The Central Asian Context and the Jehovah's Witnesses: An Overview

Massimo Introvigne
CESNUR (Center for Studies on New Religions)
maxintrovigne@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: The five republics of Central Asia that emerged from the collapse of the Soviet Union face problems of democracy, of constructing their national identities, of managing religion, and of dealing with the hegemonic projects of China, Russia, and Turkey. They have generally looked for authoritarian solutions, creating serious problems of human rights and religious liberty, although attitudes to minority religions are somewhat different in the five countries. How Jehovah's Witnesses are, or are not, allowed to freely practice their religion in Central Asia is a consequence of this general context, and at the same time an indicator of each country's progress (or lack of it) towards democracy and the respect of human rights.

KEYWORDS: Religion in Central Asia, Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Asia, Religious Liberty in Central Asia, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan, Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan, Jehovah's Witnesses in Tajikistan, Jehovah's Witnesses in Turkmenistan, Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan.

An Overview of Central Asia

Central Asia is an area once part of the Soviet Union that includes five countries, with a total population of 73 million. Uzbekistan, accounts for almost half of the population (35 million). The largest country, Kazakhstan, as large as all Western Europe, has a population of 19 million. Tajikistan follows, approaching 10 million, and Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan, with 6.5 million each.

It is not a rich area. Only in the oil- and gas-rich Kazakhstan the GDP per capita in 2021 was $10,041.5, not so far away from the Russian Federation ($12,172.8) and the poorest European Union country, Bulgaria ($11,635). Yet, the GDP per capita in Kazakhstan exceeded by almost thirteen times the

The Journal of CESNUR, Volume 7, Issue 1, January—February 2023, pages 26—49.
© 2023 by CESNUR. All rights reserved.
ISSN: 2532-2990 | www.cesnur.net | DOI: 10.26338/tjoc.2023.7.1.3

corresponding figure in the poorest of the five countries, Tajikistan ($897.1) (The World Bank 2022).

The relevance of Central Asia cannot be measured only by looking at its present GDP. For several centuries, Central Asia has played a central role in the history of humanity, as evidenced by the archaeological remnants and marvelous historical monuments one can still admire in several parts of the region.

The five states are different in terms of geography, demographics, and economics. What they have in common is that they were once part of the Soviet Union, and that the majority of the population in four states, and a sizeable minority in Tajikistan (which has a Persian majority), is Turkic by ethnicity. In all five countries, Sunni Islam is the dominant religion. One could add that the languages most spoken in Central Asia (except Tajik) are also Turkic, but in fact most inhabitants speak Russian, many even at home, and Russian continues to function as a lingua franca throughout the region. Central Asians also have common problems, which I would summarize in four groups.

1. The problem of democracy

Unlike in the Baltic States or Georgia during Mikhail Gorbachev's (1931–2022) perestroika, there was no strong movement advocating for independence in any of the Central Asian Soviet Republics. Independence did not exactly catch them by surprise, but it was not the result of popular movements either. In all of the countries except Kyrgyzstan the first secretaries of the Soviet Communist Parties, who had not been among the most enthusiastic supporters of the perestroika, became the presidents of the new independent republics: Nursultan Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan, Saparmurat Niyazov (1940–2006) in Turkmenistan, Islam Karimov (1938–2016) in Uzbekistan, and Rahmon Nabiyev (1930–1993) in Tajikistan. In Kyrgyzstan, it was not the Communist Party's local first secretary but another member of the Soviet nomenklatura, the President of the Academy of Sciences, Askar Akayev, who was elected as the first president of the newly established independent Republic.

Their successors as presidents came from the same background. Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, who succeeded Nazarbayev in Kazakhstan in 2019 after the latter had ruled the country for more than 27 years, is a former Soviet diplomat. Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, who succeeded Niyazov in Turkmenistan and,

like his predecessor, established there a bizarre cult of personality, was an obscure Soviet dentist but was rumored to be the illegitimate son of Niyazov. Berdimuhamedow stepped down from the presidency in 2022, only to be succeeded to his son Serdar. Emomali Rahmon, who emerged from a civil war in Tajikistan that followed Nabiyev's death as the country's president and has remained in office to this day, was a Soviet military man and a member of the Supreme Soviet of Tajikistan before independence. Shavkat Mirziyoyev, who succeeded Karimov in Uzbekistan, had also been a member of the Supreme Soviet of his republic.

Kyrgyzstan was somewhat different, as it went through two revolutions, called "of the Tulips" in 2005 and "of the Melons" in 2010, and six different presidents. Although not all the hopes of the local democratic movement have been realized, Kyrgyzstan's elections are regarded by international observers as somewhat more believable than those of the other Central Asian countries, where incumbent presidents, or the heirs they have designated, are re-elected with suspiciously high majorities, and international bodies such as the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) routinely refuse to certify the elections as fair. There is no freedom of the press, human rights organizations have often denounced the jailing and even torture of political opponents, and organizations critical of the regimes are harassed or liquidated (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2006, 23–31).

All republics adopted ostensibly democratic Constitutions, recognizing the separation of powers and human rights. In fact, with the partial exception of Kyrgyzstan, the best one can say of Central Asia is that it is "differently democratic" with respect to full-blown democracies.

2. The problem of identity

The question of national identity in the five countries is politically sensitive. Each has its share of nationalist historians, who claim that present-day republics are the legitimate heirs of late medieval or early modern khanates. Museums and exhibitions proudly display the rich historical and artistic heritage of each country. There is no reason to deny the splendor of this heritage, yet most Western and Russian historians maintain that there was no sense of a national identity in any of the five countries before the 20th century, and "they owe [...]

their conception of nationhood to Soviet border demarcation and nation-building policies" (Dave 2007, 21). There were linguistic differences, and there had been khanates and other forms of independent states. But, when Russian colonialism achieved the conquest of Central Asia in the 1860s, there was no sense of five distinct national identities in the Muslim area the Czarist Empire simply called Turkestan, where a sizeable part of the population consisted of nomads.

In the 20th century, movements to promote the local languages and cultures emerged, until the Bolsheviks came. They played a decisive, if complicated, role in creating the five national identities of Central Asia (Tillett 1969). The regime clearly delimited five distinct Soviet Republics, and fixed their borders, thus creating the very problem of nationalities they then tried to solve by promoting a brutal "Russification" and eradicating the local languages and culture. On the other hand, in trying to resist Russification some intellectuals consolidated or created nationalist movements that were small but not insignificant.

It should also be remembered that in the memory of Central Asians, particularly Kazakhs, national identity is connected with a catastrophe. Ukrainian national identity (and anti-Russian feelings, which are crucial to understand present attitudes) are inextricably connected with the Holodomor. In 1932–33, Stalin (1878–1953) organized an artificial famine in a large area of Ukraine, with troops preventing Ukrainians from moving elsewhere. In Stalin's mind, the famine should have exterminated the Ukrainian small landowners, the backbone of the anti-Soviet opposition. The Holodomor, the Ukrainian holocaust by starvation, killed at least 3.5 million Ukrainians, and is now widely, if not unanimously, recognized as a genocide (Boriak 2001).

Even more forgotten than the Holodomor is the parallel Asharshylyk, which killed 2 million Central Asians, including 1.5 million Kazakhs, between 1930 and 1933. It is less well-known because, unlike their Ukrainian counterparts, local governments have been less keen to promote its study, preferring not to antagonize the Russians, although they have locally commemorated it. It is a sign of the times that, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, President Tokayev of Kazakhstan presided over a more solemn commemoration, claimed the victims were 5 million, and called for further studies (Kussainova 2022).

Many Central Asians call what happened "the Goloshchyokin genocide," after the name of the then First Secretary of the Kazakh Communist Party, Filipp Goloshchyokin (1876–1941) who had largely organized it. Goloshchyokin had

previously been the main organizer of the killing of Czar Nicholas II (1894–1917) and his family in Ekaterinburg in 1917, and was himself later executed by Stalin. One of the reasons was that he was homosexual, and Stalin had decided to eradicate homosexuality from the Communist Party. As a Ukrainian Jew, he was also a victim of Stalin's purge of Jewish Communist leaders suspected of being Trotskyists (Kindler 2018; Cameron 2018).

Later, Stalin conveniently blamed the Great Kazakh Famine on Goloshchyokin only. Historians still debate whether the Asharshylyk was caused, as the Ukrainian Holodomor, by the deliberate will of Stalin, to destroy a class of nomads and sedentarized ex-nomads who resisted collectivism and Sovietization (Conquest 1986), or was just the result of an ill-advised and catastrophic attempt to transform nomads into kolkhoz farmers overnight. 40% of all Kazakhs died in the Kazakhstan Asharshylyk. Thousands of Kazakhs and Kyrgyz who survived escaped to Xinjiang, where their descendants have remained to this day only to become victims of the current Chinese repression.

Stalin replaced the Central Asians who had died with Russians and other non-Muslim Soviet citizens who were encouraged or compelled to settle there. In the 1950s, Kazakhstan came to have a majority of Russians and Ukrainians, with ethnic Kazakhs reduced to 30%, although they became the majority again in the 1980s, being more prolific than the Western settlers (Dave 2007, 60).

The use of local languages was actively discouraged, and many Central Asian became *mankurts*, a term invented by Kyrgyz novelist Chinghiz Aitmatov (1928–2008) in his 1980 novel *The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years* (English translation, Aitmatov 1983) to designate a class of slaves. The word came to identify those citizens of Central Asia who had lost their cultural heritage and had accepted being both Sovietized and Russified (Dave 2007, 3).

After what American scholar Martha Brill Olcott famously called their "accidental independence" (Olcott 2002, 5), the Central Asian political elites tried to turn the problem of national identity into a resource, in essence claiming that *mankurtizatsiia* was reversible (Dave 2007, 3). Speaking the local languages, something that was regarded as suspicious in Soviet times, became an asset. Presidents were compared to Emperor Timur (1336–1405) and other great rulers of the past, and efforts were made to connect to an often-mythological pre-Soviet and pre-Russian past. When I visited the mausoleum of the late

President Karimov in Uzbekistan, in 2018, the iconography comparing him to Timur was obvious. Even transforming prints were on sale where, by moving the object, the image of Karimov changed into a portrait of Timur.

The mythical past rulers rely on can only be Turkic (Persian in Tajikistan) and Muslim. Yet, Central Asian presidents also understand they should not antagonize Russia.

3. The problem of religion

Museums and exhibitions, including the one Tajikistan organized in Paris in 2021–22 (Musée Guimet 2021), emphasize pre-Islamic religious pluralism in Central Asia, with the presence of Melkite, Jacobite, and Nestorian Christians (Dauvillier 1956, Colless 1986, Sims-Williams 1992, Lala Comneno 1997), Buddhists, Zoroastrians, Manicheans, as well as local cults, subsumed under the increasingly controversial label of Shamanism. However, when Imperial Russia started its military conquest of Central Asia, it found a society that had been totally Islamized.

From Ivan IV "the Terrible" (1530–1584) to Peter the Great (1672–1725), the Czars of Russia believed that it was possible to convert all Muslims within their Empire to the Russian Orthodox Church, through a combination of missionary work, tax incentives for those who converted, and forced baptisms. Catherine the Great (1729–1796) abandoned this policy, not so much because she was influenced by liberal Enlightenment ideas but because she realized that eradicating Islam was impossible. She decided to control it by creating a Muslim Spiritual Assembly that should have been a counterpart of the Holy Synod of the Russian Orthodox Church, equally controlled by the state (Keller 2001, 2–3).

After Russia conquered most of the present-day five states in the 1860s, the first governor-general of Russian Turkestan, General Konstantin Petrovich von Kaufmann (1818–1882), inaugurated the politics of *ignorirovanie*, based on the two pillars of dismantling the Islamic political institutions and ignoring the private practice of Islam and the reputedly non-political Sufi brotherhoods. Although von Kaufmann, despite his German ancestry, was a fanatical Orthodox believer who, unlike Catherine the Great, refused to see any spiritual value in Islam (Keller 2001, 7), he prohibited Russian Orthodox missionaries from entering Turkestan, believing missions would fuel anti-Russian protests. Von

Kaufmann was persuaded that Islam would eventually disappear, not through violent eradication but through the arrival in Central Asia of a growing number of Russian Orthodox colonists, who would one day become the majority of the population and whose "superior" lifestyle Muslims would acknowledge and imitate (Keller 2001, 6–7).

Von Kaufmann's policies were criticized but substantially maintained by Russian administrators until the anti-Russian revolts, which had occasionally erupted before but became widespread when Russia tried to conscript Central Asians to fight in World War I, persuaded them that Islam, including Sufism, had never ceased to be active underground as a political force. By then, the Czarist Empire was approaching its end, which created in Turkestan a myriad of local revolts that made the territory effectively ungovernable.

Lenin (1870–1924) tried to reassert control of the territory by promising to respect the religion and identity of Central Asian Muslims. In a way, Lenin kept his promises, not because he liked Islam but because he believed he could not consolidate his fragile control of the former Turkestan without it.

Things, changed dramatically with Stalin, however, who in 1927 launched the first campaign to "de-Islamize" Central Asia and impose atheism. Thousands of Muslim clergy were arrested and executed, several thousand mosques were destroyed or converted to secular halls, the use of Arabic script and the veil for women was prohibited. Stalin's campaigns lasted until 1941, when the needs of the Patriotic War persuaded him that he needed the support of Muslim clergy to conscript Central Asians into the Red Army without problems. Just as he did with the Russian Orthodox Church, Stalin freed from jail those Muslim clergymen who were willing to collaborate, and resurrected the state-controlled Islamic institutions that dated back to Catherine the Great (Keller 2001, 251).

Although there were periodic campaigns to promote atheism, and ethnic Central Asians who achieved leadership positions in the Soviet pro-atheist organizations, Russia after Stalin continued with a policy dating back to Catherine the Great and General von Kaufmann, controlling institutional Islam through state Muftis and clergy (an attitude Putin is continuing today: Bekkin 2020), while it ignored Sufism and individual piety. One of the results was that, as Alexandre Bennigsen (1913–1988) and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay (1926–2018) noted in their celebrated 1986 book *Le Soufi et le commissaire*,

Sufi brotherhoods actually grew, and became a force to be reckoned with in the later years of the Soviet Union (Bennigsen and Lemercier-Quelquejay 1986).

When the Soviet Union collapsed, the newly formed five independent states all proclaimed the end of official atheism and inscribed religious liberty in their Constitutions. Most political leaders, their backgrounds in the Soviet Communist Party notwithstanding, publicly proclaimed their Islamic faith, made pilgrimages to Mecca, and hailed Sufism as a force for harmony and peace. Uzbekistan's Karimov even swore on the Quran (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2006, 50).

On the other hand, they kept in place the Soviet institutions created to control Islam, often putting at their head relatives or close associates of the presidents (Peyrouse 2004). They also controlled Islamic education, in some cases insisting that institutions training clergy also used as textbooks the writings of the presidents themselves, presented as great philosophers, including works of Karimov in Uzbekistan and, as long as he was alive, the *Roukhnama* of Turkmen president Niyazov, which was proclaimed "the second Holy Book" to be studied together with the Quran (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2006, 54).

Since the 1990s, and even more after 9/11, Central Asian presidents came to see radical Islam as the main threat to their power, and imposed stricter policies. Before 9/11, Karimov had already closed 4,000 of the 6,000 mosques operating in Uzbekistan (Abdullaev 2002). To some extent, the threat was real. On the other hand, some Presidents used the rhetoric of "Islamic terrorism" to justify the repression of all political opponents and strict control of religion. Hizb ut-Tahrir, an international fundamentalist movement founded in Jordan, whose relationship with violence and terrorism remains controversial (Mayer 2004), has been banned in all five states and accused of all sort of wrongdoings.

Tablighi Jamaat, a large conservative missionary organization with millions of members, created in India in 1926 within the revivalist Deobandi movement (Masud 2000), has also been banned in four Central Asian states and in Russia. Kyrgyzstan, where the movement has an important presence, has so far resisted Russian pressure to crack down on it. Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan have both banned Yakyn Inkar, which emerged in 2014 as a more radical schism of Tablighi Jamaat. Members of the latter in Kyrgyzstan have supported the repression of Yakyn Inkar (Najibullah 2022).

German and Slavic populations settled in Central Asia in the 19th century with the support of the Czars, and more were forcibly deported or relocated there by Stalin. One result was an increased Christian presence. Buddhists from other parts of the Soviet Union were also relocated in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and there remains a small presence of the so-called Bukhara Jews, although most of them emigrated to the United States and Israel.

Relations with Russia guaranteed the legal existence of the Russian Orthodox Church in Central Asia. Catholicism has a significant presence in Kazakhstan, with some 250,000 devotees, mostly of Lithuanian, Polish, German, and Korean heritage (Peyrouse 2003). Some arch-conservative Catholic bishops have been a problem for the Vatican, whose recent reforms they have opposed (see e.g. Pullella 2022), but they have been generally supportive of the government. Pope John Paul II (1920–2005) visited Kazakhstan in 2001. Pope Francis went one step further in September 2022, when he participated in the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, held in the Kazakh capital, thus legitimizing the ambitious interreligious initiatives inaugurated by Nazarbayev—who proclaimed the Pyramid built in Astana by the celebrated British architect Norman Foster "the world centre for interconfessional dialogue" (Aitken 2009, 200–1)—and continued by his successor Tokayev (Chambon 2022).

The relationship of the five states with Protestant groups has been much more difficult. These actively try to convert both Muslims and Orthodox and Catholic Christians, and are accused of being agents of the United States and the West, particularly by Russian propaganda (Peyrouse 2003). The repression of these groups has been harsh, and has become worst in the 21st century, with churches closed, converts fired from their jobs, heavy fines imposed for allegedly illegal proselyting activities, and the arrest and even torture of pastors and believers (Laruelle and Peyrouse 2006, 53). Repression, however, is not the same in all countries. Kyrgyzstan may offer the best situation for Protestants, Turkmenistan the worst; with the other three republics somewhere in the middle, and with some signs of improvement.

4. The problem of the neighbors

Issues of religious liberty and human rights in Central Asia cannot be examined without considering the role of three key neighbors: Russia, China, and

Turkey. All are important commercial and military partners of the five republics, with which they have different historical ties. All try to exert their influence on Central Asia, including in the religious sphere.

— Russia

Russia is, of course, the former colonial power, but relations with it are ambiguous among the five countries' cultural elites. While some intellectuals and academics are influenced by Western postcolonial studies and criticize Russian's historical role in the region, others refuse to call Russia's activities "colonialism" and emphasize that being incorporated in the multinational and multicultural Czarist and Soviet empires also had advantages. The same Kyrgyz novelist Aitmatov who coined the word *mankurt,* stated in a controversial 1993 post-independence speech that:

> We cannot attain progress by isolating ourselves from Russia… Our development is part of one organic whole. The Russian language and culture are an integral part of the psyche of the Kyrgyz and Kazakhs, offering them an access of civilization (Dave 2007, 51).

Like many Central Asian intellectuals and politicians, Aitmatov was struggling to keep together a celebration of independence and national identity with the idea that Kyrgyzstan was not just another third world state emerging from colonialism, but part of a Eurasian culture that used Russian language as a bridge to Europe.

These feelings, of course, have been used by Russia for its own purposes and to present itself as the "elder brother" of the five republics, with a right to tell their leaders what is best for them. Russia also believes it has both a right and a duty to offer military assistance in case of riots and instability, as most recently happened in Kazakhstan in January 2022. Russia expects the five republics to follow its ban of religious organizations deemed "extremists," including Tablighi Jamaat and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Russia gladly offers its "experts" to teach Central Asian authorities and courts which movements should be considered "extremists."

In turn, Russia is ready to ban new religious movements born in Central Asia and outlawed there as hostile to the local governments. This has happened to Allya Ayat (SOVA Center 2019), an esoteric movement that was established in Kazakhstan in 1990 by an ethic Uyghur called Farhat Mukhamedovich Abdullayev (1937–2007), as well as the syncretic movement based on Sufism, Ata Zholy, founded by Kadyrali Tarybaev (1961–2009) in Kazakhstan in 1999,

from where it expanded to Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Russia (Schwab 2014; Dubuisson 2017).

The situation changed somewhat with the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, and the influx of some 350,000 Russian refugees who escaped conscription and arrived in four of the five republics since September 2022 (only Turkmenistan kept its borders closed) (Goble 2022). To Putin's surprise, Central Asian Presidents refused to support his invasion and annexation of parts of Ukraine, maintaining at best a neutral stance amid fears that their independence, too, may be called into question. It is too early to predict whether this more cautious attitude towards Russian policies will also extend to the sphere of religion and affect attitudes towards religious organizations banned in Russia.

— China

China is glad to replace Russia as trusted partner and elder brother of the Central Asian states, although not all the citizens of the latter welcome closer ties. When visiting Kyrgyzstan in March 2018, my wife and I happened into an exhibition of drawings by schoolchildren in Bishkek. One represented a huge red dragon threatening the country. A schoolgirl confirmed the dragon was indeed China.

One stumbling block is the treatment of Turkic and other Muslims in Xinjiang by the Chinese regime. Uyghurs are a Turkic population, but among Xinjiang's re-education camps inmates there are also ethnic Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tajiks, some of them descendants of those Central Asians who moved to China when escaping the Asharshylyk of the 1930s.

In turn, some individuals today escape from the camps and persecution in Xinjiang and seek political asylum in the Central Asian states where they have relatives and whose national languages they still speak. Indeed, some of the internationally famous survivors of Xinjiang camps who testified about torture and rape are ethnic Kazakhs who escaped to Kazakhstan (see e.g. Sauytbay and Cavelius 2021). Some are ethnic Kyrgyz, including Ovalbek Turdakun, a Christian who was persecuted for his religion in Xinjiang, giving the lie to the Chinese theory that those detained in the camps are all "Islamic radicals" (Bhuiyan 2022). These refugees are a political embarrassment for the Central

Asian governments, which are eager to maintain economic ties with China and to play the Beijing card to balance the influence of Moscow.

There have been rumors, some of them confirmed, of ethnic Kyrgyz and Kazakhs who are Chinese citizens kidnapped in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and taken back to China (Akmatov 2022). *Bitter Winter*, a daily magazine on religious liberty of which I am the editor, regularly reports about the pressures exerted by Chinese embassies in these countries, which result in both asylum seekers who escaped China, and Kazakh and Kyrgyz citizens who protest on behalf of relatives detained in the Xinjiang camps, being beaten, arrested, and effectively compelled to leave and seek asylum in Europe or the United States.

— Turkey

A third important player is Turkey, which has played the card of common Turkic heritage and language. The Organization of Turkic States (formerly the Turkic Council), whose headquarters are in Istanbul, includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, with Turkmenistan as an observer (Tajikistan, which regards its cultural heritage as Persian rather than Turkic, does not participate).

A problematic aspect of Turkish influence has to do with religion. Until the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the most effective vector of Turkish cultural influences in Central Asia was the educational system implanted there by Hizmet, the Islamic revivalist religious movement founded by Turkish scholar Fethullah Gülen. Tens of thousands of the most well-off Central Asians passed through these schools in the post-Soviet era, and alumni of the Gülen education system are now an important segment of those in the local elites who are in their thirties and forties.

In 2013, however, Gülen spectacularly broke with Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who later accused him of having organized the failed coup of 2016 in Turkey and nicknamed Hizmet the FETÖ (Fethullah Terrorist Organization). While the United States refused to ban Hizmet and extradite Gülen, who lives in Pennsylvania, Turkey persuaded Pakistan and the Gulf states to outlaw the group as a terrorist organization, and continues to exert strong diplomatic pressures to achieve the same aim in Central Asia.

Turkey convinced Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan to cooperate, but not Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, notwithstanding both blandishments and threats

(Kenez 2022); although Gülen schools there have been renamed and their ownership in part transferred to locals. However, a serious incident happened in 2021, when on May 31, Orhan Inandi, a Kyrgyz citizen and the founder and leader of the Gülen school system in Kyrgyzstan, which also includes an accredited university, suddenly disappeared. While the Turkish embassy at first denied any involvement, on July 5, President Erdoğan himself confirmed that Inandi had been abducted in Kyrgyzstan and was detained in Turkey (Putz 2021). His lawyers claimed he had been tortured (*Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Kyrgyz Service* 2022).

Kyrgyzstan authorities claimed they had not been involved, but many in the country found it hard to believe that the local intelligence services had not at least been informed. This poisoned the relationship between Turkey and the Kyrgyz elite, where many are alumni of the Gülen schools, or send their children there. The Hizmet-related schools were once the best resource for Turkish cultural and religious influence in Central Asia. Paradoxically, they now make exerting this influence more difficult.

The Problems of Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Asia in Context

Jehovah's Witnesses have a venerable history in Central Asia. Semyon Kozlitsky (1835–1935), the first known Russian convert to the Bible Students, the predecessors of the Jehovah's Witnesses, and a former Orthodox seminarian (Baran 2014, 16), was exiled to the village of Ust-Bukhtarma, in Kazakhstan, in 1892 (Zhapisheva 2019).

Similar to the Catholics from Lithuania, Jehovah's Witnesses later came to Central Asia because they were deported there by Stalin. There were an "Operation North," deporting Jehovah's Witnesses from Ukraine and the Baltic States, and an "Operation South," deporting their co-religionists from Moldova. Although most were taken to Siberia, some ended up in Kazakhstan (Baran 2014, 34 and 61). Just as Jehovah's Witnesses continued their activities underground in Moldova or Ukraine, those deported in Central Asia converted others, both in the camps and outside of them, and the clandestine activity of the Jehovah's Witnesses expanded. Historian Emily Baran reports how one Pavlo Rurak, sent to a camp in Karaganda, Kazakhstan, in 1951, recalled the secret meetings he was able to organize with co-religionists there (Baran 2014, 58).

In the Kengir revolt of 1954, also in Kazakhstan, when the inmates seized the control of a camp, some 80 Jehovah's Witnesses refused to take up arms and participate in the rebellion. As a result, they were:

> locked in a barracks on the edge of the camp by the rioters. When Soviet troops stormed the camp, they spared the Witnesses from the bloodshed that followed. One Witness who lived through these events reflected that the revolt taught him to "wait on Jehovah" and not seek solutions to problems elsewhere (Baran 2014, 79).

In Uzbekistan, the first Jehovah's Witnesses who were arrested and sent to the labor camps were Serafim Yakushen, and Yekaterina Kobzar from Fergana, in 1957 (Atabaeva 2019). In 1961, a governmental report claimed, perhaps inaccurately, that there were by then more Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan (377) than in Kazakhstan (286) (Baran 2014, 111).

The repression in Central Asia (and other parts of the Soviet Union) continued in post-Stalin years, and in fact the anti-religious campaign of Nikita Khrushchev (1894–1971) in 1962–64 included a concerted effort to eradicate the Jehovah's Witnesses altogether (Baran 2014, 95–8). Baran reports that the KGB in Kazakhstan tried to fabricate compromising information on the elders of the local congregations (Baran 2014, 288), and at one stage even tried, ultimately without great success, to create a schism and promote a national organization of Jehovah's Witnesses, separated from the Brooklyn headquarters (Baran 2014, 91–8).

Today, there are 257 congregations and 17,541 Jehovah's Witnesses who preach and teach in Kazakhstan, and 5,282 with 89 congregations in Kyrgyzstan (jw.org 2022a, 2022b). Statistics for other Central Asian countries are not released, but the Jehovah's Witnesses are present in all five republics.

It is not my aim here to present a history of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Central Asia, nor a detailed list of the violation of their human rights. The Jehovah's Witnesses themselves submit annual reports to the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) for each country (see European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 2022b, 2022c, 2022d, 2022e). Their situation is also discussed in the yearly reports on religious liberty of the U.S. Department of State, whose sections on the five countries devote their largest coverage to the Jehovah's Witnesses (see e.g. U.S. Department of State 2022).

I will rather present the main problems the Jehovah's Witnesses are confronted with in Central Asia, and discuss how they are related to the general issues I examined in the first part of the article. This analysis does not imply that the

situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses is the same in each of the five countries. In Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan they are free to operate, although with limitations. They are subject to substantial restrictions in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, and banned in Tajikistan.

1. Democracy and Conscientious Objection

Human rights scholars and bodies of the United Nations have acknowledged that a full-blown democracy should recognize conscientious objection to military service as a right. The states that make serving in the military compulsory do not only need soldiers. They also have an inherently non-democratic view of how all citizens should pass through mandatory indoctrination in the military.

As authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states, some Central Asian republics share this attitude. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan recognize religion-based conscientious objection as ground for opting out of military service. However, in Kyrgyzstan conscientious objectors must pay a fee equivalent to $210, even if their refusal to serve in the military is based on bona fide religious motivations (U.S. Department of State 2022, Kyrgyzstan, 6).

Kazakhstan regards military service as mandatory, but allows an exemption for religious ministers. According to the report Jehovah's Witnesses submitted to the OSCE in 2022, during the previous year 43 of their ministers faced difficulties in obtaining the exemption, and five were detained by enlistment officials (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 4).

After Turkmenistan lost ten cases at the United Nations Human Rights Committee between 2015 and 2016, in 2021 it freed the 16 Jehovah's Witnesses who were in jail for their refusal to serve in the military, and since then has not prosecuted any of their co-religionists for the same reason. The Jehovah's Witnesses, however, complain that adherents of draft age are interviewed by law enforcement officers, who try to talk them out of conscientious objection, sometimes slandering Jehovah's Witnesses in the process (European Association of the Jehovah's Witnesses 2022d, 3).

In 2021, Tajikistan introduced the possibility of replacing compulsory military service with "mobilization conscription reserve," which can be accessed by paying a certain amount to the Ministry of Defense and undergoing one month of military training. This solution is not acceptable to Jehovah's Witnesses, nor does

it meet the standards of the UN Human Rights Committee since the alternative offered is not really non-military. There is still one month of military training, and the payment must be made to the Ministry of Defense (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022c, 9).

An alarming form of control of their citizens in countries that suffer a deficit of democracy is the refusal, on various pretexts, to allow access to regular banking services to individuals and groups whom the governments regard as undesirable. In 2022, the Jehovah's Witnesses reported to the OSCE that

> In the past four years, registered religious associations of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan have faced insurmountable difficulties in obtaining basic banking services. Current legislation requires that religious associations engage such services to qualify as a legal entity. The banks' discriminatory actions thus constitute a direct attack on Jehovah's Witnesses' religious rights. Complaints to government agencies have gone unanswered (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 6).

However, after the intervention of the General Ombudsman for Human Rights, the problem has now been largely solved.

2. Identity and discrimination

The identity of the newly established Central Asian states is perceived as fragile by their authorities, which makes them hostile to those who for reasons of conscience opt out of its symbolic reaffirmation.

Historically, the Jehovah's Witnesses have claimed the right not to sing national anthems nor to salute national flags, as they regard these practices as contrary to the biblical prescription of venerating and worshiping God only. In the United States, the Jehovah's Witnesses established the right to this behavior through several landmark cases they litigated up to the Supreme Court (Stevens 1973).

However, in both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan Jehovah's Witnesses continue to run into problems for their attitude towards national flags and anthems. In Kyrgyzstan, on 25 May 2022, the State Committee of Religious Affairs refused to allow the importation of the Jehovah's Witnesses' book *Examining the Scriptures Daily* because its teachings about the anthem and the flag were regarded as contrary to a local law provision that prohibits "desecration of the State Flag of the Kyrgyz Republic, the State Emblem of the Kyrgyz Republic and the State

Anthem of the Kyrgyz Republic" (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022b, 3–4).

After years of efforts to explain their position, in 2022 Jehovah's Witnesses still saw incidents in Kazakhstan where their children were harassed at school for their refusal to sing the national anthem or participate in patriotic ceremonies, although these incidents were later resolved (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 6).

The national identity of the five republics is believed to be rooted either in their largely Sufi and "moderate" Islamic tradition, or in the harmony between different "traditional" faiths. Although in fact it is not a recent import into Central Asia, the religion of the Jehovah's Witnesses is considered as "non-traditional." Proselytization is regarded with suspicion, as something denying the official narrative about identity and potentially threatening it. Even where there are no anti-proselytization laws, Jehovah's Witnesses engaged in missionary activities have been harassed in different ways and even detained.

3. Religion and control

The Soviet-style control of religion is perpetuated by systems where religious organizations must be registered to freely operate, and religious buildings must be registered or designated as such to be legally able to host religious activities and ceremonies.

In Kazakhstan, a 2021 amendment to the 2011 Religion Law at article 7.1 mandates that religious activities can only take place either in buildings designated and registered as religious, or in buildings whose owners have notified the authorities in writing ten days before holding a religious activity and have received no objections. Article 7.1 has been used to prevent the Jehovah's Witnesses celebrating their annual memorial of Christ's death in rented premises, intimidating landlords who rent to them, and raiding peaceful meetings for alleged violations of the statute (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 3–4).

The Jehovah's Witnesses have often faced idiosyncratic situations with respect to registration. In Turkmenistan, registration has so far proved impossible to obtain. They were duly registered as a religion in Tajikistan in 1994, and re-registered in 1997. However, their registration was suspended in 2002, and

cancelled in 2007. Their activities were banned in Tajikistan, and several Jehovah's Witnesses have been arrested, beaten, and deported.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Jehovah's Witnesses obtained national registration in 1998, but local authorities also require local registration. The latter has been consistently denied, notwithstanding the favorable decisions obtained by the Jehovah's Witnesses at the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

Uzbekistan considers that the registration the Jehovah's Witnesses obtained only covers their Kingdom's Hall in Chirchiq, a city in the Tashkent region. Any activity or distribution of literature outside of this specific building is thus deemed illegal. Attempts to register additional local organizations of Jehovah's Witnesses have consistently failed, including under the new 2021 law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations," which according to some international observers should have made registration easier.

In Kazakhstan, the Jehovah's Witnesses obtained registration in 1991, and were re-registered in 2012 under a new law on religion. Their local organizations are also registered, and the only present concern is that voices emerge from time to time calling for more restrictive legislation.

4. Neighbors and "extremism"

Jehovah's Witnesses are not without problems in both Turkey and China. In Turkey, their Kingdom Halls are not recognized as places of worship, in addition to problems with conscientious objection (Yıldırım 2022, 28). China has not included the Jehovah's Witnesses in the list of the movements it bans as *xie jiao* ("heterodox teachings," sometimes less correctly translated as "evil cults"). Nonetheless, at least one court of law has applied Article 300 of the Chinese Criminal Code, which prohibits being active in a *xie jiao*, to the Jehovah's Witnesses (Korla City People's Court 2020). The website of the mammoth China Anti-Xie-Jiao association (chinafxj.cn), which rightly regards itself as the largest anti-cult organization in the world and is directly controlled by the Chinese Communist Party, routinely translates and posts articles by Western and Russian anti-cult groups slandering the Jehovah's Witnesses.

While it is unlikely that anything good for the Jehovah's Witnesses will derive from Chinese or Turkish influence in Central Asia, Russia is an active source of

inspiration and often a direct player in most of the campaigns against them in the five republics.

Since the issue has been discussed by others (Šorytė, this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*; Corley 2021), I limit myself to noting how both two main themes of the Russian anti-Jehovah's Witnesses campaigns, and a key tool of the repression, have been systematically imported into Central Asia. The tool is the appointment by administrative authorities of purported "experts" who rely on Russian (and sometimes Western) anti-cult literature to render opinions legitimizing the repression of the Jehovah's Witnesses (Corley 2021, 2022; Aslanova, this issue of *The Journal of CESNUR*).

The two themes are that the Jehovah's Witnesses psychologically manipulate and disturb their "victims," causing them "psychological harm;" and that they are "extremists" because they argue through their preaching and literature that their religion is superior to others. These are typical, and faulty, Russian arguments. Accusing the Jehovah's Witnesses of causing "psychological harm" is just another way of reintroducing the pseudo-scientific and discredited theory of brainwashing (see Introvigne 2022a). All religions present their doctrines as superior to others—otherwise, why should anybody convert to them? Yet, Russian anti-cultists and courts only regard this attitude as evidence of "extremism" when dealing with the Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority religions, while similar claims by the Russian Orthodox Church or Islam are not found objectionable.

Ignoring this criticism, Tajikistan liquidated the Jehovah's Witnesses even before Russia did, and Kazakh courts have sided with the local anti-cult associations Centre to Support Victims of Destructive Religious Cults (Corley 2022) and Terra Libera (European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses 2022a, 5). Supported by the usual "experts," they have penalized the Jehovah's Witnesses for inflicting "psychological harm." Jehovah's Witnesses' literature has been censored, or excluded from importation as "extremist," throughout the region. On 25 March 2021, the headquarters of the Jehovah's Witnesses in Kyrgyzstan was raided.

This Russian influence, however, also met with resistance, both domestically and internationally, which allows for a concluding remark. In a landmark decision, the United Nations Human Rights Committee ruled on 7 September

2022, that Tajikistan's decision to liquidate the Jehovah's Witnesses was illegal (see Introvigne 2022b). On 2 December 2021, the Pervomayskiy District Court of the City of Bishkek ruled against the Prosecutor General's Office of the Kyrgyz Republic, which had asked the court to ban several books and brochures of the Jehovah's Witnesses as "extremists." The decision was rendered on procedural reasons, but after the Jehovah's Witnesses had produced a detailed defense supported by expert witnesses, including the undersigned and Rosita Šorytė (see Introvigne 2021).

Together with others, these are signs that improvements in the situation of the Jehovah's Witnesses and other minority faiths in Central Asia are not impossible, the more so in a context where Russia has lost authority and credibility after the aggression against Ukraine. Scholars and human rights activists should continue their work, without losing hope or assuming that the anti-religious-liberty attitudes prevailing in certain countries are eternal or irreversible.

References

Abdullaev, Evgeniy. 2002. "The Central Asian Nexus: Islam and Politics." In *Central Asia: A Gathering Storm?*, edited by Boris Z. Rumer, 299–330. London: Routledge.

Aitken, Jonathan. 2009. *Nazarbayev and the Making of Kazakhstan*. London and New York: Continuum.

Aitmatov, Chinghiz. 1983. *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years.* English transl. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Akmatov, Alinur. 2022. "China Tries to Hide Detention of Ethnic Kyrgyz in Xinjiang Camps." *Bitter Winter*, October 11. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3uEBiKu.

Atabaeva, Louisa. 2019. "'Stay Neutral': Life of Jehovah's Witnesses in Uzbekistan." *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, May 6. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3UHHThF.

Baran, Emily B. 2014. *Dissent on the Margins: How Soviet Jehovah's Witnesses Defied Communism and Lived to Preach About It*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Bekkin, Renat. 2020. *People of Reliable Loyalty... Muftiate and the State in Modern Russia.* Huddinge: Sodertorn University.

Bennigsen, Alexandre, and Chantal Lemercier-Quelquejay. 1986. *Le Soufi et le Commissaire: Les confréries musulmanes en URSS*. Paris: Seuil.

Bhuiyan, Johana. 2022. "Former Xinjiang Detainee Arrives in US to Testify over Repeated Torture He Says He Was Subjected to." *The Guardian*, April 13. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3Fcm83T.

Boriak, Hennadii. 2001. "The Publication of Sources on the History of the 1932–1933 Famine-Genocide: History, Current State, and Prospects." *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 25(3/4):167–86.

Cameron, Sarah. 2018. *The Hungry Steppe: Famine, Violence, and the Making of Soviet Kazakhstan.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Chambon, Michel. 2022. "The Vatican's Diplomacy in Central Asia." *The Diplomat*, October 3. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FDWJ4x.

Colless, Brian Edric. 1986. "The Nestorian Province of Samarkand." *Abr-Nahrain* 24:51–57.

Conquest, Robert. 1986. *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine*. Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, in association with the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies.

Corley, Felix. 2021. "Kazakhstan: Plagiarised 'Expert Analysis,' Jehovah′s Witnesses to Pay Over 3 Years' Wages." *Forum 18*, 24 September. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3iRlfX3.

Corley, Felix. 2022. "Kazakhstan: 'This Is Not a State Campaign Against the Church'?" *Forum 18*, August 19. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FdrAUg.

Dauvillier, Jean. 1956. "L'expansion de l'église syrienne en Asie centrale et en Extrême-Orient." *L'Orient syrien* 1:76–87.

Dave, Bhavna. 2007. *Kazakhstan: Ethnicity, Language and Power*. Abingdon and New York: Routledge.

Dubuisson, Eva-Marie. 2017. *Living Language in Kazakhstan: The Dialogic Emergence of an Ancestral Worldview*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press.

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. 2022a. *Kazakhstan: Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report. Statement of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 26 September–7 October 2022.* Warwick, NY: Office of Public Information, Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters.

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. 2022b. *Kyrgyzstan: Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report. Statement of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting,*

Warsaw, 26 September–7 October 2022. Warwick, NY: Office of Public Information, Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters.

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. 2022c. *Tajikistan: Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report. Statement of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 26 September–7 October 2022.* Warwick, NY: Office of Public Information, Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters.

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. 2022d. *Turkmenistan: Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report. Statement of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 26 September–7 October 2022.* Warwick, NY: Office of Public Information, Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters.

European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses. 2022e. *Uzbekistan: Jehovah's Witnesses Religious Freedom Report. Statement of the European Association of Jehovah's Witnesses, OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 26 September–7 October 2022.* Warwick, NY: Office of Public Information, Jehovah's Witnesses World Headquarters.

Goble, Paul. 2022. "Influx of Russians Fleeing Mobilization Increasingly Alienating Central Asians." *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 19:149, October 11. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FkjxFa.

Introvigne, Massimo. 2021. "Kyrgyzstan: Jehovah's Witnesses Books Will Not Be Banned as 'Extremist.'" *Bitter Winter*, December 3. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3iOCTdX.

Introvigne, Massimo. 2022a. *Brainwashing: Reality or Myth?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Introvigne, Massimo. 2022b. "Tajikistan's Ban of Jehovah's Witnesses Illegal, UN Human Rights Committee Says." *Bitter Winter*, September 27. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3hfBSv1.

jw.org. 2022a. "Jehovah's Witnesses Around the World: Kazakhstan." Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3uGPouw.

jw.org. 2022b. "Jehovah's Witnesses Around the World: Kyrgyzstan." Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3PkJQzG.

Keller, Shoshana. 2001. *To Moscow, Not Mecca: The Soviet Campaign Against Islam in Central Asia, 1917–1941*. Westport, CT, and London: Praeger.

Kenez, Levent. 2022. "Turkey's Top Imam Threatened Turkic Countries That Do Not Cooperate with Erdoğan Government." *Nordic Monitor*, May 10. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3iPH3SQ.

Kindler, Robert. 2018. *Stalin's Nomads: Power and Famine in Kazakhstan*. Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press.

Korla City People's Court. 2020. "Liu Weiguo and Others." Decision of June 30. English translation, *Bitter Winter*, August 18. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3uDDwty.

Kussainova, Meiramgul. 2022. "Kazakhstan Honors Millions Who Died in 'Great Famine.'" *Anadolu Agency*, May 31. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3VIY3bZ.

Lala Comneno, Maria Adelaide. 1997. "Nestorianism in Central Asia During the First Millennium: Archaeological Evidence." *Journal of Assyrian Academic Studies* 11(1):20–53.

Laruelle, Marlène, and Sébastien Peyrouse. 2006. *Asie centrale, la dérive autoritaire. Cinq républiques entre héritage soviétique, dictature et islam.* Paris: Autrement.

Masud, Muhammad Khalid. 2000. *Travellers in Faith: Studies of the Tablīghī Jamā'at as a Transnational Islamic Movement for Faith Renewal.* Leiden: Brill.

Mayer, Jean-François. 2004. *Hizb ut-Tahrir: The Next al-Qaida, Really?* Geneva: Institut universitaire de hautes études internationales.

Musée Guimet. 2021. *Tadjikistan. Au pays des fleuves d'or.* Gand: Snoeck Publishers, and Paris: Musée national des arts asiatiques Guimet.

Najibullah, Farangis. 2022. "Fundamentalist Islamic Group Still Active In Kyrgyzstan Despite Ban And Crackdown." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Kyrgyz Service*, May 30. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FeCDwm.

Olcott, Martha Brill. 2002. *The Kazakh: Unfulfilled Promise*. Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

Peyrouse, Sébastien. 2003. *Des chrétiens entre athéisme et islam. Regards sur la question religieuse en Asie centrale soviétique et postsoviétique.* Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose and IFEAC.

Peyrouse, Sébastien. 2004. "La gestion du fait religieux en Asie Centrale: maintien du cadre conceptuel soviétique et renouveau factice." *Cahiers d'Asie centrale* 13–14:77–120.

Pullella, Philip. 2022. "As Pope Kazakhstan Visit Ends, Conservative Critic Speaks Out." *Reuters*, September 15. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://reut.rs/3FDXiLH.

Putz, Catherine. 2021. "Abducted From Kyrgyzstan, Educator Orhan Inandi Paraded in Turkey as a 'Terrorist.'" *The Diplomat*, July 6. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3HjJaIR.

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Kyrgyz Service. 2022. "Abducted Kyrgyz Educator Says He Was Tortured in Turkey." February 21. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3BhqWDZ.

Sauytbay, Sayragul, and Alexandra Cavelius. 2021. *The Chief Witness: Escape from China's Modern-Day Concentration Camps*. Melbourne and London: Scribe Publications.

Schwab, Wendell. 2014. "How to Pray in Kazakhstan: *The Fortress of the Muslim* and Its Readers." *Anthropology of East Europe Review* 32(1):2242.

Sims-Williams, Nicholas. 1992 "Christianity in Central Asia and Chinese Turkestan." In *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, edited by Ehsan Yarshater, 530–34. Costa Mesa, CA: Mazda Publishers.

SOVA Center. 2019. "Самарский областной суд признал экстремистской религиозную группу 'Алля-Аят'" (Samara Regional Court Recognizes Allya-Ayat Religious Group as Extremist). May 28. Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3PbjGzh.

Stevens, Leonard. 1973. *Salute! The Case of The Bible vs. The Flag.* New York: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan.

The World Bank. 2022. "GDP per Capita (Current US$)—Europe and Central Asia." Accessed November 23, 2022. https://bit.ly/3Pc3aPo.

Tillett, Lowell. 1969. *The Great Friendship: Soviet Historians on the Non-Russian Nationalities.* Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

U.S. Department of State. 2022. *2021 Report on International Religious Freedom.* Washington DC: U.S. Department of State. Accessed December 12, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FoAq1l.

Yıldırım, Mine. 2022. *An Appeal to Move Forward from Aspirations to Actions: Monitoring Report on the Right to Freedom of Religion or Belief in Turkey.* Oslo: Norwegian Helsinki Committee.

Zhapisheva, Assem. 2019. "Jehova [sic] Witnesses in Kazakhstan: Right to Be Inclusive." *Central Asian Bureau for Analytical Reporting*, May 10. Accessed November 22, 2022. https://bit.ly/3FiuiHU.