

Diversity from the Volga Riverbank



The author is in front of Vladimir Lenin Statue in Kazan, Russia.

Teuku Kemal Fasya

From June 24 to 30, the author had the opportunity to visit Kazan and Moscow, Russia. This visit was part of an educational and research project to be carried out by several universities in Aceh under the institutional diplomacy of Wali Nanggroe.

Kazan is the capital of the Republic of Tatarstan, one of the 22 constituent entities of the Russian Federation that has been granted special powers and a distinctive constitutional framework. The predominantly Muslim population of the Republic of Tatarstan is a distinguishing feature of the region, despite the fact that Muslims constitute a minority. The introduction of Islam to Tatarstan was not the first instance in Russian history; however, it became the most significant, profoundly influencing national culture. The majority of Muslims in Russia adhere to the Shafi'i school of Sunni Islam. Nevertheless, it is notable that a considerable minority adheres to the Hanafi school of thought, which originated in Tatarstan.

The Kazan Kremlin complex provides an illustrative example of the enduring reality of truth and pluralism. The term "Kremlin" is derived from the Russian word for "fortress," historically providing a haven from external threats, including those posed by barbarian invaders, for the Russian community.

In the realm of tourist information, this historical site is designated as 'A Temple of All Religions.' Visitors can explore a variety of religious structures, including Orthodox churches, synagogues, and mosques. Notably, the Kul Sharif Mosque is the largest mosque in Europe outside of Turkey. Originally constructed in the 16th century, it underwent reconstruction in 2005. The history of the magnificent blue Kul Sharif Mosque is intricately linked to the historiography of Islam in Russia. Following its destruction, the mosque was rebuilt on a larger scale and has since become an emblem of hospitality and warmth among Muslims. Each day, hundreds of tourists ascend the minaret to observe the Muslim prayer ritual.

The silence side of Russia

This is important to clarify in the context of extrapolating the values of diversity that should flourish in every part of God's earth. For Indonesia, the idea of diversity must continue to resonate, as it is essential to maintaining the national identity of a nation that encompasses numerous tribes and cultures within its hundreds of ethnicities.

This aspect is less obvious in Russia because of the complex global history of the former Soviet Union in modern times. Much is misunderstood and distorted because of its poor relations with the United States and its allies after World War II and during the Cold War. This situation is exacerbated by the fact that the conflict with Ukraine is often viewed only from Kyiv's perspective, leaving Moscow's voice unheard.

For Indonesia, relations with Moscow go beyond mere bilateral formalities and are characterized by close and friendly ties. Many national political figures have served as diplomats there, including R. Subandrio, Alexander Maramis, Adam Malik, Manai Sophian, Rachmat Witoelar, and Hamid Awaluddin.

The problems are not only due to Western media bias. There are also internal factors and challenges. The use of the Cyrillic alphabet and the limited prevalence of English in Russia contribute to many people's inability to see the gem of diversity that is this former Iron Curtain country.

While there was persecution and destruction of religious values during the Soviet era, Russia has undergone significant changes after Perestroika and Glasnost. The communist political system collapsed in the 1990s, and the influence of capitalism and freedom has affected many aspects of Russian life today. Nevertheless, the cultural sediment of long-term repression remains in the mental and behavioral expressions of the Russian people, who speak less and smile less.

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