

# **TRANSFORMING OF THE MEDIA-POLICY TOWARDS ISLAM**

## **POLICY OPTIONS**

### **Summary**

Last years Russians had negative representations about Moslem faith and Moslems. Representatives of this religion are seen as zealots, terrorists, people alien to a modern society. The significant role in formation of such stereotypes belongs to mass media.

The given document contains suggestions on strengthening of positive image of Moslems and overcoming the negative stereotypes concerning Moslem faith in the Russian and Tatarstan journalism, developed in frameworks Media Working Group of the Center for Policy Studies/Open Society Institute.

## **Problem description**

Now it is possible to speak about presence of islamophobia in the Russian society. For many people the Moslem faith is associated first of all with war and terrorism, and adherents of Moslem faith are represented as aggressive, severe, and fanatical people.

The negative image of Moslem faith and its adherents in modern Russia has developed basically under influence of memory about war in Afghanistan, events in the Chechen Republic, explosions in Moscow, acts of terrorism on September, 11 in the USA, capture of hostages on the "Nord-Ost", Beslan tragedy and the numerous acts of terrorism connected with activity of radical Islamic groupings both as worldwide, so and in Russia. Moslems appear in the Russian information space, basically, only as participants of military-political conflicts. The analysis of the press has shown the big number of negative stereotypes concerning Moslems which are broadcasted on extensive masses of the population.

**Besides objective preconditions of negative stereotypification of Moslems – it is conflicts in the Near East, on Caucasus, etc. – there are reasons, which are founded on journalistic and Muslim communities:**

- 1) absence of regular and duly informing of mass media about the events occurring in Muslim world of republic;
- 2) ignorance by the majority of Muslim figures of the rights in interaction with journalists;
- 3) lack of communication between Moslem and Journalism communities;
- 4) shortage/absence journalists knowledge about Islam;\_
- 5) absence of specialized initial and post higher school (courses, seminars) preparations of the journalists working with religious subjects;
- 6) pressing forward of journalists "to inflate" scandalousness by any ways – it is distortion of the information, disregard the facts, etc.;
- 7) lack of specialists and prevalence of traditionalism in Muslim journalism;
- 8) institutional nonformalization of Muslim journalism in Tatarstan Republic;
- 9) absence of knowledge at the population of a manipulation methods by mass-media.

On the basis of the work of a round table «Moslem faith and mass-media», which collected journalists and Muslim figures of Tatarstan (on June, 8, 2004) and results of the politic-sociological research including interrogation of editors, journalists of Tartar-speaking and Russian-speaking mass-media RT, Muslim leaders, imams, government officials; the content- and discourse- analysis of the Russian and Tatarstan press offers have been developed, variants of policy options have been elaborated.

**The purpose** of the given offers in the media policy is strengthening positive image of Moslems and overcoming of negative stereotypes concerning Moslem faith in the Russian and Tatarstan journalism. Achievement of the given purpose depends on active interaction of the following social groups: journalistic community, Muslim community (umma, Spiritual controls of Moslems and their divisions), scientific and pedagogical community of faculties of journalism and humanitarian sub-faculties of institutes of higher education, Muslim educational institutions, Councils on religions affairs, the Ministries of Press and Information of the Russian Federation and RT.

**The actions** necessary for achievement of this purpose:

1. Organization of the specialized press-service accumulating information about life of different religious in Tatarstan.
2. Creating of the Union of Moslem Journalists of Republic of Tatarstan.
3. Preparation of the future journalists specializing on religious subjects, with participation of the specialized Muslim mass-media.
4. Organization of courses about Islam and trainings for journalists.
5. Amplification of the intracorporate control of journalistic community
6. Introduction of studying PR and communication with Mass-media in Moslem scholars and universities.
7. Organization of meetings between representatives of Moslem and journalists communities.
8. Creation of the thematic blocks concerning problems of protection from the media manipulation by consciousness within the framework of humanitarian courses of Kazan institutes of higher education.

## **1. Religious press-service of Republic of Tatarstan**

Problems of the Center will include accumulation and distribution of the information for the local / central mass-media and the interested establishments about the processes occurring in life of different religious confessions of republic. The mass-media frequently reflect Moslem faith one-sidedly and negative, in view of shortage of the information. The religious press centre will solve the given problem.

As the decision of deficiency information of such sort creation of the site representing all news of republic religious life can serve. This Internet-resource would find users also outside Tatarstan that increases its value.

The center should be known in professional circles of republic and Russia as a whole what will be contributed by press conferences, advertising, PR-actions.

## **2. Union of Moslem Journalists of Republic of Tatarstan**

Accumulation of the information on variety of umma life, carrying out of educational actions, meetings with the religious and secular public, journalistic competitions should become as problems of the Union. The Tatarstan Union of Muslim journalists, representing journalists of one of the most advanced regions where Moslems make half of population, having co-operated with the Union of Muslim journalists of Russia, can become influential force. It will contribute in formation of the alternative information flow concerning Moslem faith in Russia.

## **3. Preparation of the future journalists specializing on religious subjects, with participation of the specialized Muslim mass-media.**

Representatives of the specialized Muslim mass-media can contribute in preparation of the journalists specializing on religious subjects, supervising and reviewing degree projects, carrying out master-classes, reading elective courses, involving students to doing practical work.

#### **4. Organization of courses about Islam and trainings for journalists**

The given actions are directed on overcoming of theological, terminological and other errors in covering the problems concerning Moslem faith. The basic problematics of courses and trainings are: substantive provisions of Moslem faith, current of Moslem faith, a brief history of Moslem, value of Moslem faith in the Tatar culture and life of peoples of Russia, a role of Moslem faith in a modern politics. Individual consideration is demanded with questions of ethics of religious subjects covering.

Realization of the given problem demands not only organizational resources, but also the measures directed on increase of motivating at journalists who, in the majority, are not interested in improvement of professional skill. Especially it concerns Tatarstan where the level of incomes of journalists is insignificant. Material stimulation can minister to the decision.

#### **5. Amplification of the intracorporate control of journalistic community**

It is necessary to popularize activity of The Grand Jury of the Union of Journalists of Russia in all country and in Tatarstan. This will be contributed by materials of mass-media which will inform Muslim figures on rules of interaction with mass-media, about precedents of the Grand Jury activity.

It is necessary to be converted more often to questions of a professional etiquette at taking place seminars for journalists.

#### **6. Introduction of studying PR and communication with Mass-media in Moslem scholars and universities**

For the optimization of interactions between journalists and Muslim community there is a necessity for creation of a **special training course** for the future imams, devoted to the problems of public relations and work with mass-media. Most effectively such course can teach represents from Muslim and secular journalism.

## **7. Organization of meetings between representatives of Moslem and journalists communities.**

It will contribute in search of directions of transformation of a media - policy concerning Moslem faith, to an establishment of professional contacts of representatives of these communities. Meetings can be carried out in a format of press conferences, round tables, conferences, competitions, festivals.

## **8. Creation of the thematic blocks concerning problems of protection from the media manipulation by consciousness within the framework of humanitarian courses of Kazan institutes of higher education.**

The knowledge of mechanisms of a media - manipulation will help to overcome information pressure of mass-media and, accordingly, critically to comprehend the media - materials concerning Moslem faith. Higher school education acts as the most suitable object of realization of this purpose: first of all, institutes of higher education produce a layer of the intellectuals acting further as leaders of opinions; secondly, the system of higher education provides elective courses.

## Financial aspect

The analysis of the current situation in media-policy allows determining the most probable sources of financing of suggested actions. The degree of participation each of the suggested sources of financing depends on many factors (an urgency, presence of means, a budgetary policy, and so on).

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Possible sources of financing</b>
Organization of the specialized press-service accumulating information about life of different religious in Tatarstan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Charity foundations;</li><li>- State.</li></ul>
Creating of the Union of Moslem Journalists of Republic of Tatarstan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Charity foundations;</li><li>- Union of Journalists of Tatarstan (house, information support);</li><li>- Union of Moslem Journalists of Russia (information support)</li></ul>
Preparation of the future journalists specializing on religious subjects, with participation of the specialized Muslim mass-media.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- State</li></ul>
Organization of courses about Islam and trainings for journalists.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Spirituals Boards of Moslems</li><li>- Charity foundations</li></ul>
Amplification of the intracorporate control of journalistic community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- State</li></ul>
Introduction of studying PR and communication with Mass-media in Moslem scholars and universities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Charity foundations</li><li>- institutes of higher education</li></ul>
Organization of meetings between representatives of Moslem and journalists communities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Charity foundations</li><li>- State</li></ul>
Creation of the thematic blocks concerning problems of protection from the media manipulation by consciousness within the framework of humanitarian courses of Kazan institutes of higher education.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- institutes of higher education</li></ul>

A row of the suggested actions - increase of the intracorporate control over journalists, preparation of the future journalists specializing on religious subjects, with participation of the specialized Muslim mass-media, creation of the thematic blocks concerning problems of protection from media manipulation by consciousness within the framework of humanitarian courses of Kazan institutes of higher education - does not demand serious financial expenses. Realization of the intracorporate control depends in many respects on the civil initiative of groups of interests – journalists and Moslems. Special preparation of Muslim journalists, creation of thematic blocks of special courses also does not demand additional expenses as it depends on curricula of institutes of higher education.

To the realization of the suggested measures on transformation of representation Moslem faith in mass-media the state programs could contribute both on Russian, and a republican level. At the present time in Tatarstan there is no strategy of an information policy on strengthening interconfessional tolerances. Among other things, there is a necessity of the state contribution to development of Muslim information resources: the specialized press centre, Muslim journalism.

Whereas negative stereotypes concerning Moslems, first, have already strongly taken roots in consciousness of Russians and, second, they are on a regular basis produced by the mass-media, work above this question requires long term. Work on the suggested directions should be carried out constantly, instead of within the framework of the closed period.

Tatarstan can become an experimental platform for formation of effective model of interaction of the Muslim and journalistic communities, capable to adequate reflect life of umma and as consequence, to influence positively on formation of tolerance.