

Religion

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During our MPD research trip to Türkiye, I had the opportunity to learn more about religion in the country and the role it plays in Turkish society. Türkiye is officially a secular state, but a majority of its citizens are Muslims. However, this does not necessarily mean that Türkiye is a deeply religious country. It is important to consider how Turkish citizens view religion and faith. Many Muslims in Türkiye do not strictly adhere to Sharia religious commandments, the country is generally accepting of alcohol consumption, and it does not discriminate against women for religious reasons. Similarly, followers of other religions, such as Christians and Jews, are able to practice their faith without issue.

Another aspect of religion in Türkiye that impressed us was the country's protection of religious buildings and monuments of different faiths. In Istanbul, we visited the Hagia Sophia, a former Orthodox church (which was converted to a mosque during the conquer of Istanbul in 1453, turned into a museum after the founding of the Turkish Republic and was reverted back to a mosque in 2020. While being used as an active mosque, Hagia Sophia remains open to visitors of all faiths.

I was also surprised to learn that the country has a small but vibrant Catholic community. We had the chance to attend a Catholic mass at the San Antonio di Padova Catholic Church in Istanbul, where the service was conducted in Turkish. It was interesting to see how Catholicism had adapted to Turkish culture and language, with hymns and prayers translated into Turkish. Despite being a minority religion in the country, the Catholic community seemed to have found its place in Türkiye.

It can be said that Türkiye has developed a very flexible and modern attitude towards religion despite the tense situation in the region in this regard. In this sense, it is very similar to Kazakhstan. Türkiye, as the former center of and the natural successor to the Ottoman Empire, has a rich Islamic heritage, while Kazakhstan, as a former part of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, had a history of religious suppression under tsar and communist rule. Today, both countries have taken legislative steps on the issue of religious practice. In Türkiye, for example, there are laws that protect the rights of minority

religions and regulate the construction of religious buildings. Similarly, Kazakhstan has adopted a law on religious freedom that guarantees the right to freedom of conscience and religion.

Despite these positive developments, challenges remain in both countries. For example, there are concerns about the rise of extremist groups and the impact of political and social polarization on religious tolerance. Nonetheless, as a traveler, it was interesting to see how different religions and communities could coexist and respect each other's beliefs in Türkiye.