



UNISCI Discussion Papers

“AKROMIYA”: ISLAMIC EXTREMISM OR THE ISLAMIC BRAND OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY?

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Introduction

The bloody events in Andijan on 13-15 May have made the name of “*Akromiya*” in the epicentre of world public attention.

The current conflict between the state authorities and the “*Akromists*” and their supporters started in June 2004 when a group of local entrepreneurs were arrested and accused in anti-constitutional activity. The court hearing started In February 2005.

The government claims these 23 entrepreneurs belong to the underground and illegal organization “*Akromiya*” allegedly linked to *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, the clandestine Islamic party calling for establishment of Islamic caliphate.

The accusation is almost totally based on a piece of paper which was ostensibly attached to a book “*The Path to Belief*” written by Akram Yuldashev in 1992. Yuldashev was indeed a spiritual leader of the local community of Muslims located in the Andijan suburb district Bogi Shamol. Before 1992 he was a member of *Hizb-ut Tahrir*, but being disagree with its strategy lapsed this organization and organized his own circle of believers.

Yuldashev’s teaching, at least his book, has nothing to do with political agenda of extreme Islamists. It is rather a call for religious self-purification. He can be compared with Said Nursi (died in 1960), Turkish Muslim thinker, whose teaching was quite moderate and not challenging the secular state: the main focus of his teaching was spiritual self-perfection through education, both religious and secular, and building Muslim community via charity, mutual trust and backing up public morality.

Followers of Sayid Nursi, known as Nurchi and Fathullachi², had formed a wide movement, charities and informal networks across the country and have been prominent for their philanthropy, assistance to poor families. They have been successful in raising funds aided for fellowships to young people and the like social purposes.

¹ *Las opiniones expresadas en estos artículos son propias de sus autores. Estos artículos no reflejan necesariamente la opinión de UNISCI.* The views expressed in these articles are those of the authors. These articles do not necessarily reflect the views of UNISCI.

² Fethullah Gülen is another Turkish Muslim thinker and modernist, still alive, who has been follower of Said Nursi.



The “*Akromiya*” community followed almost the same path as Nursi’s apologists. Another parallel can be drawn with Christian analogues, for instance, the Mormon Church³ established itself as a self-sufficient and extremely wealthy community, Quakers⁴ known for their egalitarianism and creedlessness, or Mennonites known for their humanitarian aid. “*Akromiya*” therefore could be regarded as a kind of Islamic ‘protestant’ community with the virtues pursued in this mundane world, via hard work, entrepreneurial success and profit sharing with the community members and the poor.

The only Islamic element of “*Akromists*” was their reverence of Akram Yuldashev and the pious life style. The bulk of their activity was consumed by business and building of their own social infrastructure and safety net – a clinic, a pharmacy, a nursery and so on. They proved to be really successful entrepreneurs and even some of them were awarded by the government.

From this point of view “*Akromiya*” as an Islamic movement is not yet political one, it has more to do with social, that is quite moderate, Islamism. By the way, the current US administration is possessed with the idea of promotion of “moderate” Islam. I know from my meetings with some US officials that they quite positively perceive the performance of the current Turkish Islamist government which is ideologically closed to Nursi teaching and movement. So why not to support “*Akromiya*” in the same way?

However, the Uzbek government which declaratively supports the idea of “moderate” Islam, in practice doesn’t make distinction between terrorists and extremists, and between extremists and moderate. In the middle 90s the government had undertaken crackdown and persecution of the local followers of Sayid Nursi, treating them in the same way as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. Now it turned similar reprisals against “*Akromiya*”.

The accusation of “*Akromists*” refers to the mentioned attachment to the book *The Path to Belief*. The author of this attachment suggests five steps toward establishment of an Islamic State via deposition of the current secular government. But the charged followers of Akram Yuldashev deny his authorship of this attachment.

Their spiritual leader Akram Yuldashev has been jailed and is in the prison since 1999.⁵ The access to him is denied. According to some sources he is said to be murdered in prison. If so then he will never be able to confirm his authorship of this notorious attachment.

Against his authorship of the attachment says the fact that since issuing of ‘The Path to Belief’ Yuldashev was never convicted for this writings. Only in 1998 he was brought to justice, but the investigator found nothing criminal and challenging the regime in this book. As a result, he was shortly released, although to be jailed soon again. The ‘existence’ of the attachment was revealed just recently and most probably falsified by the security services and associated experts on Islam.

The term “*Akromiya*” itself has been also most probably invented by these experts.⁶ The “*Akromists*” themselves, though recognizing of being zealous followers of Akram Yuldashev, yet deny they represent a clandestine organization with a political agenda. In Andijan itself they are rather known under the name “*Yimonchilar*” (from the word “*Yimon*” meaning Belief as a word taken from the title of the Akram Yuldashev’s book).

³ The literate name is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

⁴ Religious Society of Friends

⁵ It is his second conviction. Before that he was convicted in 1998 but was soon released and then, after bombing in Tashkent in 1999, was again arrested.

⁶ The term ‘*Wahabists*’ was invented by some Soviet orientalism scholars to brand Islamic activists and militants at the end of 1980s and beginning of 1990s.



But if they are so peaceful and far from politics why the government pursue them and how were possible the violent events in Andijan on 13 May – the seizure of the oblast administration building, releasing of prisoners and taking hostages?

The analysis of the circumstances preceded these violent actions lead to conclusion that they were rather provoked by the government – first of all, by the trail farce itself and some provoking actions during the trail.⁷

The Uzbek regime was expecting the growth of protest movement caused by the ongoing economic crisis, harsh restrictions of economic and political freedoms and inspired by liberal revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine and especially in Kyrgyzstan. According to some insight sources the security services were preparing a series of provocations in order to ‘kill two birds with one stone’ – to discredit the opposition movement and suppress mass dissent until it widespread across the country. That is, a controlled bloodshed was demanded and deliberately instigated by the government in order to take advantage of that.

If not provoked and suppressed by the government the “*Akromiya*” community could serve as an example of non-violent grass root self-government, let it be with Islamic accent.

Community Based Organizations (CBO) is the term often used by Western donors pursuing promotion of civil society in the region. No doubts, “*Akromiya*” had a chance to develop itself as CBO. Sadly, the government has made everything to divert it from this ‘Path to Democracy’ and turn it into a ‘Path to Militancy’.

⁷ On Friday the law enforcement agencies started harassment of and confiscation of property belonging to families of those 23 entrepreneurs what outraged people.