The freedom of religion that the Soviet regime claimed was actually a lie. Religion in Soviet conditions was an embodied expression of class and party views. The conclusion and policy that the activities of certain religious organizations could be permitted only to satisfy the religious needs of the older generation, formed only during the old tsarist era and having lost loved ones during the war years, but that they should be limited and reduced year by year, was an expression of hypocrisy and temporary compromise.

In practice, freedom of religion was not fully guaranteed in the Soviet Union. Although the USSR officially declared itself a secular state and separated the church (mosque) from the state and the school from religion, in practice religious ideology was replaced by a system of pseudo-communist ideas. Thus, religion was squeezed out of public life, and an ideological system based on atheistic propaganda took its place. In addition, the Soviet ideological apparatus used the organizational experience of religious organizations, including the forms of mass propaganda of the Russian Orthodox Church. As a result, the idea of \u200b\u200b"secularism" was transformed not into true freedom, but into a mechanism of political control that denied religious views. In Orthodox, especially Russian, the right corner of the room where ordinary people lived in their homes was called "krasny kut" - "red corner". An icon hung there, and a lamp was lit on a wooden shelf below it. An icon is a painting on a wooden board depicting the image, figure, or likeness of Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, or the great Christian angel Gabriel (Gabriel), or one of the famous saints. A person entering the room bows to the icon and is baptized.

During the Soviet era, every educational institution, enterprise, organization, and military unit had a “red corner.” They hung pictures of Lenin and Stalin, not icons. After the cult of Stalin’s personality was condemned in the second half of the 1950s, separate “Lenin rooms” were created wherever possible. Stalin’s pictures were removed from the red corners. Draw your own conclusions: the atheistic Soviet state simply replaced the images of God, the

Virgin Mary, angels, and saints with images of geniuses. Baptism and prayer were replaced by praise in their honor. Can such a belief be called a free belief? It is even difficult to call such a belief atheistic, because in it the sincere religious form of worship was replaced by a pseudo-secular form. The essence has not changed.

New Uzbekistan is a new socio-political reality in which the idea that "the people serve the state bodies, not the state bodies" has gained practical meaning in this country. As a result of this approach, the state system operates in a way that is oriented towards human interests. New Uzbekistan is a society that has made respect for the elderly, respect for the young, care for people and families in need, as well as kindness and humanity the criteria of life. It is shaping a new spiritual space based on social justice and civic responsibility by glorifying human dignity, strengthening solidarity and cohesion[3].

In his speech at the solemn event dedicated to the 29th anniversary of the adoption of the country's Constitution on December 7, 2021, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev expressed the following opinion: "Today, Uzbekistan is taking decisive steps towards building a social state and a just society. Therefore, it is time to strengthen the principle of 'New Uzbekistan - a social state' at the constitutional level." This idea represents the main content of the philosophy of new statehood. According to it, the direction of development of Uzbekistan is based on the principles of prioritizing human interests, ensuring social justice, and guaranteeing the well-being of citizens. Thus, the concept of "New Uzbekistan - a social state" is being strengthened as the ideological and constitutional foundation of state policy[4].

The revision of the Constitution of Uzbekistan was undoubtedly one of the most important political events of 2023. The national referendum held on April 30 marked a new stage in the country's history. 84.5 percent of voters participated in it, 90.21 percent of whom supported the new version of the Constitution, while 9.35 percent opposed it.[5] These results demonstrated the

commitment of the people of Uzbekistan to the path of renewal, reforms, and strengthening democratic values. At the same time, this process is evidence of growing civic engagement and political culture, and has become an important turning point in the constitutional development of New Uzbekistan.

Among the main changes introduced into the Constitution, one of the most important is its acquisition of the status of a directly applicable legal document. Also, the fact that Uzbekistan is a social and secular state was firmly established in the new edition as a clear constitutional norm. In addition, the updated Basic Law expanded a number of guarantees related to civil, social and human rights. In particular, the first article of the updated Constitution clearly expressed the content and direction of the state system, its principles based on social justice, the rule of law and the promotion of human dignity: “Uzbekistan is a sovereign republic, a legal, social, secular, democratic state”[6].

President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, at a meeting dedicated to the results of the referendum with the participation of the chambers of the Oliy Majlis, political parties, the judiciary and executive authorities, and representatives of the public, emphasized the status of Uzbekistan as a secular state. As the Head of State noted, the principle of secularism forms the foundation of the country's constitutional system, and this approach serves to ensure freedom of religion, tolerance, and the rule of law in society.

A secular state is a form of government in which state power is independent of religious organizations, that is, religion and politics are separated from each other. In such a system, state decisions are made not on the basis of religious rules or beliefs, but on the basis of the Constitution and legislative acts. At the same time, no religion is recognized as the state religion, and equal rights and opportunities are created for representatives of all faiths.

One of the main features of secularism is the full provision of freedom of conscience and belief. The state pursues a policy of neutrality between different religious confessions and adherents of faith, treating them equally. A

secular state, in this sense, guarantees the rights of citizens to receive education, to independently choose the path of personal development, and to exercise creative freedom in science and culture. However, secularism should not be understood as an ideology of atheism or anti-religion. On the contrary, in a secular state, religion is recognized as an important spiritual institution of social life. It remains a factor contributing to the spiritual and moral development of a person. Therefore, secularism is not an idea that denies religion, but rather combines it with civil liberties.

In such a state, conditions are created for representatives of all religions to freely practice their faith, and maintaining an atmosphere of religious tolerance, mutual respect and harmony becomes an important direction of state policy. As a result, in a society where religious diversity and cultural pluralism exist, governance is not based on a single ideology or religious orientation, but on human rights and the rule of law. In this sense, the path of a secular state is the most just, stable and humane path of development for any state. It strengthens peace, harmony and tolerance, and forms a social system that respects the beliefs, opinions and life choices of citizens. The principles of a secular state are present in the constitutions of many foreign countries (Turkey, Azerbaijan). For example, the experience of Turkey, which has established this principle in its constitution, also indicates that one of the main principles of a secular state - freedom of conscience - is guaranteed in secular development and all democratic systems.

In conclusion, the concept of secularism, if correctly understood by the state and citizens, will yield positive results. Secularism leads to greater tolerance, which is a good thing. But it should not be implemented by blindly adopting from Western Europe. Secularism should grow from the bottom up, not by pressure from above. We must make this secularism our own, not blindly copying it. This is misunderstood by the religious community. Because it has been misinterpreted in some countries. The reason is that this has entered most

societies with Western colonization. Therefore, both sides should understand it correctly. Strengthening freedom of conscience within the framework of the concept of building a social and secular state in Uzbekistan is an important factor in ensuring social stability and human rights. The results of the study show that freedom of conscience not only guarantees an individual's right to believe or not, but also serves to create an atmosphere of tolerance, mutual respect, and social cohesion in society. Therefore, this principle is an integral part of democratic development.

Also, the reforms being implemented in the country are significant in that they are aimed at legally strengthening freedom of conscience, regulating the activities of religious organizations, and ensuring interfaith harmony. In this process, the improvement of national legislation in accordance with international standards plays an important role. As a result, the legal culture of citizens will increase, and trust between the state and society will be strengthened. As the study revealed, ensuring freedom of conscience should not be limited only to legal guarantees, but also be supported by developing a spiritual and moral environment, improving the education system. It is precisely the combination of these factors that will serve to prevent extremism and radicalism in society. Strengthening freedom of conscience is an important condition for building a social and secular state in Uzbekistan, which is of decisive importance in protecting human interests, ensuring social stability, and establishing democratic values.

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