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National tolerance program of the United Arab Emirates: universal and spiritual values

The importance of tolerance in the multicultural reality of the modern world cannot be overestimated. Tolerance is essential in the conceptual foundations of many states' domestic and foreign policy. Against the background of developing various models of tolerance in the world, there is also a reverse trend towards reviving traditional and religious values. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) promotes its position on the importance of traditional values and tolerance in shaping the conceptual foundations of the country's domestic and foreign policy. The UAE Federal Cabinet has approved a National Tolerance Program that promotes brotherhood and peaceful coexistence between different cultures and religions and fully supports traditional values. The article analyses the conceptualization of tolerance, its distinctive features, value bases and potential for implementation in the Middle East region. The methodological and theoretical basis of the research was the work related to approaches in interpreting different views on understanding the concept of tolerance in the UAE. The article concludes that the balance between universal and traditional values of the Islamic world is the main feature of the national tolerance program. It is also expected that, given the growing influence of the UAE in the Middle East, this model of tolerance may become widespread and become a new basis for consolidation in the Middle East.

Keywords: tolerance, traditional values, religion, UAE, Middle East.

Introduction

The importance of tolerance in the multicultural reality of modern politics can hardly be overestimated. Tolerance is significant in the conceptual foundations of many states' domestic and foreign policies. However, against the background of the development of various models of tolerance in the world, there is a tendency to revive traditional value orientations, often based on the cultural and religious characteristics of countries and peoples, and a striking example of this is the Middle East. In the Middle East, traditional values are strengthened based on spiritual values. This is especially evident in the Muslim states of the Middle East, which often serve as models of such traditionalism. Entrenched religious content in many aspects of politics in the Middle East, and frequently based on Sharia law, are among the reasons for the formation of the image of the Middle East as a conservative region with the importance of traditional values. Such a position does not reflect the complexity of the area. There is a need for a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of tolerance in this region and one of the most economically developed countries, the United Arab Emirates.

The state actively promotes the concept of tolerance, and is the leitmotif of the state's domestic and foreign policy. This attention to the development of an ideological model can be explained by various factors, ranging from historical and cultural to political and economic. The UAE is a relatively young state, developing rapidly, the value base for which can become a guarantor of the stability of the country's economic and political prosperity in the region and the world. Tolerance is a significant value that formed and is one of the main elements of UAE's social and political policies. Moreover, some researchers scientifically prove that the UAE was and still is a leading country in spreading tolerance on both national and international sides regarding its domestic and foreign policies.

The article analyses the concept of tolerance in the UAE, the reasons that determined the choice of this tolerance model, its implementation in the country's domestic and foreign policy, and the distinctive features of the UAE's policy; first of all, the conceptualization of Muslim values and traditions.

Materials and methods

The methodological and theoretical basis of the research was the work related to approaches in the interpretation of various views on the understanding of the concept of tolerance in the UAE, the reasons that

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determined the choice of this tolerance model, and its implementation in the country's domestic and foreign policy. A retrospective reference to the evolution of the ideas of tolerance in the history of UAE made it possible to identify the cultural accent in the National Tolerance Programme in the light of Islamic values and highlight the National Tolerance Programme as primarily a UAE concept. At the same time, pay attention to the programme's potential to become a solid foundation for forming a balanced relationship between cultures and different Middle Eastern states.

Literature review

Recent tragic events in the Middle East region show once again the importance of tolerance, especially for the areas with different ethno-religious background people. The topic of tolerance and its importance in general and in the Middle East region, in particular, are well covered in the literature. There is an interest in studying tolerance's importance for democracy, starting with a well-known article by Lipset 1959, Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1994 and Sullivan and Transue 1999 [1–3]. There is a lot of literature related to the decline in tolerance or tolerance importance issues in the Middle East and UAE, which could be found in the work of Tessler 2002, Rizzo et al., 2007, Ciftci 2010, and Spierings N. 2019 [4–7]. While the decline in tolerance has gotten much scholarly attention, less attention has been given to the recent developments, especially in UAE, that have been made in recent years to support and promote tolerance. This article tries to change this by providing some insights on this topic.

Results and Discussion

The population's well-being level, the human development index, and economic development indicators define the UAE as a developed state. The history of the development of this state is full of miracles. It reminds me of the fairy tale of Cinderella, who acquired a special status in world politics and economics due to the wise management of the wealthiest oil reserves discovered in this country recently, shortly after they gained independence from the British colonialists. The government uses its colonial past as a common platform for political dialogue with the former colonies of the region. Another critical factor in building this country's political vector of development is Islam, the UAE's official religion and the region's leading religion [8].

The country pursues a very active foreign policy aimed at regional leadership. In this context, the UAE needs to offer a universal concept that meets the various needs of the Middle Eastern states. In this case, the idea of tolerance implemented in the UAE was very effective due to the values embedded in it. The fundamental normative document of the tolerance policy is the National Tolerance Program. Approved by the UAE Cabinet of Ministers in 2016, the National Tolerance Program aims to consolidate society and a shared understanding of fundamental values in the social consciousness and form a positive image of the UAE as a country on the world stage. This, of course, requires multifaceted work, which is actively carried out by the state. For example, in February 2016, the post of Minister of Tolerance was created. Various activities are carried out within the tolerance program framework [9]. In November 2017, the pedestrian bridge over the Dubai Canal was named by H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid as the Tolerance Bridge [10]. Each year in Abu Dhabi, more than 800 religious leaders and scientists meet with each other to make input in solving international problems and ways to promote such values as peace, friendship, and inclusion on Promoting Peace in the Muslim Societies Forum [11].

UAE government and society were going to build up tolerance, multiculturalism, and a culture of acceptance of others and reject attitudes of discrimination and hatred. Therefore, on the holy month of Ramadan in 2016 Ruler of Dubai, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, gave his famous speech that inaugurated the UAE National Tolerance Programme “The UAE, led by His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, will continue to promote the principles of tolerance established by the Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan. Tolerance is a key value of our ancestors and our founding fathers. The UAE has spread it throughout the Arab region and the world” [12].

The UAE National Tolerance Programme is based on seven main pillars: “Islam, the UAE Constitution, Zayed's Legacy and Ethics of the UAE, International Conventions, Archeology and History, Humanity, and Common Values”. The National Tolerance Programme will be in collaboration with federal and citizens, residents, experts, teachers, students and employees under five main themes: “strengthen the government's role as an incubator of tolerance; consolidate the role of family in nation-building; Promote tolerance among young people and prevent them from fanaticism and extremism, enrich scientific and cultural content, and integrate international efforts to promote tolerance and highlight the leading role of UAE in this area” [9].

The UAE discourse of tolerance, a response to international politics, has evolved into a strategic tool pivotal in planning for a post-oil order [13]. The project's vision is based on the "belief that the Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence is a Ministry for all" and based on the following values: "diversity and pluralism, dialogue and coexistence, human rights, convergence and communication tolerance, peace and security; happiness and positivity; good and giving; national affiliation". Therefore, the UAE National Tolerance Programme Mission Verticals of the National Tolerance Program has the following mission verticals: "government's role as an incubator of tolerance, consolidate the role of the family in nation-building enriching scientific and cultural content, complementing international efforts in promoting tolerance and sharing the UAE's exemplary role in this area encouraging tolerance among the youth and protecting them from intolerance and extremism" [9].

The religious component of the UAE's concept of tolerance is a relatively new project for the country and the entire region. The Ministry of Tolerance launched initiatives and national programmes to strengthen cooperation among people and government entities. The UAE Charter of Tolerance, Coexistence, and Peace initiatives were established to promote tolerance, coexistence and respect for cultural diversity and reject violence, extremism and racism. Among them is a unique worldwide initiative, the Tolerance Responsibility Programme for Organizations. This programme was started to encourage organizations to support tolerance [9]. The idea of tolerance and acceptance of others occupies a significant place in the philosophy of Islam. The project's success is also due to its close connection with the traditional values of the Arab world [14]. According to E. Monier (2023), the UAE's tolerance discourse limitations lie in its less concern with the religious identity of Christians and more focus on sustaining power [13]. However, we found much evidence of the inclusion of all religions, particularly Christianity.

On February 4, 2019, one historical event captured the world's attention: the first-ever trip of the head of the Roman Catholic Church to the Arabian Peninsula. During this visit, much attention was paid to developing tolerance and interaction between different religions [15]. The leader of the Catholic and Islamic worlds in UAE signed the Human Fraternity document in Dubai, UAE. This historical meeting was born from the dialogue and collaboration between faiths [16].

In Abu Dhabi, a cultural and religious centre, Abraham's House, has been created to develop mutual understanding based on spiritual knowledge [17] about 50 churches of various denominations in the UAE [18].

Spiritual brotherhood is based on the philosophy of Islam, and it is to religious norms that the National Program of Tolerance refers to when forming the justification of this or that position concerning the most critical events in the region. The second pillar, after Islam, is the Constitution of the UAE, which provides the national tolerance program with a legal framework. This gives the program a special status and forms the constitutionally enshrined values of equality, formalized in Article No. 25 on non-discrimination, Article No. 40, which guarantees the observance of the rights of foreigners following international norms [19].

It should be noted that the human rights mentioned above are among the fundamental rights ensuring tolerance and enshrined in international law by the United Nations. The national flavour and particular importance of the tolerance program are given by the ideas and values laid down by Sheikh Zeida. Sheikh Zeida is the father, founder and spiritual leader of the UAE. He devised the concept of uniting the seven emirates and formed the central values based on Islam [9].

Making Sheikh Zeid's legacy one of the pillars of understanding tolerance in the UAE is an expression of recognition of the authority of the founding fathers. It underlines the connection between the world's perceived idea of tolerance and traditional values, which include, in addition to religion, Arab traditions. Moreover, it emphasizes the leadership position and determination of the UAE to follow the principles of tolerance, which not only do not contradict but also echo the principles and values of the Arab people. As a result, the tolerance program is complex and multi-layered, allowing it to be applicable locally and internationally. For example, it reflects the universal values enshrined in international documents and shared by all people on the planet, while at the same time, it is based on and reflects the values of the Muslim world.

The UAE's model of tolerance, which maintains a balance between universal values and those of the Islamic world, can be explained by several factors. First, the UAE's demographics cannot be analyzed without considering the many foreigners working and living there. According to statistics, only 11 % of the UAE's people are citizens; another factor is religion. Over 75 % of the region is Muslim, but 25 % comprises more than two hundred faiths and nationalities, 6.6 Hindu [20]. Those other than Muslim believers lived in the territory of the contemporary UAE for decades. For example, the first Hindu temple was built in 1958. Moreover, in 2020, the first traditional Hindu stone temple, BAPS Shri Swaminarayan Mandir, was completed.

More than 50,000 Sikhs live in the UAE, making this community one of the most prominent. In 2012, the first Sikh temple, Guru Nanak Darbar, was. The 100,000 square feet of land for the Sikh temple was granted for its construction by Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Ruler of Dubai and Vice President of the UAE. Guru Nanak Darbar is the most prominent gurdwara in the Gulf region [15].

The Mormon Church has 16 million members worldwide and has 168 dedicated temples, although none previously existed in the Middle East. The first Mormon temple in the Middle East, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, will be in Dubai at the site of EXPO 2020 [21].

The UAE has a new vision for the Middle East region — an alternative, future-oriented model that supports moderate Islam, empowers women, embraces diversity, encourages innovation and welcomes global engagement. These values have been ingrained in the UAE's DNA since the country's founding in 1971. It explains why over 200 nationalities call the UAE home and why different religions have built approximately 40 churches, two Hindu temples, a Sikh temple and a Buddhist temple, which welcome multi-national congregations. In April 2020, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced plans to build a temple in the UAE, its first in the Middle East. Meanwhile, the region's largest Anglican Church is being built in Abu Dhabi and will accommodate more than 4,000 worshippers once complete [22].

In 2017, Sheikh Mohamed renamed a mosque in Abu Dhabi to “Mary, Mother of Jesus” to build a more vital understanding between Christians and Muslims. The UAE government is committed to encouraging values of inclusion and coexistence. The Ministry of Tolerance, led by His Excellency Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, implements programs that foster respect, peaceful coexistence and mutual understanding among people in the UAE. The UAE is celebrating 2019 as the Year of Tolerance. On 15 December 2018, it was declared that 2019 in UAE is the Year of Tolerance. The decision aims to reflect the approach adopted by the UAE since its establishment as a bridge of communication between the peoples and cultures of the world and the creation of the National Tolerance Programme [23].

Within the Year of Tolerance, the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) organized the exhibition with the participation of 20 international communities in the UAE named — The UAE is a Home to Tolerance. The UAEU Vice Chancellor, Prof. Mohamed Albaili, stressed that the university plays a role model as an open and mindful community. Flagship University is proud of the diversity and pluralism of its faculty, staff and students within one community, which is rooted in moderation and balance [24]. Promoting a Tolerance culture at UAE schools: the vibrant role of Teachers Workshop at the College of Education, UAEU. In addition, a real-world lesson in English under the title “Power of the Word” was presented to serve the topic and promote tolerance and respect for different cultures among university students [25].

The UAE Islamic education curriculum places a dedicated focus on tolerance. The textbooks explicitly discuss the theme of tolerance and are organized under three categories: teaching about tolerance, teaching for tolerance, and teaching through a pedagogy of tolerance. The textbook developers tried to achieve their goals by discussing the concepts of acceptance of diversity, justice and equity, civic engagement, critical thinking, compassion for humans, and protection from extremism. Teaching tolerance through religious-based instruction may provide effective practices that provide insights into tolerance education at large [26].

Abaido's (2020) scientific research on youths' perception of tolerance in UAE findings proves the success of the new education programme in the country. The research findings reveal that youth living in the UAE have a concrete understanding of the value of tolerance and practice it daily [27].

A culture of tolerance and coexistence is celebrated on 16th November, 2023. The Tolerance Day is organized by the UAE Ministry of Tolerance and Coexistence under the esteemed leadership of His Excellency Sheikh Nahayan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan. This kind of festival intends to deepen the values of tolerance and coexistence among cultures and to create a platform that transcends boundaries and fosters mutual understanding. Primary attention is given to educating the youth about the fundamental values of tolerance to build a tolerant society with a deep sense of unity and respect for diversity [28].

The UAE also demonstrates tolerance at the political level, taking a balancing position. On the one hand, the UAE reflects its unity with other monarchies of the Persian Gulf; on the other hand, it actively promotes its vision of the region's development. Saudi Arabia, as a country on the territory of which the main shrines of the Islamic world are historically located, is a conservative religious country. As a religious country, the UAE builds its political vector of development in openness and flexibility, including tolerance towards religion. For example, ensuring equal rights for women plays a vital role in the country's social policy [28]. Great efforts are being made to make the UAE a leading country in modern technology.

Conclusion

It can be assumed that the balance of the modern and the traditional reflected in the tolerance program can become the ideological basis for consolidation in the Middle East. The Gulf region has previously witnessed many socio-political issues that have affected its social dynamics and structure. While the discourse of tolerance emerged initially as a response to international political developments, it has evolved into a more comprehensive strategy. The co-existence of 200 nationalities in the UAE is considered an opportunity to promote tolerance based on the core values promoted and socially embedded within the UAE society. The UAE government has launched various initiatives to support human fraternity and maintain peace and stability in society: establishing the Ministry of Tolerance in 2016, construction of the Tolerance Bridge in 2017, renaming a famous mosque in the capital after Virgin Mary “Mariam Umm Eisa” and formulating a National Tolerance Programme in 2016. The universal ideas reflected in the national tolerance program and many initiatives aimed at introducing a tolerant approach in all spheres of life and a high level of relations with the world. The concepts of pan-Arabism and pan-Islamism became inapplicable in the actual regional situation because of the ideas embedded in them. However, they unite many people and are not universal and flexible. Moreover, they do not sufficiently express the idea of tolerance, which is embedded in the philosophy of Islam. The increasing incorporation of religious tolerance initiatives into government planning suggests a high level of interest in this issue and a will to achieve all the needed goals. The UAE’s strategy is based on local historical, traditional, cultural, and political factors. The UAE’s tolerance programme addresses the ruler’s regional ambitions and seeks to sustain domestic legitimacy by constructing and reinforcing local identity and values. Based on traditional Islamic and universal values, the UAE’s National Tolerance Programme has potential in the Middle East, can attract all the region’s countries, and can become a prerequisite for creating a base that consolidates the region’s various nations.

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Н.Л. Сейтахметова, Е.М. Шаронова

Біріккен Араб Әмірліктерінің Ұлттық төзімділік бағдарламасы: әмбебап және рухани құндылықтар

Қазіргі әлемнің көпмәдениетті шындығындағы толеранттылықтың маңыздылығын асыра бағалау қиын. Толеранттылық көптеген мемлекеттердің ішкі және сыртқы саясатының тұжырымдамалық негіздерінде маңызды орын алады. Әлемде толеранттылықтың әртүрлі модельдерінің дамуы аясында дәстүрлі және діни құндылықтарды жандандырудың кері үрдісі байқалады. Біріккен Араб Әмірліктері (БАӘ) елдің ішкі және сыртқы саясатының тұжырымдамалық негіздерін қалыптастыруда дәстүрлі құндылықтар мен төзімділіктің маңыздылығы туралы өз ұстанымдарын алға тартады. БАӘ федералды кабинеті әртүрлі мәдениеттер мен діндер арасындағы бауырластық пен бейбіт қатар өмір сүруге ықпал ететін және дәстүрлі құндылықтарды толығымен қолдайтын ұлттық төзімділік бағдарламасын мақұлдады. Мақалада толеранттылықтың тұжырымдамасы, оның айрықша ерекшеліктері, құндылық негіздері және Таяу Шығыс аймағында іске асыру әлеуеті талданған. Зерттеудің әдіснамалық және теориялық негізі БАӘ-дегі толеранттылық тұжырымдамасын түсінуге қатысты әртүрлі көзқарастарды түсіндіру тәсілдерімен байланысты жұмыстар болды. Авторлар мақалада ислам әлемінің әмбебап және дәстүрлі құндылықтары арасындағы тепе-теңдік ұлттық төзімділік бағдарламасының басты ерекшелігі болып табылады деген қорытынды жасаған. Сондай-ақ, БАӘ-нің Таяу Шығыстағы ықпалының артуын ескере отырып, бұл толеранттылық моделі кең таралуы және Таяу Шығыста шоғырланудың жаңа негізі болуы мүмкін деп күтілуде.

Кілт сөздер: толеранттылық, дәстүрлі құндылықтар, идеология, БАӘ, Таяу Шығыс.

Н.Л. Сейтахметова, Е.М. Шаронова

Национальная программа толерантности Объединённых Арабских Эмиратов: универсальные и духовные ценности

Важность толерантности в мультикультурной реальности современного мира трудно переоценить. Толерантность является ядром концептуальных основ внутренней и внешней политики многих государств мира. Однако на фоне развития различных моделей толерантности в мире наблюдается обрат-

ная тенденция к возрождению традиционных и религиозных ценностей. Объединенные Арабские Эмираты (ОАЭ) проводят политику срединного пути, учитывающего важность традиционных ценностей и толерантности в формировании концептуальных основ внутренней и внешней политики страны. Федеральный кабинет министров ОАЭ одобрил Национальную программу толерантности, которая способствует братству и мирному сосуществованию между различными культурами и религиями и всецело поддерживает традиционные ценности. В статье проанализирована модель толерантности ОАЭ, её концептуализация и отличительные особенности, ценностные основы и потенциал для реализации в Ближневосточном регионе. Методологической и теоретической основой исследования послужили работы, связанные с различными взглядами на концепцию толерантности в ОАЭ. Авторами сделан вывод о том, что баланс между универсальными и традиционными ценностями исламского мира является главной особенностью национальной программы толерантности. Также, учитывая растущее влияние ОАЭ на Ближнем Востоке, ожидается, что эта модель толерантности может получить широкое распространение и стать новой основой для консолидации на Ближнем Востоке.

Ключевые слова: толерантность, традиционные ценности, идеология, ОАЭ, Ближний Восток.

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