

## PLACE AND ROLE OF ISLAM IN REGIONS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

ILДАР НАСЫРОВ. COOPERATION OF RUSSIAN REGIONS  
WITH INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS: FORMATS  
AND OPPORTUNITIES ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE REPUBLIC  
OF TATARSTAN (Part 2)

*Keywords: international relations of  
regions; regions and foreign policy;  
international organizations; models of  
interaction with integration institutions; up-  
to-date sectors of cooperation; effectiveness  
of external relations; multipolarity.*

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*Citation:* Nasyrov I. Cooperation of Russian Regions with  
International Organizations: Formats and Opportunities on the  
Example of the Republic of Tatarstan (Part 2) // Russia and the  
Moslem World, 2024, № 4 (326), P. 18-31. DOI:  
10.31249/rmw/2024.04.02

*Abstract.* The article studies the issues of interaction between the  
constituent entities of Russia and international organizations, the

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*importance of this type of international cooperation for the socio-economic development of the regions and for the implementation of the Russian foreign policy. The possibilities of participation of the constituent entities in the promotion of national interests on the world stage in the context of increasing external pressure on Russia are considered. The analysis of the issues of political and legal regulation of international and foreign economic relations of the constituent entities of Russia is given, including the questions of participation in the activities of international organizations. The article introduces a classification of formats for the interaction of regions with international organizations and characterizes the features of their implementation; the transformation of the international activity of the regions is demonstrated, according to the evolution of the foreign policy priorities of the state.*

*To evaluate the performance of models of cooperation with integration institutions of various types, the experience of Tatarstan is being studied. The importance for socio-economic development and improving the quality of life of the population by participation of the regions in the activities of international organizations as part of the Russian representation in them, or building relationships with international associations at the level of regions and local authorities, as well as holding events under the auspices of international organizations is confirmed. Alternatives for involving the constituent unities in the implementation of essential areas of Russian foreign policy are proposed. The positive role of the regions in maintaining contacts between Russia and a number of leading international organizations is also discovered, along with the search for new low-politicized formats of cooperation, such as partnerships with international associations and structures at the level of local authorities. The potential of the regions appears highly-demanded in the implementation of Russia's consistent policy to form a multipolar world order.*

### **Goals and Forms of Cooperation with International Organizations at the Level of Tatarstan**

Being one of the components of integration into the world community, cooperation with international organizations introduces extra aspects to the formation of international relations, taking into account geopolitical, economic and other interests of the participants [1, p. 33].

When building ties with international organizations, regions, as a rule, are focusing on advancing social and economic development; building foreign economic and humanitarian relations; boosting regional competitiveness in an open economy; increasing the living standards and quality of life of the population; studying and implementing the best world practices in territorial development; and other issues relevant to particular federal subjects.

As part of international integration mechanisms, regions can also contribute to the implementation of the 'soft security' policy, which is relevant to national interests [2].

When examining the forms of interaction between regions and international organizations, it is necessary to differentiate between membership in an organization and participation in the implementation of individual projects of international organizations, especially regional ones. At the regional level, there is also a widespread practice of implementing recommendations and proposals of international organizations, as well as participating in programmes and projects initiated by them. Participation of a delegation or representatives of the region in events held by international organizations can be viewed as a form of cooperation that requires minimal interaction with international organizations and limited impact on their work.

*Permanent membership in an organization* implies regular participation in its activities and comes with both rights (including involvement in decision-making) and responsibilities

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(including providing financial or other support for the organization).

Over the 30-year history of the development of international and foreign economic relations, Tatarstan has accumulated significant experience from being an Observer in the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TÜRKSOY), as well as being part of the Russian delegation in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe [3, p. 233–239]. However, since the spring of 2022, there has been a clearly negative trend towards anti-Russian politicization of the work of some international organizations, which in some cases has become a determining factor. NATO and EU unfriendly countries' abusing a supermajority vote in the Council of Europe resulted in Russia's decision to withdraw from the oldest international organization in Europe [4].

In the eastern direction, Tatarstan has been greatly invested in the activities of the international non-governmental organization, the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World", since it was founded in 2006. In June 2014, Russian President Vladimir Putin assigned Rustam Minnikhanov, the President of Tatarstan, to lead and reorganize the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World". The Group's activities are aimed at promoting relations between Russia and Muslim countries through the coordinated efforts of civil society, businesspeople, religious associations, as well as the expert and journalistic community. They are working to establish contacts with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and associated organizations. The Group's action plan includes dozens of public, scientific, business, religious forums and events that are held annually both in Russia and abroad [5]. The leading event is International economic summit "Russia – Islamic World: KazanSummit", which has become the major platform for economic interaction between Russia and the countries of the Islamic world.

The fact that regions contribute to establishing relations between our country and Muslim states confirms their role in the implementation of Russian foreign policy in an area, which domestic researchers consider one of the most relevant at the present stage [6, p. 96]. As part of the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World", Tatarstan not only addresses the major challenges facing the Group, but also strengthens business, cultural and humanitarian ties with Muslim countries and Islamic organizations, and continuously works to promote the region abroad, advertising its economic potential, cultural heritage and human capital. The headquarters of the Eurasian branch of the world organization United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is located in Kazan. In November 2021, Ilсур Metshin, Mayor of Kazan, was elected President of the UCLG. Earlier, in November 2019, he was also elected President of the United Nations Advisory Committee of Local Authorities (UNACLA). This is the first time that a Russian representative has been elected President of UNACLA.

Kazan is a member of the Organization of World Heritage Cities (OWHC) and the League of Historic Cities (LHC). In 2021, the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan also participated in projects and events of the Organization of Islamic Capitals and Cities (OICC), the International Assembly of Capitals and Cities (IAC), the International Association "Sister Cities" and several others.

The constant exchange of experience and best practices in urban development has greatly contributed to the dynamic development of the capital of Tatarstan; facilitated the successful implementation of a number of regional programmes aimed at creating a modern urban environment, building public spaces, and improving courtyard areas; and supported projects for the development of urban infrastructure throughout Tatarstan. At the time of difficult foreign policy situation, the long-term work with international organizations at the level of local

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authorities depends on the local government bodies' commitment to relevant issues.

*Holding events under the auspices of international organizations* on the territory of the constituent entities of the Federation. We believe that this activity can be legitimately considered as international, since organizing and hosting such events involve keeping in touch with foreign partners; finding new opportunities for cross-border cooperation; adapting and implementing world standards and promising practices in relevant areas; and reinforcing the international image of the regions. At the same time, social and economic development gains momentum, which leads to an increase in the overall competitiveness of the territories.

For example, preparation for the XXVII Summer Universiade in Kazan in 2013 transformed the capital of Tatarstan; the event was organized by the federal authorities in cooperation with the International University Sports Federation (FISU). More than 150 facilities were built and about 380 more venues were reconstructed specifically for the Universiade; these include 36 new sports facilities (including a stadium for 45 thousand seats, the Aquatics Palace of Water Sports, the Rowing Centre, etc.), the unique Universiade Village, the Kazan International Airport infrastructure, two railway stations in Kazan, 11 transport interchanges, 39 pedestrian crossings, 3 metro stations and other modern, cost-effective facilities. In the historical centre of Kazan, over than 300 buildings were restored, 212 kilometres of roads were repaired and built on 149 city streets, more than 20 new hotels were opened, which promoted the development of tourism industry in the region.

Sports facilities constructed for the Universiade are widely used for the development of physical culture and mass sports, hosting international and all-Russian competitions. Many sports complexes, as well as residential and public buildings in the Universiade Village, were transferred to Tatarstan universities. All this gave a new impetus to the development of the higher education system in the region.

The intangible part of the Universiade heritage also includes the establishment of specialized organizational structures staffed by highly professional personnel with experience in preparing and conducting major public events, and the development of volunteering in Russia. Founded in 2009, the Directorate of the Universiade subsequently organized more than 120 international and all-Russian sports and other events, currently operating as ANO Directorate of Sports and Social Projects.

The Directorate implemented several significant projects, including the 45th World Professional Skills Championship according to *WorldSkills* standards, held in 2019 in Kazan. More than 1,300 contestants from 63 countries took part in the event, organized jointly with the international non-profit association *WorldSkills International*. The legacy of the world championship of blue-collar professions was the International Exhibition Centre “Kazan Expo” and a large amount of high-quality equipment and inventory that was subsequently transferred to vocational schools. Together with the international experience with competition within certain professions, all this prompted the transition to modern standards of personnel training in Tatarstan and the spread of best practices in this area in other Russian regions. A material and technical base and platforms for training specialists according to the standards of the non-profit association *WorldSkills International* were created in Tatarstan. By the end of 2021, over 6 thousand people had passed demonstration exams according to *WorldSkills* standards.

Involvement in international projects that have an educational focus and encourage the exchange of advanced management technologies helps to improve the quality of regional and corporate management, bringing the level of training to international standards and advancing human potential in general. These factors are essential for increasing the investment attractiveness of the regions [7, p. 128].

Constructed specifically for the *WorldSkills* championship, Kazan Expo is one of the largest international exhibition centres

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in Russia; its opening was a milestone in the development of the regional infrastructure of exhibition and fair activities, since the platform was designed for hosting business events at the all-Russian and international level. The capacity of the complex is more than 10 thousand people.

Thus, the modern practice of holding major international competitions in Russian regions gives a new meaning to the traditional concept of the tangible and intangible heritage of events [8].

*It should be noted that in an open economy, the competitiveness of the regional social and economic system can be boosted through recommendations and proposals of international organizations, as well as participation in their programmes and projects. Status of international organizations with which regions can collaborate in this area is very extensive, ranging from the UN to international industry associations and professional communities.*

The Investment Development Agency of the Republic of Tatarstan actively cooperates with the UN and its intergovernmental organizations, such as UNCTAD, the United Nations Association of Russia (UNA-Russia), the UN Information Centre in Moscow (UNIC), etc. In February 2020, the presentation “Russian Regions: Republic of Tatarstan – Sustainable Development Goals” was made at the UN headquarters in New York. Through UNCTAD, in particular, specialists in the field of attracting investment are trained according to the latest methods. Experts from the UN organizations are invited to Tatarstan for the exchange of experience and the advanced professional training of personnel. In order to improve the work of public-private partnerships (PPP) in the region, a joint report on the potential for using PPP in the Republic of Tatarstan was prepared in cooperation with the UN Economic Commission for Europe.

As for the development and promotion of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the UN, active members of Tatarstan youth organizations interact through participation in educational initiatives and involvement in global reports on the



youth agenda and achievement of the SDGs. Kazan (Volga region) Federal University regularly holds the Kazan International Model UN with the participation of Russian and foreign students.

The Republic of Tatarstan has been cooperating with UNESCO for many years. Tatarstan is the only Russian region with three properties on the UNESCO World Heritage List: the Kazan Kremlin (2000), the Bolgar Historical and Archaeological Complex (2014) and the sites of the town-island of Sviyazhsk (2017). Mintimer Shaimiev, the first President and State Councilor of Tatarstan, has been named UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Intercultural Dialogue. There are UNESCO departments operating in the Republic, and joint youth and educational projects are implemented. The Republic regularly hosts major international events organized by UNESCO. Kazan is part of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network (UCCN). Tatarstan became one of the first Russian regions to sign a communiqué on cooperation with UNESCO (2003). UNESCO supported events dedicated to the 1000th anniversary of Kazan (2005) and 200th anniversary of Kazan University (2014). The fact that the contacts of the republic with UNESCO are rather diverse reaffirms the increasing role of Russian regions in the development of relations between our country and this particular international organization [9, p. 11].

*Youth policy* is becoming an important connecting link of international partnership. Multiple youth initiatives and projects in the field of entrepreneurship, science, volunteering, and public diplomacy are being implemented within the BRICS group. In October 2020, Kazan hosted the V Global Forum of Young Diplomats of the BRICS countries. In July 2015, the First BRICS Youth Summit was held in the capital of Tatarstan; the heads of the Ministries of Youth Affairs of the BRICS countries took part in the event. It should be noted that, according to many analysts, BRICS can become the main pole of the emerging multipolar world [10; 11].

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Moreover, a representative office of the Global Shapers Community (GSC) of the World Economic Forum operates on the basis of the Academy of Youth Diplomacy of the Republic of Tatarstan, a public organization based in Kazan.

With the support of the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), an international non-profit organization of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Republic of Tatarstan regularly hosts joint events, such as the Kazan OIC Youth Entrepreneurship Forum, the International Youth Model of the OIC and the Forum of Young Diplomats of the OIC countries, supported by the Council of Young Diplomats of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Since 2012, the “Selet” Tatarstan Republic Youth Social Fund has been a membership organization of the ICYF. In 2022, the Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum chose Kazan as the youth capital of the countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. The fact that Sergey Lavrov, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, participated in inauguration ceremony of Kazan as the youth capital of the OIC underscores the significance of this event for cooperation with Muslim states.

Tatarstan is also working to strengthen ties with foreign industry organizations.

*Foreign economic relations.* The Ministry of Industry and Trade of the Republic of Tatarstan cooperates with the Association of Turkish Machine Manufactures and the Business Advisory Council for Libya, as well as participates in the events organized by the Council for Interregional Cooperation in the Volga-Yangtze format.

For 10 years, the Tatarstan Investment Development Agency has been a member of the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA), an international non-governmental organization established in 1995 by the UN Conference on Trade and Development. Representatives of Tatarstan take an active part in events under the auspices of WAIPA.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food of the Republic of Tatarstan cooperates with the Eurasian Economic Commission (EEC), working on the implementation of joint cooperation projects with partners from member states of the Eurasian Economic Union.

*Healthcare.* In October 2021, Kazan conducted exercises of international teams of rapid response to emergency situations of a sanitary and epidemiological nature. Co-sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO), the event was attended by approximately 100 people from 11 countries of Europe and the CIS.

Healthcare organizations in Tatarstan are accredited according to international industry standards and conduct external quality assessments of medical laboratories under international programmes. With the support of global professional associations, Kazan holds international master classes, attended by employees of medical research and educational centres.

*Culture.* Tatarstan actively cooperates with the international Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) under the Organization of Islamic Cooperation. In Tatarstan, joint exhibitions, seminars and conferences are held regularly, and the educational funds of universities are being replenished with art literature.

As part of collaboration with international theatrical associations and unions, in 2010, the Tatarstan Union of Theatre Workers started to hold the International Theatre Festival of Turkic Peoples “Nauruz” in Kazan. The Tatarstan Union of Composers has been organizing the international “Pearls of Tatar Music” concerts where leading foreign orchestras perform the music of Tatarstan composers. Kazan annually hosts major international theatre and music festivals. Together with foreign cinematographic organizations, the Tatarstan Union of Cinematographers has been holding the Kazan International Festival of Muslim Cinema (KIFMC) since 2005; it has become one of the hallmarks of the region.

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*International sports federations and organizations.* Tatarstan prepares and holds international competitions in cooperation with more than 15 international sports federations.

### **Conclusion. Promising Areas of Cooperation**

Lately, the system and structure of international relations has been under serious consideration. Russia successfully involves the potential of the regions in implementing the consistent policy towards creating a multipolar world. This is facilitated by the established system of international cooperation at the level of federal subjects and the extensive experience of coordinated work with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russia. The system is resilient to the negative impact of the U.S. sanctions policy against Russia, since the current formats of cooperation at the subnational level persist and continue to develop. Regions also actively contribute to the implementation of the key directions of Russian foreign policy.

Among all the forms of international cooperation of Russian regions, interaction with international organizations is of utmost importance; while federal subjects are authorized to engage with said organizations, this particular type of work is not sufficiently widespread and explored. A study of the experience of Tatarstan in this area reveals ample opportunities to boost economic and social development of territories through cooperation with international organizations. This demonstrates viability of this form of external relations, which additionally ensures that federal subjects are promoting national interests in the world.

Increased external pressure on Russia due to the situation in Ukraine makes it necessary to diversify and adjust the focus of international cooperation. We can see two promising directions of expansion of foreign relations for the region, based on the historical multilateral ties between Tatarstan and the East and West, as well as the established cooperation of the Republic with international organizations and integration structures. These

directions of foreign relations – namely, cooperation with the countries of the Islamic world and the Middle East and participation in Eurasian integration processes – are among Russia's current foreign policy priorities. In both areas, Tatarstan has laid a significant groundwork: the level of business, economic, social and cultural ties is high; there are foreign representative offices of the Republic; and contacts have been established with officials and the business community. Tatarstan promotes cooperation with Muslim countries at the level of international organizations, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and its structures. Extensive work is also carried out within the framework of the Strategic Vision Group "Russia – Islamic World". The Eurasian vector covers not only neighbouring countries, but also Turkey, China, and several other Asian countries with which Tatarstan has strong business relations. The Eurasian direction of cooperation is supported by many integration mechanisms created with the participation of Russian authorities. It should be noted that Kazan regularly hosts international events of the highest level, including the CIS, EAEU and other Eurasian structures. This adds momentum to the regional level of cooperation. In these vectors of cooperation, long-term work with industry and humanitarian associations and structures (including youth organizations) is quite promising.

It should also be noted that regions promote links between Russia and a number of international organizations, for example UNESCO, and help to establish new forms of cooperation, such as partnerships with international associations and structures at the local government level.

In conclusion, international relations at the level of local authorities, including cooperation and exchange of municipal practices within international organizations, are the least politicized, which is highly relevant at the present stage. Thus, cooperation with international organizations has become an important factor in strengthening foreign economic and humanitarian ties of regions in a number of priority directions of

Russian foreign policy. It remains a significant driver for regional development.

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