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## **PATTERNS OF UNDERSTANDING OF “FREEDOM OF RELIGION” AMONG BELIEVERS OF THE RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATION JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES**

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Freedom of religion is a right guaranteed to citizens of Kazakhstan by the Constitution and current legislation. However, each individual has their own understanding of the expression “freely to practice one’s religion.” There are also laws on religion that regulate socio-religious relations, which leads to a transformation in the understanding of the postulate of Freedom of Religion. The purpose of the article is to reveal the peculiarities of the understanding of the concept of freedom of religion among Jehovah's Witnesses and compare them with public understanding. The results of the study show both common and different perceptions of religious freedom in theory and practice.

The terms freedom of conscience and freedom of religion in the post-Soviet space most often appear inseparably in the legislation of these countries. Definitions of these concepts find distinctive features in a number of countries. According to the Law on Religious Activities and Religious Associations, Article 3, paragraph 6 states: “Everyone has the right to freedom of conscience,” with the explanation: “Everyone has the right to hold religious or other beliefs, disseminate them, participate in the activities of religious associations and engage in missionary activities in accordance with the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The exercise of the right to freedom of conscience should not condition or limit universal human and civil rights and obligations to the state.”<sup>1</sup> This demonstrates that in the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the concept of freedom of conscience includes aspects of freedom of religion and is not included in the general rights of citizens of Kazakhstan, but in the article regulating religious activity. The question of the identity of these concepts has been debated for decades by political scientists, lawyers, philosophers and other experts. E.O. Toilybekov, in his analysis of the theoretical features of the concepts “Freedom of conscience”, “Freedom of religion” and “freedom of religion”, notes the synonymy of these definitions. <sup>2</sup>

At the same time, the objects to which the legislation will apply can and have the right to have their own opinion about what “freedom of religion” is and what aspects of regulation it affects.

### **Methodology**

The study is based on the fundamental basis of the believer's personality and understanding of life, so a qualitative research method was chosen, especially a semi-structured interview with followers of the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses. The results of the study were transcribed using the coding method.

## Pre Interview

In January of this year, a pilot interview was conducted with adherents of Jehovah's Witnesses in Almaty. This city was not chosen by chance, since it is there that the leadership office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan is located and permission from the religious organization of Jehovah's Witnesses is required to conduct a pilot and real study. The objectives of the pilot study were to identify the weaknesses of questions that could have similar answers, determine the saturation of the data or a sufficient number of respondents, the average interviewing time, and search for an ideal location for the interview in a place unfamiliar to the researcher. The list of respondents was compiled in advance by a religious organization from among the adherents, and included elders and ordinary followers of different genders and ages.

The pilot study found:

1) interviewing one respondent takes from 40 minutes to an hour and a half, which requires more careful planning, given the remoteness of the interview sites from each other.

2) Data saturation reaches 7-10 people. After the 8-9th respondent, the uniqueness of the information received decreases, which indicates unanimity on certain issues.

3) The need to combine two questions to which Jehovah's Witnesses gave the same answers. Jehovah's Witnesses and the right of religious belief

The religious organization Jehovah's Witnesses in Kazakhstan has a history of more than one hundred and fifty years. During this period of time, Jehovah's followers were repeatedly persecuted. Today we can note the emergence of the third generation of Jehovah's Witnesses, who are also citizens of our country and one of the clear signs thanks to which society "recognizes" Jehovah's Witnesses is the work of preaching. Preaching is also the most incomprehensible action for society and is also often a reason to attract the police.

Jehovah's Witnesses consider discussing the Bible with others an important part of their faith. The roots of this importance are also found in the Bible, Acts 20:20: "I did not cease to tell you everything that could be useful to you, and to teach you publicly and from house to house." 3. Often, such conversations on religious topics are perceived by society, as missionary activity, which has its own clearly defined positions in the legislation. The Law "On Religious Activities and Religious Associations", Chapter 1, paragraphs 2 and 5, includes the following definitions: "religious activity – activity aimed at satisfying the religious needs of believers; missionary activity - the activity of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners, stateless persons, aimed at disseminating religious teachings on the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan with the aim of converting to religion;" 1 From these provisions it follows that Jehovah's Witnesses have the right to have religious beliefs and share them with society, without pursuing the goal of converting to their religion. This also confirms the decision of the judicial panel of the Supreme Court of the Republic of June 1, 2017, in the case of an administrative offense against A.O. Korolev, who shared his religious beliefs. The court ruled: "In accordance with paragraphs 1 and 3 of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted by resolution 2200 A (XXI) of the UN General Assembly of December 16, 1966, ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan by Law of November 28, 2005 No. 91-III "Every person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to have or adopt a religion or belief of his choice and freedom to manifest his religion or belief, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, in worship, observance, observance and teaching."

Jehovah's Witnesses and religious freedom

Data coding

Table 1. Coding structure with questions and main codes.

Questions	Main codes	Total 10	
		Number of participants	% of participants
What freedom of religion is	Presence of religious beliefs	9	90
	Freedom of religious assembly	10	100

	Freely share your religious beliefs	10	100
Is Freedom of Religion implemented in Kazakhstan?	yes	10	100
	no	0	0
	Comparison with Russia	4	40
	Comparison with West countries	5	50
Have you ever encountered bias (intolerance) based on nationality or religion?	yes	10	100
	no	0	0
	Comparison with Islam	3	30
	Comparison with Russian Orthodox Church	1	10
Are you satisfied with life in Kazakhstan?	yes	10	100
	no	0	0
How do you see your life in 5 years?	I will live the same way in Kazakhstan	9	90
	I will be a Jehovah's Witness	10	100
	I don't make a wish	1	10
	Our situation will improve	2	20
	Главное, чтобы хуже не стало	2	20

### Conclusion

From the analysis of interview data, one can notice dominant codes that indicate special importance for believers and their unanimity on this issue. Thus, we can note that for Jehovah's Witnesses the presence of religious beliefs, freedom of their dissemination and the opportunity to meet with fellow believers are fundamental. All respondents note that the right to Freedom of Religion is implemented in Kazakhstan; they are also satisfied with life in Kazakhstan, although they draw parallels with other countries. Despite the fact that all respondents encountered intolerance or prejudice based on nationality or religion, the majority see themselves as citizens of Kazakhstan in five years.

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2. Toilybekov E.O. Freedom of conscience and its legal basis in Kazakhstan and Russia // Materials of the II International. scientific-practical conference. Novosibirsk 2017. P 213
3. <https://www.jw.org/ru/information-for-authorities/information-brochures-for-all-countries/brochure-Jehovah-witnesses-and-their-preaching/>

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## ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЬСТВО В МУСУЛЬМАНСКИХ СТРАНАХ НА ПРИМЕРЕ ОБЪЕДИНЕННЫХ АРАБСКИХ ЭМИРАТОВ

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