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**TOURISM AS METHOD OF FORMING ETHNO-CONFESSIONAL  
TOLERANCE IN NORTH CAUCASUS**

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***Abstract***

The article considers the problem of searching the ways towards mutual understanding and concord between peoples, based on the ethno-confessional tolerance principles. The key object of the research is the North Caucasian Region, a unique multicultural, multinational and multiconfessional community in the Russian Federation, which has been the centre of ethno-confessional tensions and conflictogenity over the years. More than a hundred peoples belonging to different cultures, language groups and practising all world religions live in this region. Special emphasis is put on the Chechen Republic, worldwide notorious for its recent military history, experiencing a hard stage of revival after the long military conflict. The Chechen people are a unique community having their special national culture with a well-preserved tribal structure, which greatly differs from other North Caucasian ethnic groups.

Today's objective necessity and qualitative changes in the social and political life of the North Caucasian peoples demand a new paradigm of ensuring peace and security in the North Caucasus, based on the positive dialogue of cultures and tolerant attitude to diverse ethnic, confessional traditions and values existing in the region. The North Caucasian peoples should choose a new direction of the economic development, which can become an effective alternative to confrontation. Tourism is considered to be a way towards mutual understanding between peoples with different, even opposite, attitudes to reality. Tourism contributes to the knowledge of ethnic history and culture, helps to justify and accept other people's approaches to life, beliefs, values, traditions and customs; promotes good-neighbourly coexistence.

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**Keywords:** Ethno-confessional tolerance, tourism, North Caucasus, Chechen Republic.



## 1. Introduction

The relevance of discussion held in the modern society about the conditions of ensuring peace and security on the planet causes continual growth of scientific and practical interest in the problem of tolerant relationships among social communities. This problem has taken on particular importance today, when the world is again on the verge of the world war and mankind should take advantage of every possibility to preserve peace. One-track thinking, ideological intolerance in solving controversial issues, consequent mutual distrust, increased tensions and aggression lead to new conflicts between peoples. That is why, it is very important in conflict situations to use practical skills of establishing dialogue and constructive relationships between opponents based on the mutual respect of the mindset, behaviour, political or religious beliefs.

In a preamble of the international document adopted at the meeting of the Earth Charter Commission at the UNESCO headquarters (the Earth Charter, 2000), it is recorded that “in the midst of a magnificent diversity of cultures and life forms we are one human family and one Earth community with a common destiny” and we must “bring forth a sustainable global society founded on respect for nature, universal human rights, economic justice, and a culture of peace”. Sixteen principles of the Earth Charter also include “a culture of tolerance”.

The ideas of peoples’ peaceful coexistence, based on tolerance principles, give humankind the chance to survive and develop under the conditions of current political and economic instability and sociocultural and ethno-confessional diversity. According to Declaration of Principles on Tolerance adopted by the General Conference of UNESCO in 1995, tolerance ideals in relations between political institutions, social, ethnic and religious groups are prerequisite to ensuring peace, security and sustainable socioeconomic development of the society. Today it is important to find the right direction and choose optimum methods of forming a tolerant society.

## 2. Problem Statement

Although the problem to be considered has a great significance in the global aspect, it also evokes particular scientific interest in terms of security of the certain areas which are characterised by ethno-confessional diversity. Therefore, the article leaves aside the general estimation of tolerance in the world, but focuses on studying this problem at a micro-regional level. The key object of the research is the North Caucasus, a region with rather controversial worldwide reputation, notorious for its recent military history. The matter is that the security level of the whole Russian Federation directly depends on this region’s sustainable development.

The region currently faces an array of political and sociocultural problems but, as experience has shown, the compulsory solution of these problems does not give good results. In this regard, the crucial task is to carry out the scientific analysis of ethno-confessional tolerance of the North Caucasian community. On the one hand, the region has a wide experience of extremism prevention under conditions of joint residence of peoples with different ethnic and religious traditional values. On the other hand, the region is characterised by high ethno-confessional tension and conflictogenity.

People have to search for new ways towards mutual understanding and concord based on the tolerance principles, and these ways include tourism. Tourism is an effective and productive attempt to get acquainted with and understand every national community's social and ethical uniqueness; it helps, if not to completely accept, but at least mostly to justify different views of the same problems and phenomena, without causing confrontation. At the world's leading travel trade show ITB in Berlin on March 9, 2017, the UNWTO Secretary-General, Mr. Taleb Rifai, said that "beyond the measurable advances that tourism can make possible, it is also a bridge to better mutual understanding among people from all walks of life."

### **3. Research Questions**

The research focuses on the basic methods of forming ethno-confessional tolerance in the community, which is moulded by means of tourist exchanges in the relationships between people with different sociopolitical views, religious organisations and authorities as a peace and security factor in the North Caucasian Region.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to perform the analysis of ethno-confessional tolerance in the North Caucasus and to substantiate tourism's role as a means of facilitating mutual understanding and concord between peoples.

### **5. Research Methods**

Considering the problem of tolerance, the authors applied theoretical research methods of analysis and synthesis, which gave the opportunity to use the conclusions based on studying particular cases and to connect separate mental and natural language elements of tolerance into a single whole.

The empirical research methods including studying references and Internet resources, observation, survey, expert evaluation method were applied to analyse the ethno-confessional situation in the North Caucasus. The well-founded results of the research, conclusions and recommendations are based on the objective data.

### **6. Findings**

Different peoples understand tolerance in a different way, which reflects diverse forms of human relations. The origin of the term goes back to a Latin verb "tolerare" – "to bear", "to endure", "to suffer", connected with cases when a person had to bear, keep a thing in hand, making certain efforts, suffering and tolerating. The term "tolerance" has become more widespread in its English interpretation – where along with the meaning "to endure" it also means "to permit", i.e. to treat any person or a thing with indulgence and liberality. Thus, this concept possesses a certain limit of tolerating another person or phenomenon even if they seem odd and provoke aversion or resistance. The French interpret the term "tolerance" even more loyally; they understand it as respect for other people's freedom, mentality,

behaviour, political or religious views. The word “tolerance” in the Arabic language seems to be the most concise one, it includes the following connotations: forgiveness, indulgence, gentleness, sympathy, favour towards other people.

O. HOFFE, the German philosopher, associates tolerance with the idea of freedom and justice. According to him, tolerance means guarantee of other people’s freedom or, to be more precise, respect for a different world-view and behaviour, free in their otherness. The scholar states that the tolerance principle has become generally recognised thanks to confessional tolerance as a result of long spiritual, social and political progress (Hoffe, 1991).

In Russian, tolerance means “the moral quality characterising the relation to other people’s interests, political and religious beliefs, habits and behaviour. It is expressed in seeking mutual understanding and harmonisation of diverse interests and opinions without applying pressure, mainly by means of explanation and persuasion...” (Guseynov, & Kon, 1989, p.351).

The term “tolerance” is shown here as an active sociopolitical position of a person or a social group. It is not humble slavish patience, but tolerance for the sake of achieving spiritual, sociopolitical concord, mutual understanding, compromise between different confessions, ethnic and social groups, political organisations; it is tolerance that leads to solidarity and good. The unquestionable advantage of this definition, in our opinion, is that it includes an ethical basis of the tolerant attitude to the representatives of other ethnic groups and religions.

It is worth noting that ethnic and confessional aspects are to some extent included in all definitions of tolerance, which allows speaking about their dominating character in the content of this phenomenon. Thus, the ethno-confessional dominant is a key idea in the historical development of the concept “tolerance”.

The principle of ethno-confessional tolerance is a set of theoretically substantiated and corroborated methods of forming such relationships between social, ethnic, confessional and other groups that ensure peace and security. Sociopolitical aspects of tolerance are expressed in justifying and accepting other people's attitudes to life, beliefs, lifestyles, traditions, customs, ideas. In this regard, the attempts of economically developed countries to impose on other peoples their own vision of the development trends and liberal values are absolutely unacceptable (Kokarevich, & Sizova, 2015). At the same time, tolerance should have its limits: it is impossible to tolerate terrorism, extremism, chauvinism (Kasyanova, & Vinogradova, 2012).

The problem of searching ways towards mutual understanding between different social groups in the multicultural environment has concerned scholars of all epochs. The issues of inevitable good-neighbourly coexistence of different ethnic communities in the long-term prospect and necessity of creating international communication culture remain a cornerstone of forming social relations. According to A.J. Toynbee (1934-1961), the English historian, the United States offered the world the ideal model of human coexistence. The population of this country was transformed into the unifying multicultural and multinational community which the residents consider the promised land, the goal of human aspirations. However, the issue of interracial conflicts during the formation of the American cultural identity is becoming more critical in the course of time, and tolerance problems acquire global and sometimes unsolvable forms. Other researchers (Korobeynikova, 2015, p. 627) suggest the idea of soft globalisation

that “could balance or harmonize global and local interests and values, generate equal opportunities for members of various nations, cultures, ethnic groups or minorities acting on the global civil arena.”

The North Caucasus is the unique region occupying 3.5 % area of the Russian Federation. The peoples of the Caucasus were first mentioned by the Greek and Roman authors living in the VI century BC – I century AD. Today more than 21.5 million residents live in the region (14.3 % of the population of the Russian Federation). They are representatives of more than hundred peoples belonging to different language groups and practising all world religions. The region was characterised by such great dynamism of ethnic processes that now it is impossible to identify autochthons. Historically it is an area of intensive change of different cultures, which has caused its ethnic diversity. At the same time, this mixed ethnic picture makes national Russian culture unique, interesting and attractive to the foreign tourists.

Ethnic groups of the North Caucasus mainly belong to three language families: Indo-European, North Caucasian and Turkic. The Indo-European family is represented by Slavic, Armenian, Greek and Iranian (Ossetians and Tats) groups. The North Caucasian family is subdivided into two groups: Abkhazo-Adyghean (the Adygheis, Kabardians, Circassians, the Shapsug, Abasins, Abkhazians) and Nakho-Dagestanian (Chechens, the Ingush, Dagestanis, Kists, etc). The Turkic family consists of Balkars, Karachais, Kumyks, Nogais, Stavropol Turkmen, Tatars, Azerbaijanians, Crimean Tatars, Meskhetian Turks, etc. There are some ethnic groups in the region that belong to other language families (Akopyan, 2013a).

Eastern Christianity is considered to be the most widespread confession in the North Caucasus. It was spread among Armenians, Greeks, Russians, Ukrainians, as well as the majority of Ossetians and a small part of Kabardians. Before adopting Islam some autochthon peoples of the North Caucasus (Daghestanis, Adygheis) also professed Christianity (mainly the elite). Islam became widely practised by the majority of the mountain peoples of the North Caucasus. Having forced out pagan beliefs, Islam was first established in Southern and Central Dagestan, later – among Adygheis and the Vainakh. The overwhelming majority of Muslims of the region belong to Sunni Islam. Shia Islam was spread among a part of the population of Southern Dagestan. Buddhism was established for the most part among Kalmyks. Judaism is a religion of mountain Jews (Tats-Judaists). Protestant sects such as Pentecostals, Adventists and others spread among a part of the Slavic population, Eastern Christian sects spread among a part of Cossacks and Russian peasantry. (Akopyan, 2013b)

Thus, the modern territory of the North Caucasus looks like a patchwork quilt. It is home to different ethnic groups with unique history, culture, customs. It should come as no surprise that the history of the North Caucasian peoples remembers both the long periods of peaceful coexistence and the cruel military conflicts breaking out in the region. The reasons of these conflicts were both political ambitions and the mentality differences caused by historical and ethno-cultural prerequisites. According to S. Huntington (1993), the professor of Harvard University, there is a fault line between civilizations where the basic centres of crises and bloodshed move.

The qualitative changes, taking place during the last decades in the social and political life of the North Caucasian peoples, determined the objective necessity to choose instead of confrontation between peoples a new paradigm of ensuring peace and security in the North Caucasus, based on the positive dialogue of cultures, acceptance of and tolerance to diverse ethnic, confessional traditions and values

existing in the region. The research conducted by Astvatsurova (2017), Astvatsurova & Linets (2016), Astvatsurova & Jafarov (2016) have made a great contribution to the problem under study. The authors theoretically analysed political, sociological and conflictological specificity of ethnic and confessional processes in the region and offered their own vision of ways of forming tolerant consciousness to achieve stability and security in the Russian society.

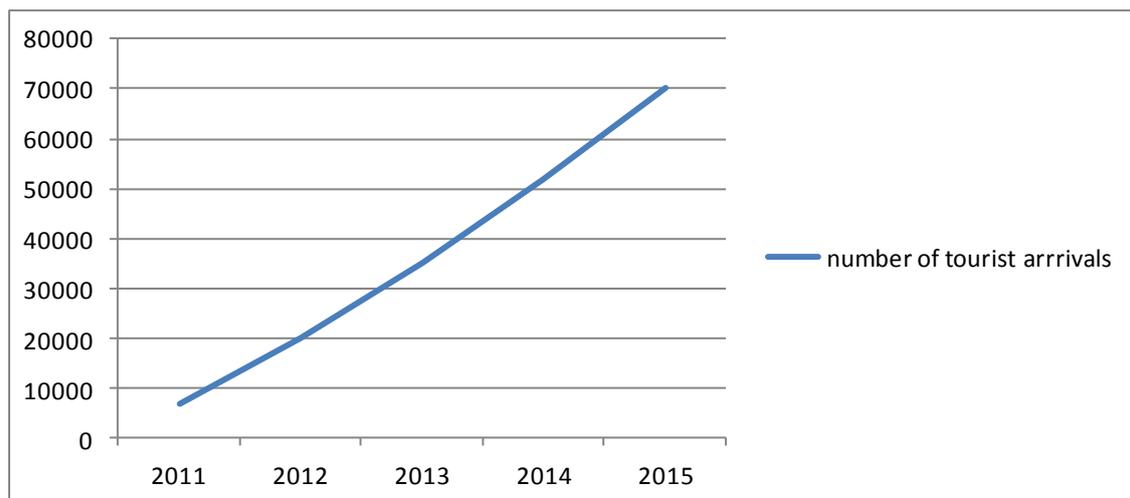
In this regard, perhaps, the Chechen Republic is one of the most illustrative and graphic examples. It has a controversial reputation nowadays and it is notorious worldwide for its recent warfare history. The Chechen Republic is experiencing a hard stage of resurgence after a long military conflict and its purpose is not only to restore the territories destroyed by the war but also to revive unique national culture.

The Chechen community is one of the unique features of Chechnya. Though the members of this community are often called Caucasians but, in fact, they differ from the other ethnic groups of Caucasian peoples. This is the only community in the Caucasus where the tribal structure has remained unchanged (Kolchugina, & Saykhanov, 2016). The unique situation is that Chechens live simultaneously in the system of three laws: the Constitution and laws of the Russian Federation, adats (customary law) of the Chechen people and Sharia law. There is no precedent in the world when absolutely different law systems coexist in harmony in one community.

The Chechen community is deeply religious. Today in the Chechen Republic there are 931 mosques: 314 cathedral mosques where Friday prayers are practised, and 617 quarter mosques where everyday prayers are made. One mosque is accounted for by 1490 inhabitants and it is the highest rate in Russia. There are seven Orthodox churches in the republic, five of which were opened in 2014.

The analysis of the ethnic structure has shown that today Chechnya is a republic with a dominant titular nation where Chechens total 95.3 %. Before the military operations the Russian-speaking people constituted the vast majority of the population in the northern areas of the republic. During active military operations (1991-1996) a considerable quantity of Russians were forced to leave the Chechen Republic, and from 2002 till 2010 their numerical composition decreased almost twice. Chechnya has entered the list of the regions which are more often abandoned. The major reasons of this situation, in our opinion, besides the challenging political circumstances, include Chechens' particular mentality, insufficient understanding and acceptance of specific national culture from the Russian-speaking population and lack of tolerance in relationships between Chechens and Russians.

Today, when there is a psychological and information war against Russia in the world, the Chechen Republic confidently implements the policy towards the revival of spiritual and moral principles of the Chechen community in Russia's legal environment, at the same time preserving and popularizing traditional and religious values. The national leadership considers the revival of the multinational community of the Chechen Republic based on the tolerance principles to be one of the priority tasks. And the development of inbound tourism may be the first step to creating an image of a friendly and hospitable destination. During the recent years Chechnya has experienced a steady growth of tourist arrivals, which is visually shown in figure 01.



**Figure 01.** Dynamics of the tourist arrivals in the Chechen Republic during 2011-2015

The development of the regional accommodation facilities indicates the considerable growth of tourists’ interest towards the Chechen destination. The data are presented in table 01.

**Table 01.** The key performance indicators of collective accommodation facilities of the Chechen Republic in 2015

Number of collective accommodation facilities	Number of rooms in collective accommodation facilities	Number of beds in collective accommodation facilities	Number of nights in collective accommodation facilities
36	731	1 646	82 828

Thus, the tourist flow to the Chechen Republic has increased to 70 thousand arrivals a year. The tourist route “From War – to Peace and Creation” has become a high-profile event in the region. Today, the tourist administration is involved in negotiations about visiting Chechnya by the descendants of Chechens-Muhadjiruns currently living in Syria and Jordan. In 2015 a delegation of China’s tourism industry representatives visited the Chechen Republic in the frameworks of the advertising tour. Visitors were enraptured with Grozny’s beauty, unique culture and delicious cuisine. The Chechnya’s tourism industry is constantly developing tourist programmes with creativity and initiative.

The methods of forming ethno-confessional tolerance are different: a constructive negotiating process between stakeholders at different levels, consensus search in dissenting opinions on existing problems, diplomacy, flexible tactics in conflict situations, etc. The authors of this article are sure that the guarantor of long-term ethno-confessional tolerance can be considered thorough knowledge and deep penetration into the ethnic history and harmonious autochthonic cultures, which are not aggravated by dramatic military conflicts. The result is the inseparable complicated interconnection of social practices, cultural experience and cooperation of diverse peoples – indigenous and migrant, conquerors and the conquered, large and small-numbered groups. It is the case when one can switch from the state of “patience” to the state of “tolerance”, which is based on the reliable positions, is not afraid of comparison with other opinions and does not avoid spiritual competition.

The peoples of the North Caucasus should choose a new direction of economic development and shape a favorable destination image based on tolerance principles. And in this regard, tourism can become the crucial factor contributing to mutual understanding between the peoples with different, sometimes opposite, attitudes to reality.

Nowadays, the majority of the countries in the world recognize tourism not only as an important element of economic development, but also as an effective tool of reconciling and rallying different peoples and cultures, forming tolerance and readiness for cooperation (Nedzelsky, 2012). Acquaintance with another culture allows one to better understand its bearers, which finally, promotes friendly relationships and ensures peace on the planet. Virtually all international declarations in tourism point out this fact. Tourism plays a link role in peoples' public life; it is an ideal structure and a flexible tool for enhancing communication techniques. In the context of globalisation, tourism opens new development prospects for cultural identity and intercultural exchange fostering constructive dialogue between peoples and nations.

## **7. Conclusion**

The modern world consists of dissimilar civilisations, which have to learn to coexist with others. It assumes transition from the security based on intolerance, xenophobia, hatred, to the security based on tolerance. Ethno-confessional tolerance is a phenomenon accumulating the complicated relationships between social, ethnic, confessional groups, which is manifested in their mutual tolerance, and makes considerable impact on the protection of the society from external and internal threats.

The importance of this problem for the whole world community is proved by the fact that the General Conference of UNESCO adopted Declaration of Principles on Tolerance, which affirms that "tolerance is not only the cherished principle, but also a necessity for peace and the economic and social advancement of all peoples" (Declaration of principles of tolerance, 1995).

At the same time, the ethno-confessional tolerance principle, generated within the western liberalism, cannot be universal for all regions with no regard for their specificity. Therefore, being a multinational and multiconfessional state, having great tragic experience in achieving the spiritual and sociopolitical concord between peoples, the Russian Federation pays particular attention to the issues of stabilisation of interethnic relationships. In particular, in 2012 the President confirmed the "Strategy of the National Policy of the Russian Federation till 2025". Currently the so-called Law on the Russian Nation is being actively discussed in mass-media, and the Ethnicity and International Relations Academic Council is created under the presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences.

These initiatives have special importance for the multinational North Caucasian Region where the problem resolution of the ethno-confessional tolerance can become an effective factor of ensuring peace and security. In our opinion, tourism is one of the key methods of forming tolerance, which can be a moral and intellectual basis for mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples, promote the achievement of peace and concord in the region.

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