

HIJRAH OF RUSSIAN MUSLIMS TO TURKEY: PRO ET CONTRA

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The goal of the article is to reveal and analyze the development of a new trend, specific to the Russian Muslims, namely, the phenomenon of migration to Turkey for residence due to the ideological persuasions. The historical term «hijrah» («migration») was used in the times of the Prophet, and now is also used by emigrants. In the material, based on monitoring of the mass media, social media, individual interviews, the essential trends of this process are considered, the examples from life of Muslim emigrants are given, gathered experience from their life in Turkey is generalized. The results presented in this article indicate the influence of social, economic, political and cultural processes, which take place in modern Russia on ideology and position of future emigrants. The materials of the article can be useful for the investigation of migration problems and modern social discussions about the place of religion in the secular state.

Keywords: history; hijrah, Muslims of CIS, Muslims of Russia, Muslims-Russians, migration of Muslims, Islam in the Russian Federation, Islam in Turkey, Islam and politics.

INTRODUCTION

According to the recent report of the United Nations on migration 2.5 % of the population of modern Turkey are immigrants from different states, as well as from the countries of CIS² (Trends in International Migrant Stock: The 2013 Revision, 2013). Traditionally Turkey is considered as a country of migrants, as in the 60-ies – 70-ies of the XX century active emigration of the population to the West European countries, especially to West Germany was evidenced. Also Turkey was often used as a transit country for the migration to Europe by migrants from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Iraq, Iran and Pakistan. From 1923 to 1997, the migration service documented 1.6 million migrants from the Balkan countries. In the late 80-ies the immigration wave from Iran, Iraq, also the Kurds' migration from Iraq in 1988 and 1991, the Albanians', the Bosnian Muslims', the Pomaks' (the Bulgarian Muslims') and the Turkomans' migration in 1989, 1992-1995 and 1999 (Kirisci, 2003) was registered.

Today it is approved officially that immigration to Turkey has fallen to the minimum level as a consequence of the policy aimed at this. Since 1990, however, Turkey has become a witness of a new form of irregular migration with involvement of the citizens of adjacent states, citizens of the EU and transit migrants. Turkey allows the citizens of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Iran, Moldova, Ukraine, Russia and the Republics of Central Asia move into the country freely - either without any

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visas or with visas that can be easily obtained at the airports or checkpoints. A great number of these people take part in trade (Kirisci, 2003).

Certainly, in the case of CIS countries it is difficult to evaluate what percentage of migrants affiliate themselves with Muslims. However, the Migration Policy of Turkey preferred Muslims related to the Turkish culture from the beginning of the XX century, assuming their easy assimilation, that's why we can consider that Muslims represent a large part of immigrants from CIS countries. Another factor advocating this presumption is the Islamic policy of the President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan, who presents himself as a Muslim leader and writes notes in his personal Twitter encouraging Muslim women to report him about any problems, arising in relation to wearing headscarves in state organizations.

METHODS

In this article the authors pursue the following aims: to determine the main reasons of the Muslims' migration from Russia to other countries; to elucidate causes, why Muslims choose Turkey as a country of future residence.

To achieve this goal sociological methods have been used, in particular: the method of interview, the study and analysis of the materials of online social networks covering the problem of hijrah of Muslims from Russia.

RESULTS

Turkey always appeared as an object of hijrah for Russian Muslims. Moreover, political parties have been using such a tool as the «Islamic card» in their political program, proclaiming Turkey as an attractive place of residence for Muslims, starting from the 50s of the 20 century. The pioneers of the «political Islam» in Turkey are the following parties: the National Salvation Party (Milli Selamet Partisi, MSP), founded in 1970 and headed by Nezhmettin Erbakan; the Party of Welfare (Refah Partisi, AKP), led by Erbakan again in 1980-ies and 1990-ies; also the Party of Virtue (Fazilet Partisi, FP) and the Party of Happiness (Saadet Partisi, SP), which were founded after the «postmodern» revolution of 1997 (Jung, Piccoli, 2001).

The Party of Justice and Development (AK Party – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) after winning the election in 2002 became a «successor» of Islamic parties of mid-to-late of XX century. The JDP drew a lesson from mistakes of its predecessors. And now along with proclamation of the «Islamic course» of the party policy, JDP lays emphasis on the economic development. During the JDP government Turkey was able to overcome the hyperinflation and had a period of the economic growth (T.Alkan, 2007; MTran, Guardian, 23 July 2007). «The Economist» mentions the JDP government as the most prosperous one during 50 years (The Economist, 2007). The JDP victory at the elections of 2007 favored success of such policy and the JDP was far ahead of its political opponents (Göl, 2009). The success both in

the internal and external policy makes Turkey one of the most attractive countries for Muslims, and the Prime Minister of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan becomes one of the most popular leaders of the Muslim world (Hurriyet daily news, 2012).

Originally hijra was migration of Muhammad and his followers to Medina (Yasrib) in 622, the year which was the start of the Islamic calendar (Prozorov S. M., 1991). Two years before it Muhammad met with neophytes from the settlement in the Yasrib oasis. During the year the meeting was held again with an even greater number of the Yasrib inhabitants, who converted to Islam and agreed to obey Muhammad in all matters. In 622 at least six times they offered Muhammad protection and assistance on their territory, migration of the Meccan Muslims to Yasrib and foundation of the independent community living according to their rules became the result of the process. There is also a concept of small Hijra, which is the resettlement of Muslims from Mecca to Ethiopia, but the most important process was Hijra of 622. This relocation, according to M. Hodgson, was not the escape from the problems accompanying the life of Muslims in Mecca, but the opportunity to build a society living according to the principles of Islam, more clearly stipulated in the process of the prophetic mission of Muhammad (Hodgson, 2009). Islam requires improvement of moral qualities of not only the individual, but also of the whole society, but the Meccan society was not ready for such large-scale transformations.

The concept of “Hijra” received a broader meaning with time. For example, in the Middle Ages, the heads of some Muslim sects (Kharijites, Azrakites, Carmathians, etc.) called Hijra a resettlement in their camp: it was assumed that they were the followers of more correct current of Islam, and the camp served as “Medina”, providing the ability to live according to true principles of Islam (Prozorov, 1991).

Recently the concept of “Hijra” has got a different sound and content. By a part of Muslims modern Hijra is understood as relocation of people from non-Muslim countries in order to follow the principles of Islam in their daily life. Especially this is true for Muslims from the Russian Federation and some former republics of the Soviet Union who understand Hijra by far as moving to Turkey and other countries with traditional Muslim population because of their ideological persuasions.

The author of the article in the Voice of Islam Farhad Bagirov speaks openly about the futility of all attempts to change the situation with Muslims in the former Soviet Union and urged all Muslims to do Hijra. The author does not name specific countries, suitable for Hijra, but quite emotionally describes the need of Muslim migration: “I would like to raise attention to the position of those Muslims who hope to change their situation in Russia with protests drawing the attention of human rights defenders. [...] Again I want to point at the futility of this clownery which they call justice, because in the country where the arrest is replaced by

capture, the investigation by fabrication, the presumption of innocence by guilt until it is proved, and the judicial process by condemnation, just a person blinded by a TV screen, can seek justice and hope for mercy. The system breaks prisoners so they make commitments in camps and prisons; they suffer from degrading their manhood and physical violence with elements of perversion. This system forces to sign condemnation in crimes as well as other documents and agreements in prisons where people are not only being crippled and maltreated, but the powers hate Islam and without giving a damn to their own laws they forbid to do namaz, read Quran, keep the fast, etc.” (The Voice of Islam – Bagirov, 2014). Thus, the author speaks about the legal tyranny against Muslims and calls it the main reason to do Hijra.

First of all we talk about those Muslim activists who, according to their words, had been persecuted for their religious beliefs or social activities. Often these people are the representatives of various Islamic parties and movements prohibited in the Russian Federation and CIS countries, as well as Russian Muslim neophytes.

In the Russian Internet space there is a group of sites that bring together those desires to move to Turkey. For example, in the most popular Russian network “Vkontakte” there is a closed group with more than 200 members – future migrants (“Vkontakte” - Hijra, 2015). Another group – “Life in Turkey”, created by a family of Russian Muslims, who moved to Antalya, talks about the advantages of life in Antalya, providing informational support (Vkontakte, life in Turkey, 2015). They are talking about the Muslim environment, the cleanliness and comfort of Turkish cities, a friendly atmosphere and general comfort of life. The head of the family works in the field of real estate, his wife helps him in business and takes care of children.

Along with closed resources there are sites that offer their assistance to future migrants to Turkey. The most significant among them is an online Islamic center for assistance to migrants in Turkey “Ansar” (“Ansar” center, 2015). The center (a division of construction and investment company HAK GROUP) offers specific moral and material assistance to migrants. There is a specially organized program called “Muhajir”, the meaning of which is as follows:

- 1) Muslims who decided to move to Turkey can solve their accommodation problem by buying an apartment in Islamic residential complexes;
- 2) “Ansar” center takes care of the material support of the families, paying them every month during three to five years 300 euros per family (assuming that these Muslims are experiencing financial difficulties). A period of 3 or 5 years is determined at the discretion of the center (“Ansar” center, 2015).

Thus, we are able to see the functioning of the real scheme to attract Muslim migrants. They are given a real financial assistance, which according to the leaders

of the center is provided with profits derived from activities in the field of construction business.

Besides, the HAK GROUP receives a long-term (and to some extent, dependent) customer in their mortgage programs.

It should be noted that this variant of Hijra, when the settlers solve their housing problem in Turkey in advance is becoming increasingly popular. A relatively low cost of housing in Turkey (in comparison with Russia) allows solving the problem easily by selling apartments in Russia and acquiring the similar, and often, more comfortable home in Turkey. More and more Turkish construction firms appear in this field, acting under the advertising slogan “Hijra to Turkey” (“the Muslim Guide”, 2015).

In addition to specialized websites, designed to assist the Muhajirs – those who have committed Hijra, the Russian-speaking Internet space is rich in resources, such as forums discussing the pros and cons of resettlement. Migrants share the reasons which have induced them to move. So, for example, a user of website “Golubushka” for Muslim women registered under the name “Amina Alia” writes that in spite of her great love for Russia, she still wants to go to Turkey, because “she is tired to endure every day humiliation and insults”. This is how she explains her decision to go to a foreign country: “Let’s start with the fact that I have a non-Russian appearance. A beast, the Azer limb - that’s what I have been hearing about myself since my childhood. And I could not get used to it.” (Golubushka, 2015). The situation worsened when the girl began “practising” Islam and every day came to work wearing hijab – Muslim female headwear. “Working in an official institution, I am constantly facing negativity from my peers (women somehow more often than men). These adult women who consider themselves to be intelligent, often go to the theatre and are proud of it, consider it their duty to talk about “churka” (an insulting word with a meaning of any non-Russian nationality, specifically people from the Central Asia), black**s and the way they invaded Russia in my presence. They intentionally mangle my name, ask me boorish questions about Islam. [...] Today, for example, due to the fact that I did not water the flowers which is not my responsibility and not my flowers too, a lady called me “Islamist s**t”. Just like that. Meanwhile I love Russia, it will be painful to leave because my mother is Russian ...” (Golubushka, 2015). Now the user of the website lives in Turkey, Istanbul.

But the choice of the country of residence is not always obvious. This topic is quite popular in the Russian-language Islamic webspace. Various forums discuss the advantages of various countries, the criteria for selecting countries, as well as points regarding religious aspects of this solution. Even such options as Yemen are considered (certain cities, the island of Socotra). The most popular options are Egypt and Turkey. The most desirable relocation is Saudi Arabia as it is the only Islamic theocratic state in the Arab world; Muslims try to stay in the country, study in educational institutions, but not each of them is suitable.

Users of one of the Muslim resources discuss the possibility of Hijra in UAE (Ummah-UAE, 2011). Basically, the potential Muhajirs are not afraid of the lack of legal status in the state, their main concern is the ability to find work and make comfortable life for themselves and their families. Thus, according to one of the users (the employee in the medical sphere) such families usually suffer from the lack of medical support, as it often happens to people in a foreign country that they do not have enough money to pay for medical care which means that they neglect professional help and put health and lives of their family members in danger (Mamirgov, 2010).

In his LiveJournal Murat Mamirgov (researcher, the author of the book about Islamic sects and creeds) focuses on the topic of Hijra of Russian Muslims, regretting that well-educated people often leave their country, he asks whether it makes sense for them to leave it (Mamirgov, 2010). Judging from the responses to the comments, the author of the blog is rather inclined not to leave Russia, as there is no better alternative.

Another prominent Russian Muslim activist, the publisher of Muslim literature Ajaev Aslambek in his blog covering the Hijra topic asks a specific question: “After the recent events (probably talking about the explosions in the subway in St. Petersburg and Moscow – noted by the authors), many people started thinking about undesirability of Muslims to live among the infidels. I have a question for those who have already left or are trying to leave: where do you think it is possible to live today, keeping your religion and being involved in Fitna?” (Ajaev, 2010). Obviously, the discomfort caused by the nervous atmosphere in the capital, following the terrorist attacks made the author think about Hijra, when every Muslim unwittingly becomes guilty in the incident due to the alleged common religious beliefs with the terrorists. Among the options proposed for Hijra are Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Egypt, Malaysia and the UAE.

In Russian Internet you can find a considerable number of blogs and interviews on Hijra of Russians to Turkey, which describe all aspects of this process: starting from the routes and preparation for migration due to the ideological persuasions.

Dmitry Hamza Chernomorchenko is a Russian Muslim who lives for a while in Istanbul. According to him, every month thousands of families from Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the North Caucasus and other territories of the Russian Federation are heading to Egypt, Turkey, Syria, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen and so on. “I am not going to insist on any specific figures, I only share my impression. In Istanbul, for example, today there is no single area where you do not see families of Russian Muslims,” – he says (Jalilov, 2014).

In his opinion, Turkey is the most preferred country for migration of Muslims. “Indeed, there is no other country in the world now that has hosted such a large number of the Muslim refugees, and given them the opportunity to legalize, to equip the life, to find free language courses, to enroll children in public schools”,

concludes Chernomorchenko. There are all the conditions in Turkey, due to which every Muhajir feels at home. Therefore, today Turkey is an example for every state that calls itself Islamic” (Jalilov, 2014).

The user of the “Voice of Islam” website Abdulhai describes his route from Tyumen to Antalya, at the beginning he is talking about the decision of their family to make Hijra: “Finally I managed to make a decision to do Hijra which I had adopted one and a half years ago. This article is being written by us on the road. Our journey began at 5 a.m. on Monday, 7 April 2014, from the city of Tyumen, Russia. The destination point is Antalya, Turkey. Everyone in Russia could find reasons for resettlement and almost everyone will provide a lot of such reasons, but mostly Muslims. We have made a decision on the basis of the political and religious situation in Russia, negative attitude to Muslims on the part of “powers” (with quotations marks because all power belongs only to Allah subhanallah), and from the ordinary citizens of the Russian Federation. And let everyone review their reasons for migration and their position. It is worth noting that my husband and I are not only Russians, but also Russian Muslims. So we are leaving Home” (the Voice of Islam - Abdulhai, 2014).

Another user of the same Muslim website Abujabrail also talks about his experience of Hijra from the Russian capital to the Turkish one (the Voice of Islam – Abujabrail, 2014). On the causes of emigration Abujabrail says: “The solution has been made in about six months and was accompanied by constant motivation because of the madness that was going on in Russia. One would have to get used to daily Islamophobia in Russian society, but an explicit government policy of destroying the grounds and development of Islam as well as lawlessness in relation to many Muslim activists inspired the idea of moving to the country where I can freely practice my religion, educate my children, acquire knowledge. And with the beginning of the Ukrainian conflict, when for a couple of months the closest friend of Russians was transformed into “fascists” by propaganda, the people finally became brutal, and the entire political regime began to resemble some sort of insane reincarnation of the “scoop” with all negative traits of the Russian state – we took a firm decision to leave.” The same author adds that he, “like any active Muslim in Russia was under the “supervision” of the bodies waiting for commands”. Among reasons to choose Turkey, he noted Muslim society (especially in contrast with Russia), developed Muslim infrastructure, a large number of Muslims from Russia and other CIS countries, high (close to European) standards of living, consumption, reasonable prices (often lower than in Russia), warm climate, friendly people, the absence of sharp social problems connected with drug addiction and alcoholism. The author of the post has turned upon arrival in Istanbul to find reliable real estate agency by recommendations and get comfortable accommodation in the heart of Istanbul, greatly improving the living conditions compared to those that he had in Russia.

The reporter of Islam News informational portal Vera Ilyina conducted informative interviews about Muslims from Russia with Russian immigrant from the Volga region in Turkey Abu Amir (Ilyina, 2014), who shares his views on reasons that made Russian Muslims leave their Motherland and the prospects for the believers in Russia. Like many other immigrants in Turkey, Abu Amir said that the country was chosen due to its high standard of living and well-developed Muslim infrastructure and safety: “A person here can realize his needs related to the cult and worship, and he will not be persecuted, he will not be asked questions like “Why do you go to mosque?”. For example, in Arab countries there is a dictatorship, there are no human rights, and the Arab Spring in this respect is demonstrative. Europe is imperfect too and not by chance it is called “Gayropa” (Gay Europe) now. And in Turkey a Muslim prayer finds a mosque at any step and at any restaurant he can eat freely without fear of persecution, including the persecution for wearing the beard. He will not be indicted with the article 282 (extremism) on groundless basis, somebody will not shove bullets or drugs to him.

An individual category of Muslims in Turkey is Caucasians, who are also looking for safety in Turkish cities to start a new life which is relatively easy according to Abu Amir: “About 8000 young Muslim people have disappeared in Caucasus during 4 years. Many young people are not pleased with this perspective. Turkey is a visa-free country, it is not necessary to obtain Schengen. Of course, if a young man goes to Turkey, he lives on some of his resources, gradually integrates into society, gets a job, gets a residency and lives there.” In this case the respondent does not encourage all Russian Muslims to do hijra. In his opinion, this should be done only in utmost situations, and before this it is necessary to attempt to integrate and build a dialogue with the state. He expresses the hope that “if the officials abide by the Constitution, the right to religion and all this will be respected by Muslims too,” and a wave of opposition to believers will gradually disappear (Ilyina, 2014).

Another article dedicated to Caucasian Muslims in Turkey is written by Rustam Jalilov, an author writing for Kavpolit. The article with a headline of “Caucasians on the Bosphorus: emigrants and migrant workers” discovers the reasons for Caucasians to move to Turkey. And once again the same factors are highlighted such as search for a peaceful life and safety for a family. The author talks to Zamir Kuliev, an Azerbaijani from Pyatigorsk, who lived in Moscow for about 8 years and who decided to move to Istanbul two years ago. For him this is also hijra, as he was forced to leave Russia only by one reason: concerns about the safety of his family, especially the safety of his wife who is a practicing Muslim, working and wearing hijab. By the way, the need to leave Pyatigorsk for Moscow also appeared due to huge attention of security forces and fear of losing personal freedom because of his strong Muslim position. Kuliev had an opportunity to move to Azerbaijan where he also had family ties, and financial opportunities to acquire real property

and business, but he preferred Istanbul with its big opportunities. Today Zamir Kuliev is the owner of the property, trade business, so he actively helps new coming Muhajirs from Russia to settle down in Turkey. Kuliev says that Turks are very friendly towards co-religionists, and actively help them in a difficult situation. Not surprisingly, the number of Russian Muslims in Turkey is growing, they even “are going to create a Dernegi (a public association for mutual aid, usually organized by immigrants from different countries and their descendants)” (Jalilov- Caucasians, 2014).

We have also conducted a number of interviews with Muslims who moved from CIS countries to Turkey; mostly we were interested in reasons that prompted them to leave their homeland, as well as the factors that determined their choice in favour of Turkey. One respondent described his situation in this way: “We have moved to Turkey very fast, the whole family (me, wife and two children). In connection with certain events in the country and our city, our family was under the interest of the power structures of the republic. Similarly, I can not answer what caused this interest, because I can not determine what we have stood out: my wife wears hidjab, I go to the mosque on Fridays, follow all requirements. I have my own business. I do not belong to any sects in Islam, do not give out flyers, do nothing criminal, but anyway attracted such interest and was questioned, searched. From my Muslim friends I know about cases with a sad outcome of such situations. I am responsible for my family and I want to educate our children properly. My wife and I decided not to wait until everything was resolved by itself and left. We did not have any variants. We did not speak any languages and life in Arab countries seemed too complicated and even unreal. It requires a lot of efforts to adapt, and Arab countries are not stable and safe now. Our native language is very close to Turkish, the visa is not needed, it is relatively easy to get a residence permit, and property is cheaper than ours, so it seemed easier to start a new life there. And of course we were encouraged with the perspectives of upbringing our children in a Muslim environment. We moved very quickly, did not even have time to sell the house bought the year before. I quickly got a job in a construction company, life established quickly. We do not want to come back and do not plan it.” (Khamidov, 2015).

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As we can see today the term “hijra”, which in the modern Muslim society in addition to its historical significance received the meaning of resettlement of non-Muslims in a Muslim state in order to follow the principles of Islam fully in their daily life is extremely important among Russian Muslims. Muslims are actively debating on the need to do Hijra, which country is better for this, and to what extent it is expedient to leave their homeland and move abroad. We can say that one of the main reasons that motivate Muslims to resettle is Islamophobia in all its

manifestations - from daily routine to public activities. Neither those who call to leave Russia, nor those who speak about the inadmissibility of Hijra, deny the existence of Islamophobia. That is what motivates Muslims to seek the country, first of all, with the majority of Muslim population and loyal attitude of the state towards Muslims and Islam in general. In this matter, economic or any other “everyday” benefits recede into the background. For Muhajirs who agree to live as illegal immigrants in Saudi Arabia or the United Arab Emirates the main thing is that they do not have any problems with the confession of Islam.

However, if we combine all the desired requirements for the Muhajirs, Turkey becomes a leader among the optional states for resettlement. In addition to purely international reasons such as friendly attitude of Turks and fairly simple integration into Turkish society, one important factor is the lack of difficulties for migration to Turkey from the legislative point of view. Turkey is a visa-free country for Russian citizens and it is relatively simple to obtain a residence permit. Moreover, there are many organizations that help newcomers to settle in major Turkish cities. That is why Turkey is one of the most popular countries to commit Hijra by Russian Muslims.

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