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Tatarstan: at the Crossroads of Islam and Orthodoxy

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Arguments for Russia's special place in the world take a variety of lines. Of these, one of the most fundamental and widespread is that Russia is a specially 'Eurasian' civilisation, the result of a combination of sources: European Christian and Asian Muslim (sometimes people say 'Muslim' openly, sometimes it is understood implicitly, as historically Russia has had, to say the least, little interaction with Buddhism and Hinduism). Not only the ideologues of Russian nationalism but also western political scientists venture from time to time into the risky intellectual waters of Eurasianism. Notwithstanding the tenacity of Eurasian theories for about a century, all the argument has been constructed entirely on poetical images and foggy, albeit enticing, metaphysical speculations.

If 'Eurasianism' does indeed exist, then it should have fully concrete and visible social, cultural and political manifestations. In order to discover these we should naturally examine in the first instance the religious, social and political situation in the Republic of Tatarstan. Tataria was annexed to Russia in the sixteenth century, earlier than the other Muslim countries. Immediately after the annexation of the Kazan' Khanate in 1552 the Moscow government started to implement a single-minded policy of settling Russians in the conquered territories, and thus continual everyday and social contacts between Russians and Tatars here have had a history of 450 years. Theoretically then it is in Tataria that 'Eurasianism' should have arisen in the first place. Here, as nowhere else in Russia, the results of the interaction between 'Europe' and 'Asia' should be most clearly manifest.

The very formulation of the question about Eurasianism presupposes both sides moving together: Europe towards Asia, Asia towards Europe. In our concrete example this means the reciprocal influence of Russians and Tatars. However, it is hard to talk of any reciprocal influence, from the days of the subjugation of Kazan' by the forces of Ivan the Terrible right up to 1991. It was more the imposition on the Tatars of the Russian way of life, Russian culture and Russian religion – Russian Orthodoxy.

The Kazan' Khanate was annexed in 1552, and by 1555 the solemn installation of the appointed archbishop of Kazan', Saint Guri, the first in history, was taking place in Moscow, with a religious procession and all the church bells ringing. This should not surprise us: not only had Kazan' until recently been the capital of Muscovy's greatest centuries-long enemy, but after the annexation it became the second most important town in the state. In the course of the next 200 years 'spiritual interaction' occurred in one direction only – through a policy of total christianisation and russification of the peoples who had inhabited the defeated Kazan' Khanate. The Russians

who then lived in Tataria certainly did not see themselves as representatives of a 'Eurasian' civilisation, but rather considered that they were at the forefront of the struggle with the 'infidel'.

With the reign of Catherine the Great came the recognition that it would be impossible to russify the Tatars completely. In 1773 the Holy Synod issued an edict 'On the toleration of all faiths and on the prohibition of clergy to interfere in matters concerning other religious faiths and the building of prayer houses according to their law, submitting all the above to the secular authorities'. In 1788 a muftiate was established in Ufa as the official central institution of the Muslim clergy for the whole of Russia. The muftis and the mullahs beneath them were appointed by the government 'from amongst the Kazan' Tatars'.

The government rejected forcible christianisation and russification but Russian society in Tataria did not in any way turn towards Tatar culture and 'spirituality'. Kazan' University and Theological Academy, both of which opened in the nineteenth century, were among the most prestigious in Russia; but amongst all those active in church society and the cultural and academic world of the time none showed any particular desire to build cultural bridges (if we discount the Turkic school which was set up to meet the needs of missionaries, and thus existed in order to attain those ends which had not been achieved through the use of force). People outside the Church saw themselves as an outpost of European culture, just as those in the Church considered themselves representative of Orthodox culture. Eurasian ideas were born in St Petersburg, the place in Russia most removed from Asia (both geographically and spiritually), and not where Russia actually came into contact with Asia.

Right up to the 1990s the Russian community, living side by side with the Tatars, was psychologically divided from them by an impenetrable wall. This proximity had no serious religious, cultural or political influence on the Russians' consciousness. The odd borrowing in the course of daily life need not be regarded as significant.

We can trace only one area of definitely positive influence of this long proximity on the political and religious culture of the Russians in Tataria. Official propaganda now frequently asserts that Russians and Tatars have lived peacefully with each other for centuries. And in a certain sense this is true: the repression of the Tatars was carried out exclusively by the authorities; there were no spontaneous civil conflicts, no 'Tatar pogroms'. Russians in the territories of the former Kazan' Khanate were accustomed to living in a multiethnic, multiconfessional society. There was no mutual spiritual enrichment but a pattern of peaceful coexistence with another religion was formed. Maybe this is why many Old Believers settled in the Kazan', Simbirsk and Saratov *gubernii* – the local Orthodox population were already used to being tolerant towards the Tatar Muslims.

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Islam in Tataria underwent a unique evolution. When the mosques were closed and public manifestations of Islam were forbidden, religious life moved entirely into the private sphere, into the family. Women became the principal guardians of the faith, compelled to a lesser degree than men to break the requirements of Islam as they did not work in the public sector. The Tatars were unable to observe the majority of the requirements of the sharia, including that of prayer five times daily. They spontaneously formed the conviction that observance of ritual and the law, faithfulness to the letter of the sharia, were secondary and not compulsory. The main thing was belief in God, 'spiritual' faithfulness to the Quran. It was on this basis in particular that Sufism became widely spread amongst the Tatars in the nineteenth century.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a genuine social revolution occurred in

Muslim Tataria, one predetermined by the previous evolution of religious consciousness. Education, science and culture took on an importance unprecedented in Muslim society. Before the Revolution of 1917 the Kazan' Tatars were considerably better educated and published more literature than the Russians around them. In the strictly religious sphere, this swing towards European cultural and political values manifested itself in the reform movement called Jadidism. Jadidism affirmed Islam's indissoluble links with education and science, and, in the political sphere, with democratic and socialist ideas. In Jadidist madrassahs Belinsky, Chernyshevsky and Gertsen were popular. The radical wing of the movement found points of contact not only with the Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs) but also with the Bolsheviks. At the turn of the century Jadidism was predominant amongst the Kazan' Tatars, a fact reflected in the free election for mufti in May 1917, which was won by the Jadidist G. Barudi.

A number of prominent Tatar political activists who had grown up on Jadidist ideas joined the Bolsheviks. In the first years of the Soviet regime policy with regard to Russian Muslims was implemented by the Commissariat for Muslim Affairs under the auspices of Narkomnats (the People's Commissariat for Nationalities). The commissariat was headed by a former Jadid teacher, Sultan-Galiyev. He considered that 'the red Mullahs who had been brought up on Jadidism will successfully accomplish the revolutionary transformation of society, just as the Muslim modernists did with regard to religious dogmas'.

The antireligious Bolshevik terror mainly struck the Orthodox Church at first. The rich and intellectually developed life of the diocese, that 'outpost of Christianity', was uprooted with exceptional thoroughness. This gave rise to some satisfaction in Tatar society, not only because of widespread anticlerical feeling, but also because they had seen Orthodoxy as a symbol of 'colonialist politics'.

However, the Muslims were not to celebrate for long: in 1923 Sultan-Galiyev was removed from his post and arrested. Persecution of Islam, including the 'Red Mullahs', then began. In the 1930s Tataria was subjected to atheisation: the institutional religious life of both Christians and Muslims was reduced to a symbolic minimum. From that time the position of Islam in many ways recalled that of the 1740s – once again Islam survived exclusively in the domestic sphere.

With *perestroika*, which saw the return of religion into public life, came the renaissance of prerevolutionary religious traditions and ideological trends which had apparently been rooted out in the Soviet era. It was these that determined the unique character of religious life in Tatarstan, its fundamental dissimilarity from religious life in the other Islamic 'sovereign republics within the Russian Federation' and the Islamic republics of the CIS.

Between 1990 and 1993 Tataria saw an explosion of nationalist and separatist sentiment, a development which appeared to differ little from the processes which were taking place in many other regions of the former Soviet Union. Thousands of demonstrators turned out onto the streets of Kazan' chanting separatist and nationalist slogans. The Tatar national parties, movements and organisations behind these demonstrations seemed to be expressing the views of the majority within Tatar society. Russians – and not only those living in Tataria – were well and truly frightened by some of the pronouncements by the most outspoken Tatar nationalist leader, the poetess F. Bairamova, such as 'children from mixed marriages should be burnt in the crematorium', 'all Orthodox churches in Kazan' are built on the ruins of demolished mosques – these must be restored' and 'only complete separation from Russia and the West will enable the preservation and regeneration of the Tatar nation'.

To the observer it seemed likely that Shamiyev's regime, in seeking to attain as much sovereignty as possible, would adopt the militant nationalism openly propagated by those such as Bairamova as the basis for its ideology and policy. Developments within Tatar Islam at that time seemed to offer further proof of the monolithic character of Tatar society. At the 1992 congress of Tatar Muslims in Naberezhnyye Chelny, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims in the Republic of Tatarstan (*Dukhovnoye upravleniye musul'man v respublike Tatarstan*) (DUMvRT) was created. The new body severed links with the all-Russian Central Muslim Spiritual Directorate (*Tsentral'noye dukhovnoye upravleniye musul'man*) (TsDUM), which is loyal to Moscow. At this time the leaders of DUMvRT were maintaining close contact with nationalist organisations. The impression was created of a monolithic Tatar society, radically nationalist and separatist.

However, later events were to contradict this impression entirely. After the signing of a treaty demarcating the division of authority between Tatarstan and the Russian Federation at the beginning of 1994 the unity of the major Tatar social forces collapsed, and the real ideological aspirations of Tatarstan society have turned out to be very different from the slogans of the radical demonstrators of the early 1990s. The radical nationalist organisations have rapidly become marginalised: the Shamiyev regime has broken off relations with them, and the Islamic clergy and religious believers in the Tatar academic and cultural elite have quickly followed suit.

By then the ideology of the Shamiyev regime had taken shape. One of its more original features is its emphasis on continuity with Soviet times: with the Soviet Tatar Autonomous Republic. In 1991 Shamiyev supported the coup, and in 1993 the Supreme Soviet against Yel'tsin. At the time these moves were seen as a deceptive political game, the real aim of which was the achievement of maximum independence from Moscow and the greatest possible opportunities for Tatar nationalism. This was not the case, however. Shamiyev and a significant section of Tatar society – perhaps even the majority – genuinely do not want to reject their Soviet past. One reason for this is readily apparent and is given by many representatives of the Tatar intelligentsia: the Soviet regime was the first in 400 hundred years to revive Tatar statehood (albeit in a stunted and limited form), to overcome discrimination against Tatars and to put an end to (at least overt) policies of russification. There is also another, deeper reason, however. Tatar society was not the passive object of the 1917 Revolution; Soviet rule was not an alien imposition. The Tatars, unlike some other nations, were active supporters of the Bolshevik Revolution because of the way their mass consciousness had developed. Their participation is explained not only by the struggle with the 'imperial' regime but also by a fundamental change in their cultural orientation and political values at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries which involved a turn towards western cultural and political values. Marxism was merely the concrete historical form of a more extensive change in Tatar self-perception. This is obvious in the ideology of the Shamiyev regime today: while underlining continuity with the Soviet past it nevertheless employs hardly any communist rhetoric and says that it is using a mild authoritarianism to build a modern law-based democratic state.

After the ebb of the nationalist wave different attitudes towards Russians are developing. Tatarstan today is a multiethnic state – principally Tatars and Russians – but not just a state of the Tatar people. Russians make up about half of the population of Tataria, and ideologues must reckon with the fact that ignoring their interests would be dangerous for the future of the republic. However, Russians also make up

about half of the populations of Kazakhstan, Latvia and neighbouring Bashkortostan, and the official ideology of these regimes is based on the idea of an ethnic state (although of course the odd obeisance is directed towards the Russians). Thus the key to the ideologues' understanding of the biethnic nature of the Tatar Republic lies deeper than mere political common sense. As Mufti Galiullin said to us in interview, 'Other nations have lived with the Russians 200, 100 or 70 years and haven't got used to them. We've been living with you for nearly 500 years, for us a Russian environment is natural. We don't suffer any psychological discomfort from your presence.' The respected Kazan' sociologist Rozalinda Musina has in recent years been carrying out a series of in-depth studies of the Tatar people's world view. According to her results Tatars are not just 'tolerant' of the Russians but feel culturally and spiritually closer to them. The absence of any serious opposition to the Tatar sovereignty movement on the part of Moscow and the Russians in Kazan' in the early 1990s led to a rapid resolution of conflicting positions. The Tatars got what they wanted without fighting – without the hatred and bitterness which could have continued to develop by their own logic without actually having any real basis. Of course, the declared biethnicity of the Tatar Republic is far from scrupulously maintained. Its most obvious infringement is in the fact that Tatars are increasingly prominent in the structures of government. However, generally speaking ethnocratic tendencies are much less in evidence in Tataria than in most of the 'sovereign republics of the Russian Federation'.

The ideology of the Shamiyev regime, which is ultimately rooted in the worldview of the Tatar people, determines its religious policy. This is consistently anticlerical. Unlike most of the leaders in the Russian Federation Shamiyev for a long time avoided answering questions about his religious beliefs. Neither Muslim nor Orthodox clergy are allowed in secondary schools and institutions. The Tatarstan government provides no money from the budget to religious organisations (although it looks favourably on industrial and financial enterprises donating sums necessary for the building and restoration of mosques and churches). Church and mosque buildings are handed over to believers only slowly and after much wrangling, which often leads to public conflicts. Religious leaders are usually invited to attend ceremonial functions, and the impression one gets is that the authorities see this as the only positive social function of religion.

The authorities in Kazan' are distrustful of independent religious activity and try to bring it under their complete control. The independent position of the DUMvRT mufti is a constant source of irritation to them. Early in 1996 the authorities even proposed that he go into 'voluntary' retirement, and when he refused made an unsuccessful attempt to organise a special congress of Tatarstan Muslims in order to remove him. Tensions are also constantly arising between the Orthodox bishop Anastasi and the republican authorities, largely because of his persistent demands for the return of church buildings. In 1995 the Free Orthodox Church registered an episcopal see in Tatarstan under the priest Aleksandr Mironov, who had left the patriarchal Church. The clergy of the Russian Orthodox diocese saw the establishment of a parallel Orthodox diocese as a ploy on the part of the authorities with the aim of making them more cooperative. It is hard to say whether that was really the case, but the reaction of the Moscow Patriarchate to the appearance of another Orthodox diocese in Tataria is revealing enough.

Their fears may be well-founded. Some champions of Tatar sovereignty want to turn the Orthodox Church into an obedient institution which can be controlled and manipulated, and they see the hierarchical structure of the Russian Orthodox Church

led by the Moscow patriarch as an obstacle to their plans and go so far as publicly advocating an autocephalous Kazan' diocese:

If you bear in mind that in several Turkic republics, for example Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Tatarstan, Russians, traditionally considered Orthodox, constitute about half of the population, then the main task for the Turkic movement is to prevent Moscow using the Orthodox religion of these republics as a lever of neocolonialism, as an instrument to preserve the imperialist way of thinking amongst the Russian people. A good way to cleanse Orthodoxy of its imperial content and of messianic ideas would be the establishment of Orthodox patriarchates in the Turkic republics, independent of Moscow.¹

Similar attempts to transform the Russian Orthodox Church, as well as Muslim religious institutions, are characteristic of most of the Muslim republics within the Russian Federation which were formed after the collapse of the USSR. The authorities have been most successful in implementing this policy in Kazakhstan.²

The policy of making religious life controllable and manipulable is aimed not only at Islam and Christianity. The authorities take a particularly hard line with regard to foreign Protestant missionaries and charismatic churches; a policy which is a good deal easier to follow through because of the small number of Protestants and because it has the approval of the Orthodox and Islamic clergy. Persecution reached a peak in 1994–95. Services were interrupted by the police, and since that time foreign missionaries have been forbidden entry to Tataria. In 1994 criminal proceedings were instituted against the leader of the 'Dukh zhizni' charismatic church, Nikolai Solomonov.

Why have the Tatarstan authorities adopted such an anticlerical policy? Firstly, it is clear that the Shamiyev regime is aiming to bring all social forces and movements under its control. By 1997, for example, all significant political opposition parties had been liquidated by the 'stick and carrot' method. But there is also an ideological dimension to these anticlerical policies. Among the ideologues of the regime and the Tatarstan intelligentsia (not only Tatars, but also Russians) the belief is widespread that the influence of religious organisations on socio-political life may present a danger to the politics of modernisation and to stability in the republic. In a private conversation a civil servant told me that 'Islam as such is a good thing for the Tatar national consciousness of course, and maybe it can raise moral standards a bit, but if it were to stand in the way of modernising Tatarstan, it couldn't be more dangerous'.

Given the position of the Kazan' authorities one might be forgiven for thinking that the Muslim clergy in Tatarstan consisted of radicals and fanatics. This would be a complete mistake. In the final analysis the Muslim leadership reflects the religious ideas of the Tatar people. The fundamental ideological aims of DUMvRT and its leader, Gabdulla Galiullin, are continuing to develop in a reformist direction, along lines laid down by the Jadid movement at the turn of the century. The clergy in DUMvRT see themselves not simply as performers of religious rites but also, in Galiullin's words, as 'enlighteners, historians, teachers, and vehicles for social progress'. The understanding of Islam, widespread amongst the Tatars, as 'an inner spiritual state, a personal relationship with God, rather than the compulsory observation of fixed norms' ('the sharia should be in the heart') is to all intents and purposes accepted as valid. The 500-year period of coexistence with Russians, which has had its influence on Islam and, more generally, on the worldview of the Tatar people, is not seen as an evil, but as an unavoidable part of history and as something positive,

which should be preserved.

The modernising, reformist nature of Tatar Islam is most clearly demonstrated in its interaction with the Islam of the Middle East. Problems in this relationship have come to light most clearly in the area of religious education. DUMvRT itself has no money for the upkeep of the madrassahs: they are all financed from abroad, mostly from Saudi Arabia, and foreign countries are also the principal source of teachers. Academic programmes are therefore developed in conformity with the religious convictions of the sponsors. Once they have become imams, the graduates of the madrassahs try to build community and spiritual life in the Arab way. They interfere with established national religious traditions and ceremonies, trying to mould the spiritual life of their flocks in accordance with Arab norms. A noticeable gulf is widening between the religious viewpoint of the young priests on the one hand and the ideological principles of DUMvRT and the views of the people on the other. This situation is causing the DUMvRT leadership concern. Currently mullahs who have been educated in Tatarstan are given contracts with a trial period of six months, while those who have studied abroad are given a trial period of a year. At a DUMvRT plenum, in an attempt to defend the distinctive character of Tatar Islam, Galiullin succeeded in having a motion adopted forbidding Arab Muslim movements in Tatarstan. The 'Khanafid Maskhad' was confirmed as the official form of religious confession. The DUMvRT leadership intend to dispense with foreign assistance as soon as circumstances will allow them, but they will actually be able to alter the situation only if they achieve real influence – including financial influence – in the madrassahs, which are at the moment functioning as independent educational institutions.

Some young Islamic activists are trying to break down the 'family' and 'private' character of Tatar Islam and to move the centre of gravity of religious life out of the family and into the mosque. This is proving very difficult to do, however, since in communist times it was women who became the main carriers of Islam. The role of women in Tatar Islam is considerably more important than we might imagine, with our stereotyped European preconceptions about Muslim women.

DUMvRT is fairly tolerant of, one might even say well-disposed towards, the Orthodox Church. Galiullin maintains genuinely friendly relations with Bishop Anastasi. After a short period of cooperation with radical nationalist organisations which were hostile to the Orthodox Church, Mufti Galiullin disassociated himself from them, and now constantly provokes criticism from their side with his tolerance of Orthodoxy. Mufti Galiullin often says that 'I have more in common with a Russian Orthodox believer than with a Tatar atheist' (and there are many atheists amongst the radical Tatars).

In 1996, tiring of constant pressure from the authorities, the leadership of the Kazan' muftiate set about organising 'Musul'mane Tatarstana', a Muslim party in opposition to Shamiyev. What are the party's basic principles? Galiullin believes it is vital to fight for real democracy, freedom of conscience and religious independence from the state, but at the same time he considers the government obliged to support those spiritual and moral religious values without which society degenerates. In the wider Russian context, he supports Aleksandr Lebed', because he believes he will ensure 'the renaissance of a strong, multinational Russia' and that 'we will stop prostrating ourselves before the West'.

The independent position adopted by Galiullin has had a number of consequences: the secular authorities are making systematic efforts to discredit him. The official mass media have accused Galiullin of maintaining links with extremist nationalists

and of being unable to start a dialogue with the intelligentsia or maintain constructive relations with the government. At the same time a campaign has started which aims to present Shamiyev as the 'spiritual leader of the Muslims of the republic'. Shamiyev has made the *haji* and is no longer silent about his religious beliefs: he has now become an orthodox Muslim. Clergy at the 'court' have begun to talk of Shamiyev as a natural leader of the Muslim community: for example the leader of the 'Iman' Islamic cultural centre for young people has said that 'A special feature of Islam is the unity of secular and spiritual power. Mintimir Shamiyev, who was elected by the vast majority of Muslims as president of the republic and who is their secular leader, must also fill the function of a religious leader.'³ A few loyal voices have even begun to speak of the desirability of proclaiming Shamiyev khalif!

In 1997 preparations started to relieve Galiullin of his duties. Under the slogan of unifying the Muslims of the republic it was declared necessary to hold a congress. The authorities took it upon themselves to make preparations for the congress which took place in February 1998.

The delegates who had gathered in the hall of the Tatar Academic Theatre in the middle of February at the Unifying Congress of Muslims (Ob'yedinitel'ny s'yezd musul'man) were bewildered when President Shamiyev headed towards the stage to open the congress. The secular power had never before interfered with the internal life of the muftiate in so cavalier a fashion. And when the president opened the congress, having sidelined the mufti, and made a long speech giving the audience to understand that he was the host, not all the Muslims took this in the way the authorities would have liked them to.⁴

President Shamiyev did not however become khalif (imagine the irony – former first secretary of the *oblast'* Communist Party becomes khalif!). At this choreographed congress Gusman Iskhakov, the president's man, became the new mufti of Tatarstan.

After the Unifying Congress Galiullin's actions were a series of contradictions: he announced the establishment of an alternative muftiate to the official one, then apparently seemed inclined to submit to the authorities. However, irrespective of Galiullin's future position, there are a fair number of independently-minded people amongst the Tatar Muslims and the conflict between at least a section of Muslims and the secular authorities in Kazan' will not come to an end in 1998.

By no means the whole of Tatar society is affected by the conflict between the independent Islamic clergy and the secular authorities of the republic. Even moderate modernising Islam is rejected by secularised Tatars, especially the intelligentsia. Tatar Islam is taking on europeanised characteristics. The Tatar intelligentsia see themselves as bringing European culture to the eastern fundamentalists. According to research carried out by the sociologist R. Musina, only four per cent of the population regularly attend a mosque. (The figure is, however, much higher for Tatar students – 12 per cent.) The intellectuals are sceptical about the Muslim clergy because of their 'relatively low educational level'.⁵ For example, when a presenter was needed for a Muslim television programme not a single suitable clergyman could be found, and a secular academic was chosen instead. After Galiullin's election as president of DUMvRT (in 1992; in 1995, he was reelected for a term of 3 years) he established an institute of advisers to the mufti, which attracted the Tatar intellectual elite. This step proved that the mufti understood the problem. However, the institute rapidly disintegrated.

The expression 'Euroislam' is widely used by educated Tatars to describe their

religious outlook; and although no one can define exactly what this is, its ideological orientation is quite clear. Iskhak Lotfulla, the rector of a madrassah and one of the recognised leaders of ‘Euroislam’, has spoken about the Russian influence on Tatar consciousness.

The Russians are spiritually sick because of their fallacious idea of ‘*sobornost*’, which was called ‘collectivism’ under the communists. They represent this ‘*sobornost*’ as something positive, but in fact it is no more than a pitiful excuse for irresponsibility, laziness, theft and drunkenness. One of the main aims of Islamic renewal is to overcome this ‘*sobornost*’-collectivism’ within ourselves.⁶

The views of this Muslim clergyman clearly differ from the assumptions of the Eurasianists!

The leading ideologist of the Shamiyev regime, Rafael’ Khakimov, has clearly articulated the official understanding of ‘Euroislam’ and of what Islam ought to be like in Tatarstan:

In Tatarstan Islam does not interfere in matters of state; it adheres strictly to the constitution; it encourages individualism and the creative development of people; it welcomes any social activity which is pleasing to God and it is the stimulus for transition to the market economy. ... It has organically united Muslim values with the ideas of liberalism and democracy, and that is why it can be called ‘Euroislam’ ...⁷

The appearance of a department of religious instruction at the Kazan’ Chemical and Technological Institute, headed by the famous religious teacher Gul’nara Baltanova, is of significance for the reformist processes in Tatar Islam. In this department Islam is regarded as ‘an internal spiritual condition, the relationship between man and God rather than a matter of ritual’, with stress on the Sufi and Jadidist traditions. For Baltanova a key concept is ‘objectivisation’, by which is meant ‘moving everyday religious observance to an intellectual level, bringing it closer to the genuine teachings of Islam’.⁸ Baltanova is setting up madrassahs of an exceptionally reformist type.

The ‘europeanisation’ of Tatar Islam today is accompanied by the erosion of the general religious outlook of the Tatar people. Many educated and uneducated Tatars, like Russians, are being attracted by quasi-religious movements. The most significant drift is towards Baha’i, the Rerikh movement and Akhmadia. The teachings of these movements offer their followers the opportunity of accepting various Christian spiritual and cultural values in one form or another without rejecting Islam. Indeed, the Rerikh movement in Kazan’ was actually founded by a Tatar woman. Various famous Tatar writers, actors and singers are joining the Baha’i movement; its leader is Shamil’ Fatakhov, a journalist famous in Tataria. The Baha’i even hold meetings in the republic’s academic institute (Dom uchenykh). The Tatar poet Ravil Bukharayev, who had emigrated to England and worked for the BBC, returned to Tatarstan at the beginning of *perestroika*. He brought with him the distinctive teachings of the Muslim sect called Akhmadia, which originated in Pakistan, spread to England and has now come to Tataria. The main feature of this teaching is its recognition of Jesus as God Incarnate.

Islam in Tataria has thus been moving in a Eurasian direction for 500 years. Since 1991 Orthodoxy has followed suit. The peaceful revolution at the beginning of this decade resulted in the Tatars taking power in Kazan’. Since then Russians and the

Russian Orthodox Church have had to adapt to a completely new political, cultural and psychological situation. At the same time the absence of serious discrimination, which might have caused the community to isolate itself, has encouraged Russians to be open to Tatar culture. Any conversion of Russians to Islam is possible even now only in the case of mixed marriages, but a serious interest in and sympathy towards Tatar culture and Islam is a fairly widespread phenomenon amongst Tatarstan's educated Russians.

In the first years of *perestroika*, years which were a period of triumphal affirmation for the Russian Orthodox Church in most of Russia, the Kazan' diocese fell on troubled times. Radical Tatar nationalist organisations held mass demonstrations at which there were calls to deal with 'the religion of the occupiers'. Although this anti-Orthodox wave subsided towards the end of the 1990s animosity towards Orthodoxy has not disappeared entirely amongst those campaigning for Tatar independence. When the minister of culture, Taishev, spoke at a meeting with representatives of the Association of National Cultural Societies (*Assosiatsiya national'nykh kul'turnykh obshchestv*) in December 1995, his words were received sympathetically: 'Now I will tell you my personal opinion – not as minister, but as a Tatar. I believe that there is no room for even one more church in the centre of Kazan'; there are so many of them already.'⁹

In these conditions Orthodox priests and believers have demonstrated untypical bravery and defended their rights in a determined manner. The Brotherhood of St Guri, founded in the early 1990s, has organised demonstrations and religious processions at which demands for the defence of Orthodox believers' rights have been addressed to the authorities.

This complicated, but not extreme, situation has in fact been conducive to the development of diocesan life, and to the appearance of various movements and initiatives. A remarkable phenomenon, although difficult to explain, is that the Kazan' diocese is perhaps the only 'male diocese' in the Russian Orthodox Church; more men attend church services than women, and more men than women wish to take monastic vows.

Under the leadership of Anastasi, the Kazan' diocese is one of the most liberal. Books by Aleksandr Men' and other liberal authors are on sale in every church, and there is no nationalist literature anywhere. Anastasi maintains good relations with the leaderships of other Christian confessions, notably the Lutherans and Catholics. One of Anastasi's actions was quite unique in today's Russian Orthodox Church: he agreed to hand over the ruins of a church in a deserted village near Kazan' to the Belokrinitsa Old Believers, who have opened a children's summer camp there and are now planning an Old Believer convent.

As in any diocese situated in a national autonomous region, the bishop of Kazan' is faced with the ethnic confessional problem. Anastasi approaches it from a liberal position: he supports the setting up of national Orthodox parishes which use the national language for religious services. He chooses Chuvash priests for Chuvash villages and gives his blessing to services in Chuvash. In Tataria there is an ethnic confessional group called the 'Kryashen' which despite its Turkic background has practised Orthodoxy for centuries. The very name of the Kryashen people comes from the Russian '*kreshcheny*' which means 'christened' or baptised. Most historians and ethnographers believe that the Kryashen are descended from Tatars who converted to Orthodoxy under Ivan the Terrible, although the picture is not completely clear. The Kryashen are similar in appearance to the Tatars and their language is a Tatar dialect, but their national customs, dress, way of life and

traditions differ considerably. Their names are of course Orthodox. They have moved away from Tatar culture, but they have not fully assimilated Russian culture, and have remained as it were on the border between two cultures. The Kryashen themselves believe that they were not the product of the christianisation effected by Ivan the Terrible (this would be a humiliating idea) but that they were converted long before the Russians; ethnically they consider themselves descendants of the Polovtsy. Until the middle of the last century there were no services in the Kryashen language; the famous orientalist and missionary N. Il'minsky created an alphabet and produced the first translations of the Bible and other religious texts in the 1850s. By 1917 128 books had been published in the Kryashen language. In 1926 the Kryashen numbered 200,000. In the 1930s, without being consulted, they were 'registered as Tatars'. Officially they ceased to exist as an ethnic group. However, in 1989 Bishop Anastasi took the decision to restore Kryashen-language services in the lower church of the Peter and Paul Cathedral in Kazan', and installed as senior priest a Kryashen, Pavel Pavlov. The religious and cultural renaissance of the Kryashen people has begun. A member of the congregation, the writer Maksim Glukhov, has founded a Kryashen national and cultural society which carries out a wide variety of educational activity. In 1997 there was a total of four Kryashen parishes; in 1996 Anastasi gave the Kryashen the newly-returned Cathedral of the Tikhvin Icon of the Mother of God in the centre of Kazan'.

A potentially explosive problem is the conversion to Orthodoxy of Tatars themselves. Orthodox priests usually say that converts are from families of atheists who have lost their faith. Nobody is keeping an official record of the numbers involved, but it is clear that it is not a rare occurrence. There are ten Tatar priests within the diocese and many Tatar converts can be found in almost every parish.

Tatarstan Orthodox diocesan life is rich and diverse. There are well organised Orthodox associations in Kazan' and also in some other towns of the republic. One such association is the 'Trekhsvyatitel'skoye' brotherhood in Yelabuga and Naberezhnyye Chelny, which is involved in publishing, educational and charitable work. The most exceptional organisation, however, unique not only in Kazan' but in the whole Russian Orthodox Church today, is the Orthodox youth group founded by the nun Mariya Borisova, who has a degree in chemistry. Mother Mariya and her youthful community represent a healthy kind of Orthodoxy, and it is no accident that it is in Tataria that it has made its appearance. The work began in 1993, and the 'Molodezhnaya pravoslavnyaya obshchina' ('Orthodox Youth Community') was registered in 1995. At the beginning parents brought their children to the community as they would to a club, so that they would listen to stories from the scriptures instead of playing in the street. The group grew and it is now divided into three sections: children (100), teenagers (40) and adults (150). There are twice as many young men and boys as there are girls, which is a local phenomenon completely uncharacteristic for the Russian Orthodox Church. Perhaps some of the girls will later enter the Covent of the Kazan' Mother of God. Every member of the community is under obedience and has permanent work to do within the community. Idlers are not tolerated. A large number of the members are young people from higher educational institutions, and many of them have passed through charismatic Protestant churches before finding their true home here. There is a wide variety of activities in the community: educational programmes, charitable work, pilgrimages, concerts and much else. Great emphasis is placed on concerts as a form of missionary work. At Christmas and Easter there are always big shows written by community members, and young music groups are invited to participate. At New

Year, in order to divert young people from getting drunk, there is always a special service, which gives this secular festival some spiritual meaning. At Christmas there is a party to which students and young people are invited. Evenings of Christian songs are amongst the most popular concerts. A tourist agency books concerts for which the community is paid and so earns some money. And this work with young people is not confined to prayer, concerts and practical tasks: Mother Mariya has organised a three-year course in the history of culture at Kazan' University for members of the community.

The views of Mother Mariya herself can be seen most clearly in quotations from her own conversations and writings: 'The thoughtless taking of monastic vows, which has been widespread recently, ends tragically both for those who take them and for the Church.' 'The problem for people with a humanitarian education is that they read a large quantity of religious and secular literature and then try to adjust their spiritual life to the clichés they have read and so inhibit their own genuine spiritual development.' 'When Russian Orthodox state schools are set up, the result is a bad school which teaches God's law badly.' 'The teacher of God's law must always remember that the pupil has the right to get up and leave at any time.' 'Compulsory religious education is worse than no religious education.' 'Force used in matters of the soul has already once led to revolution.' Mother Mariya has organised a rehabilitation seminar especially for those who have been subjected to the authoritarian practices of some Orthodox priests (the so-called '*mladostarchestvo*'), with the aim of restoring their spiritual and psychological health.

The Youth Community has gradually become one of the main sources of active workers for the diocese: here the bishop has recruited candidates for the priesthood, choristers, drivers and other useful people.

Let us return to our main concern, the 'Eurasian question'. After 500 years of Russian presence in Kazan' one can now see that 'Europe' has made certain steps towards 'Asia'. The anticlerical position of the Shamiyev regime has been instrumental in bringing the Orthodox and Muslim clergy closer together. As the founder of the Brotherhood of St Guri, Oleg Sokolov, told me: 'We don't have problems with Muslims; we have problems with atheists, both Tatar and Russian.' Bishop Anastasi and Mufti Galiullin have taken to discussing in advance any important initiatives they wish to take so as not to offend the other's interests. They are linked not only by diplomatic relations, but also by personal friendship: they both know that in a crisis they can rely on each other.

In 1995 there was a major conflict between the Shamiyev regime and Mufti Galiullin, which became news all over Russia thanks to the mass media. On the mufti's orders Muslim youths seized the buildings of the Al-Marjani mosque and the Mukhamadiya madrassah. Galiullin explained his actions on the grounds that the president had not kept his promise to return the buildings to the Muslim community. Bishop Anastasi visited the mufti in the building, which was occupied by the police, and expressed his support. Galiullin raised his arms theatrically and cried out 'Anastasi, tell us which of your unreturned churches you need, and my *shakird* [madrassah students] will seize it for you!' The *shakird* have been doing this with great pleasure ever since.

'Eurasianism' really is seeing the light in Tatarstan today: a conservative democratic alliance of Orthodox and Muslim believers is being formed spontaneously, and it stands in opposition to the authoritarian anticlerical modernisers. This 'Eurasianism' could not have emerged, however, without the previous development of 'Euro-islam' and 'Eurorthodoxy'. On the other hand, in the literal sense of the word,

Shamiyev's state-building project is 'Eurasian' because it is also oriented towards western values. Mufti Galiullin has proposed that the pope visit Kazan' to offer prayers for peace, an idea which has gained the support of a significant number of Orthodox priests. A real understanding between Tatars and Russians has been the fruit of the spread of European values and not of a struggle against them.

Notes and References

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- ² A. Malashenko, 'Religiya i politika v Kazakhstane', in *Religiya i prava cheloveka* (vol. 3 of *Na puti k svobode sovesti* (Moscow, 1996)), pp. 218–31.
- ³ *N.G. Religii*, 18 February 1998.
- ⁴ V. Postnova, 'Prezident i mully', *N.G. Religii*, no. 3, 1998.
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- ⁶ From notes taken by Lawrence Uzzell, Moscow representative of Keston Institute, in an interview with Lotfulla.
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- ⁹ The newspaper *Kris*, no. 97, 6 January 1996.

(Translated from the Russian by Anna Smith)