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MUSLIM COMMUNITY IN THE EDUCATIONAL SPACE OF SWISS CONFEDERATION AT THE TURN OF THE XXth – XXIth CENTURIES

Abstract. *The aim of the research is to compare different cantonal models of relations of secular authorities with religious organizations, to study the peculiarities of implementing needs of Muslim students and employees in state schools of Switzerland, to analyze the attempts to implement lessons of Islamic religious education in the cantons of St. Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau and to assess the federal and cantonal initiatives, aimed at preparation of qualified teachers of Islamic studies, in order to research the perspectives of Islamic religious education development in Switzerland. The research methodology is defined by an interdisciplinary nature of approaches (history, law, Islamic studies). The scientific novelty of the research consists in the fact that it was the first time that on the basis of different groups of sources – regulatory and legislative acts, reports and press organs of organizations and profile commissions, as well as didactic materials for school administration, the place of Islamic community in the educational space of Switzerland was analyzed. The Conclusions.* In spite of the fact that according to the Constitution of Swiss Confederation, the issues on education and religion were transferred to the cantonal level, the state, through decisions of the Federal Court of the national level, assisted to protection of religious freedoms of Muslim students (permission for visible religious attributes, special-purpose arrangements for swimming lessons, possible absence at the classes during the biggest religious holidays). It was established that the policy of cantons regarding Muslim community was often defined by external tendencies (the discussion on visible religious attributes and introduction of the course “Religions and Humanitarian Culture” concerned, first of all, French-speaking cantons while the attempts to introduce the system of Islamic religious education concern a range of German-speaking cantons). The pilot projects of IRE in St. Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau revealed the need in establishing, in Switzerland, the correspondent system for preparing teachers of this direction and elaboration of didactic materials. The Confederation responded to this urgent need with creation, in 2015, of a profile branch by the University of Fribourg – Swiss Centre for Islam and Society. The perspective direction of the research is still the comparison of Swiss, German and Austrian approaches to preparation of IRE teachers and development of didactic materials.

Key words: Switzerland, Muslims, Islamic religious education, hijab.

МУСУЛЬМАНСЬКА СПІЛЬНОТА В ОСВІТНЬОМУ ПРОСТОРИ ШВЕЙЦАРСЬКОЇ КОНФЕДЕРАЦІЇ НА ЗЛАМІ XX – XXI СТОЛІТТЯ

Анотація. Мета дослідження – через порівняння різних кантональних моделей відносин світської влади з релігійними організаціями, розгляд особливостей імплементації потреб учнів і працівників-мусульман у державних школах Швейцарії, аналіз спроб впровадження уроків ісламської релігійної освіти в кантонах Санкт-Галлен, Люцерн і Тургау й оцінку федеральних і кантональних ініціатив, спрямованих на підготовку кваліфікованих викладачів ісламознавства, дослідити перспективи розвитку ісламської релігійної освіти у Швейцарії. **Методологія дослідження** визначається міждисциплінарністю підходів (історія, право, ісламознавство). **Наукова новизна** дослідження полягає у тому, що вперше на основі різних груп джерел – нормативно-правових актів, звітів і друкованих органів організацій і профільних комісій, а також дидактичних матеріалів для шкільної адміністрації, проаналізовано місце ісламської спільноти в освітньому просторі Швейцарії. **Висновки.** Незважаючи на те, що згідно з Конституцією Швейцарської Конфедерації, питання освіти та релігії передано на кантональний рівень, держава через рішення Федерального суду на загальнонаціональному рівні сприяла захисту релігійних свобод учнів-мусульман (дозвіл на помітні релігійні атрибути, спеціальні пристосування на уроках плавання, можливість не відвідувати заняття під час найбільших свят). Встановлено, що політика кантонів щодо мусульманської спільноти часто визначалася зовнішніми тенденціями (дискусія про помітні релігійні атрибути і введення курсу “Релігії та гуманітарна культура” зачепили насамперед франкомовні кантони, а спроби запровадити систему ісламської релігійної освіти стосуються низки німецькомовних кантонів). Пілотні проекти IRE у Санкт-Галлені, Люцерні та Тургау виявили необхідність створення у Швейцарії належної системи підготовки вчителів цього профілю та розробки дидактичних матеріалів. Відповіддю Конфедерації на цю загальну потребу стало створення 2015 р. профільного осередку при університеті Фрібуру – Швейцарський Центр Іслам і Суспільство. Перспективним напрямом дослідження залишається порівняння швейцарських, німецьких і австрійських підходів до підготовки викладачів IRE та розробки дидактичних матеріалів.

Ключові слова: Швейцарія, мусульмани, ісламська релігійна освіта, хіджаб.

The Problem Statement. For the Muslims of Europe Switzerland is a symbolic place – it was in Geneva that in September 1936 the European Muslim Congress with invitation, from its initiator Shakib Arslan, of all people of Islamic belief residing there, took place (Kramer, 1986, pp. 142–143). In spite of the fact that the state does not have a colonial past, the Muslim community of the Confederation has been rapidly growing within the late 20th – early 21st c., supplemented in the middle of the century with labour migrants and at the end of the millennium – with refugees. Thus, in 1950 the Islamic believers accounted for 0.05% of the population of Switzerland, in 1970 – 0,26 %, in 1980 – 0,89 %, in 1990 – 2,21 %, in 2000 – 4,26 % (Kettani, 2010, p. 159), in 2015 – 5 % (El-Menouar, 2017, p. 13). The peculiar property of the Muslim community of Switzerland was dominance of the people from former Yugoslavia (58 %) and Turkey (21 %) (Lathion, 2010, p. 218), not South Africa or Middle East what is peculiar to most countries of Western Europe. Along with a quantitative increase of the community, between the Muslims there was an increase of number of people with Swiss citizenship: in 1970 – 2,8 %, in 1980 – 5,2 %, in 2000 – 11,75 % (Gianni, 2010, p. 10), in 2015 – 35,1 % (Tangram, 2017, No. 40, p. 63). Taking into account these two factors – a rapid increase in the numbers of ummah and increase of the share of persons with citizenship, at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries the Islamic organizations of Switzerland started demanding from the civil authorities to account, in various spheres of a social life, special needs of the Muslims, prescribed by provisions of religion.

These tendencies were expressed particularly vividly in the educational sphere as in 2016 Switzerland was already a home for 110 thousand of Muslims below 15 and 118 thousand

of those aged 15 to 29 (CSIS-Papers, 2018, No. 4, p. 10). Thus, the “traditional” demands, for the Muslims of the West, to allow female students and teachers wear hijab, excuse them from swimming lessons, or, at least, conduct the lessons in a separate way for male and female students and, the main thing, to introduce lessons of Islamic religious education in the state schools, were expressed in Switzerland in a unique way as in this country the issues on relations between religion and secular authorities are regulated not at the federal, but on the cantonal level.

The Analysis of Sources and Recent Researches. The article, suggested for the reader’s attention, is a constituent of the author’s scientific surveys, concerned with a comparative analysis of Islamic religious education system development in a range of Western countries (Sypko, 2018 – 2019, 2019), and methodological approaches hereto were emended in the course of internship in field-specific scientific and research centers – EA ERASME 3389 laboratory (Université Paris-VIII-Vincennes-Saint-Denis, November–December 2013) and the Institute of Islamic Theological Studies by University of Vienna (May 2018).

The work of Swiss scientists, Andrea Rota and Petra Bleisch Bouzar, who analyzed the experience of classes introduction of Islamic religious education in Kreuzlingen, canton of Thurgau, is particularly interesting in the context of our research (Rota, Bouzar, 2012). Baptiste Brodard from the University of Fribourg, while considering the process of imams’ preparation in Switzerland, also concerned the issue on preparation courses for teachers of Islamic religious education (Brodard, 2018). German professor Kristian Starck, while comparing the regulation of religious education by legislation of different countries of Europe, also paid attention to becoming of Islamic religious education (Starck, 2003). Jean-François Aubert focused on the analysis of difficulties, encountered by Muslim students in the state schools of Switzerland during the late 20th c. (Aubert, 1998).

As the above-mentioned works deal only with separate aspects of our research, we have used, for the sake of a comprehensive analysis, different groups of sources – *firstly*, the regulatory and legislative acts of federal and cantonal levels; *secondly*, the reports of field-specific organizations and commissions (Federal Commission against Racism (Commission fédérale contre le racisme – CFR), Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (Centre Suisse Islam et Société – CSIS), Group of Researchers on Islam in Switzerland by the Federal Commission for Migration (Groupe de Recherche sur l’Islam en Suisse de la Commission fédérale pour les questions de migration – GRIS de la CFM)); *thirdly*, the press organs of CFR – the *Tangram* magazine and the one of the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation (Secrétariat d’État à la formation, à la recherche et à l’innovation – SERFI) – *SERFI News*; *and fourthly*, the didactic materials for education professionals on the religious diversity of Switzerland, issued by the cantonal school offices.

The Purpose of Publication. The purpose of the article is to compare different cantonal models of relations of secular authorities with religious organizations, to study peculiarities of implementing the needs of Muslim students and employees at state schools of Switzerland, to analyze the attempts to implement Islamic religious education lessons in the cantons of St Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau and to assess the federal and cantonal initiatives, aimed at preparation of qualified teachers of Islamic studies, in order to research the perspectives of Islamic religious education development in Switzerland.

The Statement of the Basic Material. The Constitution of the Swiss Confederation of April 18, 1999, as well as its preceding version of 1874, guaranteed freedom of conscience and worship. Thus, Article 15 runs: every person has a right to choose their own religion and

practise it either individually or collectively. Pointedly, that the same Article (clauses 3 and 4) stresses that every person has a right for a religious education, but no one can force them to it. However, the Article 62 assigns the issues of education to cantons and Article 72 acts similarly with the issues of religion: “Regulation of relations between the Church and the State belongs to the competence of cantons. Within their authorities, the Confederation and cantons may undertake activities for maintenance of peace between members of different religious communities” (Constitution fédérale, 1999).

And as the issues on religion and education were transferred to the cantonal level, there have developed 26 models we may integrate into two provisional groups – *firstly*, cantons sticking to the principle of laicism what is a strict separation of the church and the state, and, *secondly*, territorial units where religion classes are allowed at state schools. The first group includes French-speaking cantons of Geneva and Neuchatel. Thus, Article 163 of the Constitution of the Geneva canton of 1847 emphasized that religious education has to be separated from other components of education (Constitution de Genève, 1847, p. 39). The new Constitution of 2012 already did not have any separate article dealing with restriction of a religious education, but the approaches remained the same as it is clearly prescribed that canton arranges and funds “state, *secular* and quality education” (Constitution de Genève, 2012) (italics included by us. – Author).

The similar processes took place in Neuchatel as well. Yet in 1872, the head of the Department for Public Education of the canton, Numa Droz, promulgated the law that prohibited teachers to teach religion at state schools. And Article 8 of the Law on School Arrangement of March 28, 1984 states the following: “Religious education is separated from other constituents of education”. Though, in 2000 this regulatory act was supplemented with the note that state schools may provide, for free, a part of their premises for religious education, though with comment that the classes must be of extracurricular character and take place in out-of-school hours (Loi sur l’organisation scolaire, 1984, p. 2). Taking into account the fact that in most Swiss cantons religious education was a component of school system, even though the notion of “accepted confessions” was not mentioned in cantonal constitutions (Lucerne, Zug), the emphasized secularity of Geneva and Neuchatel looks like a sort of exception as it was a consequence of an external, namely, French influence. Let us remind that French Republic since the middle of the 19th c. has been most consistent in conducting the policy of separation of the Church and the State.

In the context of Islamic factor, in the educational space of Switzerland the French impacts were seen not only in a legislative execution of the laicist model of two cantons, but also in the discussion on possible prohibition of visible religious attributes, and, namely, hijab, in the establishments of a secondary education. Yet since 1989, in the Fifth Republic there was a long-standing, both verbal and legal, struggle between the proponents and opponents of Islamic headscarves at schools that resulted in adoption, on March 15, 2004, of the Law on Prohibition of Visible Religious Attributes in the Establishments of Secondary Education (Sypko, 2018 – 2019, pp. 88–89). Therefore, not surprisingly that the issue of Islamic headscarves at state schools became the most acute right in French-speaking cantons of Switzerland and Jean-François Aubert described this like: “the hijab issue was inspired by France. In Switzerland, this issue by itself would not simply arise on the agenda” (Aubert, 1998, p. 481). We should mention that we have substantiated the similar tendencies based on the case of Quebec in Canada (Sypko, 2019, p. 696).

In contrast to France where hijab, just as other visible religious attributes, was forbidden for all members of educational process at state schools, in Switzerland they had a differentiat-

ed approach to female teachers and students. Thus, in 1992 the teacher of one Geneva school started wearing Islamic headscarf at her work. After a long period of contemplation, in 1996, the school administration, relying on a secular nature of educational establishment, made an attempt of prohibiting her coming to her working place like that. As they did not manage to reach a compromise, on November 12, 1997, the Federal Court delivered a verdict, according to which all the religious symbols affecting the students had to be prohibited at state schools (*Les relations avec la minorité musulmane*, 2006, p. 23).

At the same time, female students as private persons could wear visible religious attributes in the educational establishments. Namely, on June 25, 1996, the Administrative Court of Neuchatel adopted a decision, according to which the school was a secular institution, but hijab was an expression of a religious freedom of a female Muslim and therefore it cannot be forbidden (Tangram, 1999, No. 7, p. 65). Similar approaches were taken by other cantons as well. Though this did not mean that there were no more attempts to prohibit hijab at the level of separate schools, especially as these attitudes were actively fueled by the ultra-right Swiss People's Party.

The issue on wearing hijab at schools was restored to life every time when there appeared notable cases concerned with the Muslims. Thus, in the publications of French-speaking *Le Temps* newspaper as of February 15 and March 9, 2006, dealing with “the caricature scandal” in Denmark (an acute international crisis, provoked by the publication of the daily Danish newspaper *Jyllands Posten*, on September 30, 2005, of caricatures depicting Mohammed the Prophet), there was emphasized the need for prohibition of Islamic headscarves at schools and infeasibility of separate swimming lessons for male and female students (Parini, Gianni, Clavien, 2012, p. 170). Let us admit that just before the headline-making referendum on prohibition to build minarets in Switzerland, the mass media promulgated the “string of logic”: minarets → niqabs, hijabs → alien culture, oppression of females. It is interesting that on November 29, 2009, only 4 of 26 cantons (secular Geneva and Neuchatel, French-speaking Vaud and Basel-Stadt with the highest share of atheists in the Confederation) did not support the prohibition (Dodd, 2015).

Consequently, not surprisingly that in September 2009, the Federal Commission against Racism recorded a claim of Swiss female espousing Islam stating that her daughter was forced to take the hijab off as “the internal order prohibits covering head during the classes” (Tangram, 2010, No. 25, p. 23). The similar arguments were also provided by administration of educational establishment in St Margrethen (canton of St Gallen). On November 11, 2014, the cantonal court supported the parents and allowed a female student to have her head covered at school classes. The educational establishment administration made an attempt to appeal against this judgment in the Federal Court, but on December 12, 2015 the court of higher instance backed up the previous resolution (Tangram, 2016, No. 37, p. 31). To minimize future collisions, cantonal educational offices started issuing methodical recommendations on religious and cultural diversity for the teachers and school administrations. For instance, the manual, published in Fribourg in 2017, emphasized that hijab was allowed if it “does not hinder communication with other students and teachers”. This is the reasons why niqabs (headwear covering the face) were forbidden at schools (*Diversité religieuse et culturelle à l'école*, 2017, p. 15).

It means that, contrary to France, in Switzerland, in spite of initiatives of the Swiss People's Party (the most vivid the contradiction looked like in 2016 – 2018 in Valais canton), students' wearing of visible religious attributes at schools never was prohibited. This allowed

Nadiya K., who moved from France to Geneva in 1990 and was interviewed by the Group of Researchers on Islam in Switzerland, to compare two models of laicism: “It is possible to live in a secular society, but Swiss, not French one as in the latter case this is secularity that substitutes a religion” (Gianni, 2010, p. 29). Along with an issue, analyzed above, during the period under research there was an active discussion of the situation with a systematic absenteeism, of Muslim students, at swimming classes. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries the problem of Muslim parents’ refusals to give permission to participation of their children, including males, in general swimming classes, was becoming acute. As a consequence, the fines for violation of internal school order became more frequent. To clarify the situation, on October 24, 2008, the Federal Court confirmed a mandatory nature of swimming classes (Tangram, 2008, No. 22 p. 22), and on April 11, 2013 it specified that students may be excused from these classes only due to medical reasons. Despite the several parents’ protest, these decisions were not discriminative for Muslims as they provided that the educational establishment should ensure: separate locker rooms for male and female students, closed shower cubicles and permission for swimming suits covering all the body – burqini (*Diversité religieuse et culturelle à l’école*, 2017, p. 11).

Satisfactory for Muslim students was also the situation with the opportunity to miss the classes on great religious holidays. So, in 1991 the Federal Court adopted a decision that school rules should not violate religious freedoms of students (Aubert, 1998, p. 490). Therefore, the parents or legal guardians had to submit, in advance, a written statement to school administration. The students were to realize that they would have to master educational topics of the classes they miss by themselves (*Diversité religieuse et culturelle à l’école*, 2017, p. 9).

The permission for visible religious attributes at schools, the regulation of swimming classes, the opportunity to be absent at classes on great religious holidays – all of these are the state’s assistance to demonstrations of religious practice of the Muslims. But similarly important for the community was the issue on a religious education of the youth, especially due to the fact that in the early 21st century the second and the third generations of immigrants were formed and these generations were increasingly distanced from both ethnical and confessional roots. These functions were traditionally fulfilled by madrasa schools by mosques. But in the early 21st century this system proved itself to be unsatisfactory – classes during out-of-school time, funded by governments of other countries and provided with foreign imams, who were frequently lacking in understanding of Swiss reality, became for the Muslims, born in Switzerland, a sort of atavism. The Federal Commission against Racism saw the way out of this situation in introduction of Islamic Religious Education – IRE – at state schools. In this case, the educational material would be delivered in the canton’s official language and educational offices would obtain control over the process (Cattacin, Famos, Duttwiles, Mahnig, 2003, p. 43).

But the introduction of IRE classes at schools was complicated not as much by opposition of educators or political forces, as by the revision of approaches to the system of a religious education that took place in the early 21st c. With account of increasing diversity of religious specter of Switzerland, the switch to “confessionally neutral education” has started. Since 2003, Neuchatel canton (where, with the view to its secularity, there were no religious classes in school before this) introduced the course on “Religion and Humanitarian Culture” as a part of history curriculum in 8–11 school years. The discipline provided for study of world religions from the secular, historical perspective that had to prepare students to perception of a religious pluralism. Within several subsequent years, this program was implemented in

all the cantons of western, first of all, French-speaking Switzerland (Measures to prevent radicalization, 2016, p. 13). Let us note that these initiatives fit into the tendency, peculiar to French-speaking space – the introduction of the unified ecumenical course “Ethics and Religious Culture” in Quebec in 2008 (Sypko, 2019, p. 698), implementation of a mandatory discipline “Moral and Civil Education” in France in 2015 (Sypko, 2018 – 2019, p. 91).

Instead, in the German-speaking regions of Europe, along with the pluralization processes, the system of religious education at schools was developed. Therefore, the first attempts to introduce IRE were seen exactly in “German” cantons of St. Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau. According to apt remark of Kristian Starck, for assurance of a religious education of minorities at the state schools, the formal requirement has to be fulfilled: minimum 5–7 students of this confession with age gap of up to three years. If their number is less, their religious freedom is ensured by the fact that they are not forced to attend classes of a religious education of other confession (Starck, 2003, p. 29). After reaching the age of 16, the student could refuse from the classes of a religious education personally while before this could be done by parents or legal guardians.

Andrea Rota and Petra Bleisch Bouzar noted that Ebikon and Kriens municipalities in the canton of Lucerne were the first, who introduced IRE classes in 2002 (Rota, Bouzar, 2012, p. 169). However, in the Bulletin of the Federal Commission against Racism we find that yet in 2000 IRE was introduced in the Wil city (canton of St Gallen). The curator of this pilot project was the Islamic Center of Wil that provided some payment for a teacher and purchased didactic materials from the Federal Republic of Germany (Tangram, 2003, No. 14, p. 51).

In August 2002, IRE classes were introduced in two municipalities of Lucerne – Kriens and Ebikon. The extracurricular classes for students of the 1st to 5th year were conducted in German twice a week in the school premises during out-of-school time, i.e., during the second half of the day. What concerns funding, the municipality provided premises, while teachers’ remuneration was paid by Islamic community of Lucerne. Like in case of Wil, the problem of didactic materials arose. Therefore, the curricula and textbooks were ordered in the Institute for Interreligious Pedagogy and Didactics of Cologne (Measures to prevent radicalization, 2016, p. 15). At first, the general public of the canton was cautious about this project as the press blamed Islamic community of Lucerne in relations with fundamentalists. Only after teachers started conducting demonstration lessons, the tension decreased. In a year, Regina Steiner Amri, an IRE teacher, remembered that at first she had to listen to offences from the activists of the Swiss People’s Party, but in her work she was greatly supported by various religious organizations, first of all, the Catholic and Protestant ones and this helped her a lot (Tangram, 2003, No. 14, p. 48).

The example of Lucerne was followed by Thurgau – the Protestant canton with extensive Catholic minority. Article 91 of the canton’s Constitution of 1987 allowed a religious education at state schools on the condition that the Churches have to assure that these classes are free and provide them with didactic support on the permanent basis. According to the census of 2000, in Thurgau the Muslims already made 6 % of population. And in the municipality of Kreuzlingen the people of Islamic faith made it 12 %. That is why in 2010, following the initiative of the Association for Islamic Education in Kreuzlingen, the three-year pilot IRE project was launched. The funding was performed on a parity basis: a third from the amount was paid by parents, a third – by the Association for Islamic Education in Kreuzlingen, a third – by charity organizations, including the Catholic ones. The curricula and textbooks were adopted from Bayern. What concerns the teacher, these functions were performed by

Rehan Neziri – a Macedonian, who studied Islamic Theology, Pedagogy and religious Sociology in Turkey. After his arrival to Switzerland in 2002, he learned German and established partner relations with the Catholic organizations (Rota, Bouzar, 2012, pp. 173–174).

The pilot projects in St. Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau illustrated that for an adequate functioning of the system of Islamic religious education there is a lack of Swiss textbooks on this subject, as well as proper preparation of teachers. The national research program PNR 58 “Religious Communities, State and Society” concluded that as of 2010 the system for preparation of professionals in Islamic Theology in Confederation was at the initial level:

1) Since 2001, the Institute for Interreligious Pedagogy and Didactics of Cologne offered the courses for those, willing to teach IRE where the Swiss could enroll as well;

2) In 2004, the scientists from the University of Vienna offered their colleagues from Basel a joint program for preparation of IRE teachers but as they failed to agree the conditions, the project was not implemented;

3) In 2007, the Islamic Institute of Vienna has arranged the courses in Zurich;

4) In 2010, the program “Islam, Muslims and Civil Society” in the University of Fribourg was certified (Formation des imams, 2010).

Therefore, in 2011 the participants of PNR 58 stated that the modern Muslim community demanded from IRE teacher not only excellent knowledge of Quran, but also understanding of a social and political reality of Europe. So already in March 2014 in the University of Fribourg a large-scale event “To the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society” took place, with participation of 120 experts from different countries. As a result, by the University of Fribourg that was a powerful center for a religious research they decided to establish the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (Centre Suisse Islam et Société – CSIS), Hansjörg Schmid was elected the head of it (SERFI News, 2014, p. 11).

Despite the opposition of the activists of the Swiss People’s Party, in 2015 the CSIS was opened. Within 2016 – 2017, the Centre arranged 27 events, though most of them were directed not at the IRE teachers, but at imams (Brodard, 2018, p. 7). Already in 2017 the secondary Master’s program “Islam and Society” (30 ECTS credits) was introduced, with orientation at the graduates of other majors (Schmid, Chatagny, Isis-Arnautovic, 2017, p. 15). Taking into account the active work of CSIS, the State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation provided in the budget for 2017 – 2020 pp. 1,6 millions of Swiss Francs for the activity of this academic center (SERFI News, 2017, p. 15). Lack of funding was proven by the fact that as of 2018 CSIS had 13 employees (only three were full-time) and five doctoral students (Schmid, Chatagny, Zikeli, 2018, pp. 8–9).

The Fribourg center headed, not monopolized, the system for preparation of professionals in Islamic religious education. So in 2018 the Geneva University offered their own courses for imams and IRE teachers with distinctive interdisciplinary approach (history, law, politics, philosophy and culture). As they emphasized the secular nature, the program provided for five conceptual modules: political principles of democracy and respect for human rights, history of Geneva canton and Confederation, interreligious and intercultural dialogue, ethics, academic approach towards Islamic theology.

The Conclusions. Therefore, in spite of the fact that according to the Constitution of Swiss Confederation, the issues on education and religion were transferred to the cantonal level, the state, through decisions of the Federal Court of the national level, assisted to protection of religious freedoms of Muslim students (permission for visible religious attributes, special-purpose arrangements for swimming lessons, possible absence at the classes during

the biggest holidays). It was established that the policy of cantons regarding the Muslim community was often defined by the external tendencies (discussion on visible religious attributes and introduction of the course “Religions and Humanitarian Culture” touched, first of all, French-speaking cantons while the attempts to introduce the system of Islamic religious education concern a range of German-speaking cantons). The pilot projects of IRE in St. Gallen, Lucerne and Thurgau revealed the need in establishing, in Switzerland, the due system for preparing teachers of this direction and elaboration of didactic materials. The Confederation responded to this urgent need with creation, in 2015, of profile branch by the University of Fribourg – Swiss Centre for Islam and Society. The perspective direction of the research still is comparison of Swiss, German and Austrian approaches to preparation of IRE teachers and development of didactic materials.

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