WIENER ISLAMSTUDIEN

Herausgegeben von Ednan Aslan

Band 4

PETER LANG
EDITION

Ednan Aslan / Margaret Rausch (eds.)

Islamic Education in Secular Societies

In Cooperation with Sedef Sertkan and Zsófia Windisch

PETER LANG
EDITION

Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is available in the internet at http://dnb.d-nb.de.

Cover image: © Universität Wien

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Islamic education in secular societies : in cooperation with Sedef Sertkan and Zsófia Windisch / Aslan, Ednan / Rausch, Margaret (eds.).
pages cm
ISBN 978-3-631-64586-4
1. Islamic education. 2. Muslims—Non-Muslim countries.
I. Aslan, Ednan, 1959- II. Rausch, Margaret.
LC904.I874 2013
371.077—dc23

2013034972

ISSN 2194-7988
ISBN 978-3-631-64586-4 (Print)
E-ISBN 978-3-653-03801-9 (E-Book)
DOI 10.3726/978-3-653-03801-9

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften
Frankfurt am Main 2013
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Peter Lang – Frankfurt am Main · Bern · Bruxelles · New York · Oxford · Warszawa · Wien

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This book is part of the Peter Lang Edition list and was peer reviewed prior to publication.

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Vitalii Khromets

Islamic Education in Ukraine: Challenges and Future[1]

ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the current legal framework for the activities of Islamic educational institutions in Ukraine. It also discusses the most supportive approaches for the development of Islamic education there. Furthermore, the legal initiatives aimed at regulating the development of Islamic education in the future in Ukraine will be presented.

INTRODUCTION

While discussing the challenges and the future of Islamic education in Ukraine, I will not provide an overview of the Islamic educational institutions (kindergartens, schools, and universities) that exist currently in Ukraine. Instead, I will first discuss the general situation related to the presence of Islamic educational institutions in Ukraine today. Secondly, I will concentrate on the future of the development of Islamic education in secular Ukraine. Thirdly, I will touch on the question regarding social and legal changes that might lead to the dynamic development of the Ukrainian system of Islamic education.

1 Opening speech at the international conference "Islamic Religious Education in Secular Societies" (5-7 October 2012 in Kiev, Ukraine)

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

Issues related to the history and state-of-art of religious education in Ukraine began to capture the attention of researchers after Ukraine gained its independence in 1991. The reason for this is that during Soviet times this area was insufficiently researched since the general intention of the authorities was to completely eliminate the system of religious education in the Soviet Union in general, and in Ukraine in particular. Today, ultimately, while we can boast of a significant amount of research on religious education produced by domestic academics, most of it deals with Christian education. The history and future of Islamic education in Ukraine have been inadequately covered.

ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN UKRAINE

When I use the term Islamic education, I imply Islamic religious education, the goal of which is to increase the religious awareness of Muslims and to train Islamic religious leaders.

There are no thorough works on Islamic education in Ukraine. There are a number of published papers and sections in multi-authored volumes, which cover such issues. Elmira Muratova provides a brief historical overview and analyzes the state-of-art of Islamic education in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea (Ukraine) in her chapter Teaching Islam in Crimea in the volume entitled *Studying and Teaching Islam in Eurasia* (Muratova, 2010). Similar topics are researched in the paper titled Islamic Education in Independent Ukraine: Achievements and Future by M. Yakubovich (Yakubovich, 2012). Furthermore, the paper, by V. Vasylenko, titled Islamic Religious Education as an Integral Component of Spirituality of Religious Minorities in Ukraine (Vasylenko, 2010), offers a brief overview of the state-of-art of Islamic education in Ukraine.

In this paper I will demonstrate that the current legal framework for religious education in general, and Islamic education in particular, is insufficient. In addition, the real activities of Islamic educational institutions in Ukraine are often not regulated by the law. In the present context, it is necessary to identify those forms of development in higher

Islamic education in Ukraine that are the most acceptable *ad interim*. I will argue that the current legal framework that regulates religious education hampers the development of Islamic education, however, even under such conditions, there are a few rather effective options for the development of Islamic education in Ukraine.

Currently, the law of Ukraine prohibits religious organizations from establishing educational institutions. For instance, the laws "On Education," "On Higher Education," "On Vocational Education," "On General Secondary Education," "On Pre-school Education," and "On Out-of-School Education" enshrine the condition that religious organizations, similarly to political parties, have no right to establish educational institutions. Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine guarantees the right to freedom of beliefs and religion. Furthermore, Article 3, Paragraph 3 of the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Consciousness and Religious Organizations" establishes the right of parents or foster parents, by mutual consent, to bring up their children in accordance with their beliefs and attitudes toward religion. This right is also enshrined in international documents ratified by the Parliament of Ukraine, in particular Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Political Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. The International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Political Rights provides parents with the right to bring up their children in accordance with their personal beliefs, including the right to choose a school for their children not only from among schools established by the state, but also from among other types of schools that abide by state educational standards. However, some experts on religion-related issues and some Members of Parliament hold a different opinion regarding the legal norms on education. They refer to the same Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine, which also prescribes that churches and religious organizations shall be separated from the state and that schools shall be separated from religion. However, among the current Ukrainian MPs, there are some proponents of the provision of the right to religious organizations to establish various educational institutions. For instance, on July 9, 2008, the Parliament of Ukraine registered the draft of a law to amend certain laws regarding the establishment of educational institutions by religious organizations, but this draft has not yet been included in the agenda. The relevant committee on science and education is against such changes. At the present moment, religious organizations in Ukraine, including Islam-

ic organizations, do not have the right to establish educational institutions, but the supporters of the idea to change such norms in this area continue to work for the granting of this right to religious organizations.

In spite of the fact that the laws of Ukraine on education prohibit religious organizations in general, and Islamic organizations in particular, from creating educational institutions, Islamic educational institutions exist *de facto*. There are so-called Sunday schools organized by religious communities that do not need to be registered at all. Furthermore, there are a number of *madrasahs* in Ukraine where children, young men, and girls receive Islamic education in their extracurricular time. The situation is different with regard to Islamic higher educational institutions. Today, the Islamic University exists under the auspices of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine (Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Ukraine, 2009). In addition, the Religious Administration of Independent Muslim Communities of Ukraine of The Kyiv Islamic High Council has recently announced its plans to establish the Ukrainian Islamic University. Higher spiritual educational institutions are registered in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" (Law of Ukraine, 2012). According to Article 11 of this law, spiritual educational institutions can be registered by religious centers (administrations). It is important to note that spiritual educational institutions operate as a particular type of religious organizations. Even though the law indicates that school children and undergraduate students studying in such institutions have the same privileges as students in secular educational institutions, the diplomas issued by spiritual institutions are not recognized by the state as higher education certificates. That means that such diplomas give their holders the right to build only religion-related careers. A holder of such a diploma cannot be hired by public offices or study in the system of continuous education and obtain a diploma of secondary higher education; with a diploma from a spiritual educational institution, its holder cannot enroll in post-graduate studies. In other words, if the graduate fails to establish a religious career, he has to start all over from the very beginning. Today, there is a possibility of registering an educational institution in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education," obtaining a license, and receiving accreditation to provide educational services. For instance, in its ordinance from March 17, 2011, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine introduced differentiation in theological studies based on confession. This ordinance

made amendments to the list of professions used to launch the BA, MA, and 'specialists' programs. It is now possible to license and accredit BA and MA programs in Islamic Theology. It would seem that this is an opportunity for Islamic universities to provide state-recognized diplomas to their graduates. But the problem now is obtaining the state license. To obtain it, the faculty must hold state-recognized diplomas. As a result, there is a vicious circle. To train Islamic theologians, it is necessary to have a teaching staff with state-recognized diplomas in Islamic theology. Therefore, obtaining state permission to provide state-recognized diplomas to their graduates is a vain hope for Islamic universities today. This is the problem faced by all confessions in Ukraine, including the Orthodox churches. However, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church has accumulated some experience in this regard. In Uzhhorod, the Uzhhorod Cyril and Methodius Ukrainian Theological Academy[2] and the Carpathian Avhustyn Voloshyn University[3] are affiliated structures. Academy students are often university students as well, and upon graduation they receive two diplomas, one is a church-recognized diploma issued by the academy and the second is a state-recognized diploma issued by the university. Another positive example is that of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Among the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church seminaries issuing church-recognized diplomas is the Ukrainian Catholic University[4]. Students of the Lviv Spiritual Seminary of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church study simultaneously in the University Theological Department and also receive state-recognized diplomas. Spiritual educational institutions of the Roman Catholic Church are affiliated with foreign Catholic educational institutions registered in the corresponding countries, and as a result issue diplomas recognized in those countries. Thus, students graduating from spiritual educational institutions of the Roman Catholic Church in Ukraine receive not only church-recognized diplomas, but also foreign diplomas of higher education issued by Catholic higher education institutions. It is possible to seek recognition for the latter in Ukraine since they are state-recognized diplomas in other countries. This experience of the Roman Catholic Church is interesting and useful, and could also be used by the Islamic universities in Ukraine. An Islamic university could obtain the accreditation of a foreign state Islamic university,

2 Homepage: http://www.uuba.org.ua/index.php
3 Homepage: http://www.kau.com.ua/index.php
4 Homepage: http://ucu.edu.ua/

thus offering its students the possibility of seeking recognition for their diplomas, if they need to do so. To issue a double diploma, however, it is necessary to harmonize the curricula of both higher education institutions. This process is rather easy. But it is also possible to take another approach by registering the Islamic university as a branch of the foreign Islamic university. The former could then issue diplomas recognized by the university to which it is affiliated. Such an approach would make it possible for the Islamic university to be registered in accordance with the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education" and to be licensed to provide educational services as a branch of a foreign higher education institution. Of course, in the end, we might find ourselves in a situation where the university operating as a branch of a foreign university promotes ideas that are hostile to Ukrainian statehood and society in general. This is possible if the university is affiliated with a university that is promoting extremist ideas and sheltering itself behind Islam. An objection that can be raised to such an argument is that this is what the laws of Ukraine are for, since they prohibit any such activities. In case a university promoting extremist ideas appears in Ukraine, it can be closed down in accordance with current legal framework. That is why the option to register Islamic universities as branches of foreign Islamic universities on condition that they do not promote extremist ideas is the best way to legalize them in Ukraine.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE OF ISLAM IN UKRAINE

In the near future the possibility of developing Islamic education may arise as a result of changes in the Ukrainian legal framework. I believe that it is only a matter of time before religious organizations obtain the right to create educational institutions according to the laws of Ukraine on education. Then Islamic centers and administrations will be able to create both general education institutions, such as kindergartens, primary and secondary schools, and higher education institutions to offer education to pupils and students who themselves (or their parents for them) will choose an institution, which is centerd on Islamic values, simultaneously implements the state education educational standard, and offers religious education by using the selective block of the curriculum.

To prepare for these changes and to make sure that such schools are established when the time comes, Ukrainian Muslim centers need to begin training qualified teaching staff now. As for the establishment of Islamic higher educational institutions, or Islamic universities, it is more difficult to achieve due to the provisions of the Law of Ukraine "On Higher Education." According to the current law, to establish a university, it is necessary to have at least one department with three chairs. Each chair should be staffed with five instructors, three of whom would hold candidate or doctoral degrees. One person who has a candidate or doctoral degree, the academic title of professor, and no less than five years of teaching experience could be appointed as rector. It is understandable that such requirements are close to impossible to implement. That is why what is currently being discussed as an alternative option to regulate the establishment, licensing, and accreditation of educational services not under the Law "On Higher Education" and relevant by-laws, but instead under the Law of Ukraine "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organizations" and relevant by-laws. The only thing that would differ between the procedures for establishing religious educational institutions and secular educational institutions would be the permission to use diplomas from higher religious educational institutions for licensing and accreditation processes. The key objection here is the question regarding the recognition of higher education diplomas, received from religious educational institutions, by the state, if the latter had no influence on the training of the professionals in these institutions. It is understandable that the state should develop clear criteria indicating which diplomas from religious higher education institutions can be recognized as higher education diplomas. The failure of the Ukrainian state to meet the needs of religious organizations, in particular Islamic ones, will continue to result in accusations of discrimination of students and graduates of these educational institutions by the state. I would like to believe that in the near future this issue will be settled and that Islamic centers will have the legal grounds to establish educational institutions where pupils and students will have the option not only of enrolling in the general educational component, but also of studying Islamic education and upbringing.

At present, the religious organizations of Ukraine, including Islamic ones, do not have the right to set up educational institutions; however, those who believe in the need to legally regulate this issue continue to struggle for the religious communities to gain this right.

To develop the system of higher Islamic education in Ukraine, the best approach is to register the Islamic universities as divisions of foreign Islamic universities under the condition that they will not import ideas of extremism. This is also the best way to legalize such universities in Ukraine.

In the near future the laws will be amended and Islamic centers will have the legal grounds to set up educational institutions where school children and university students will be able to acquire Islamic upbringing and education.

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Denys Brylov

Islamic Education Between Tradition and Modernization: The Ukrainian Example

ABSTRACT

This paper is dedicated to the relationship between the traditional and modernizing components within the Islamic education system, through the example of Ukrainian Islamic universities. It examines the structure of Islamic education as well as its establishment and content. Furthermore, it investigates Islamic education as an instrument of state policy. Using the example of al-Azhar University, the paper analyzes issues arising from an attempt to mechanistically reform the Islamic system of education based on the model of a secular one. Finally, it takes a detailed look at the situation of Ukrainian Islamic universities, especially their operation and issues pertaining to the institutionalization of Islamic education in Ukraine.

INTRODUCTION

Turning to the relationship between tradition and modernization in Islamic education, we should note the immediacy of this issue to today's Islamic community – especially for Muslim countries of the former Eastern bloc and Soviet Union. This is related to similarities among the so-