

satisfaction with the outcome of the Lithuanian visit seemed overly optimistic, in the circumstances.

As another variable factor in the nationalities question, *glasnost* and the emphasis on human rights and values have elevated the importance of religious freedom. Here again, Gorbachev, impelled also by the need to strengthen popular support for *perestroika*, is pursuing the path of conciliation. So far, the Russian Orthodox Church has benefited most from this policy. It is now being extended to the Catholic and Protestant Churches of the Baltic states. Judging from the significant breakthroughs in Soviet-Vatican relations confirmed by both sides during Gorbachev's December visit with the Pope, it appears that Stalin's suppression of the Uniate Catholic Church in the Ukraine will shortly be completely revoked. Having obtained the Pope's blessing on economic *perestroika* Gorbachev, for his part, has pledged that religious believers of all faiths will have freedom of worship in the Soviet Union and that this right will be established by a new Soviet law on freedom of conscience.

It should be noted that the fifty million Muslims of Central Asia have yet to experience a similarly tolerant attitude. The reawakening of religious beliefs and practices among Soviet Muslims is reflected in the growing nationalist and inter-ethnic strife throughout the area. Potentially troublesome for the Soviet authorities is the continuing influence of Muslim fundamentalism from nearby Afghanistan and Iran, and perhaps even more so, is the tendency of better educated Muslims to look to Turkey as a model of change.

In abandoning the existing nationalities policy of "fusion", Gorbachev has insisted that there can be no acceptance of discrimination against minorities, or of economic autarky, frontier modifications and cultural isolation in any part of the Soviet Union. In comparison with the past situation, the new Party platform on the nationalities issue in September 1989 offers a radical, innovative and forward-looking perspective. With the emphasis on dialogue, conciliation and tolerance, it seems specially tailored to appeal to the sensitivities of the Baltic peoples. The platform promises a significant decentralization of political and economic power, giving each republic "sovereignty" over those matters that