

# Chechen Scholars on Chechnya

Julie Wilhelmsen and Erika Fatland, eds



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# Chechen Scholars on Chechnya

## Introduction

**Julie Wilhelmsen**

The purpose of this publication is, as the title indicates, to give Chechen scholars the opportunity to present to the English-speaking world their version of what has happened to Chechnya. Over the years, a great many books and articles dealing with this tiny republic in the Russian Federation have been published in Western academia, but we seldom hear from Chechen scholars. It is high time for them to take part in the discussion.

It might be easier to achieve a more 'objective' analysis of a conflict from the outside: however, those caught up in a conflict have not only the right to give their version, they also have a particular credibility when doing so. The scholars presented here have tried to remain in place at the Chechen State University in Grozny through these past twenty years of upheaval and war. Surely they have been as close to the object of study as it is possible to come.

For scholars working in a peaceful, pluralistic society it is easy to be critical and balanced. That is our mandate; it is what is expected of us. In a setting of war and ensuing authoritarianism, however, adhering to these virtues can be costly and even dangerous. The fairly balanced character of the accounts in this volume is therefore no trifling matter. It testifies to the personal integrity and quality of the authors. It also gives hope that Chechen academia can survive despite constant attempts at politicization.

**Abbas D. Osmayev** is a Candidate of Historical Sciences and Associate Professor at the Chechen State University. He has published widely on Chechnya and the Caucasus in both a historical and current perspective. His chapter presents a broad outline of the second Chechen war from its beginning in 1999 until 2005. It traces the military operations, the so-called political settlement and the installation of the Kadyrov regime, with the subsequent 'Chechenization' of the conflict.

Despite the top–down structure of the chapter, with a focus on Moscow’s policies, the core story here is that of the Chechen civilian population. Osmayev consistently draws into his account the devastating effects of the war between federal forces, separatists, Kadyrovtsy and Radical Islamists on the Chechen people. Building on this, the article explains something which has always been difficult to understand for the outsider: the initial legitimacy enjoyed by the Kadyrov regime. Caught between a rock and a hard place, the war-weary Chechen people supported Akhmad Kadyrov because he promised not only to fight the Radical Islamists but also to defend the population from the unspeakable atrocities of the federals.

However, the transfer of control to a Chechen regime did not make things much better. The Kadyrovtsy received a mandate for indiscriminate use of force – and they used it. The war turned into a civil war. Despite the widespread impression that the cycle starting with war, continuing with a political settlement and ending with ‘Chechenization’ has resulted in some kind of resolution of the conflict, this article shows how the war seems set to go on, and on. At the end of the chapter, Osmayev notes that several former separatists were elected into the 2005 Chechen parliament, and that can give a certain hint in the direction of concord. But we are still left with the uneasy feeling that there will be no peace in Chechnya until a true process of reconciliation has been carried through and the grievances of the people have been addressed from the top of the Russian political system. Today’s regional authorities in Chechnya are nowhere close to launching such a process of reconciliation. Their authority is still built on guns. As for the federal authorities, acknowledgement of their responsibility for the grave atrocities committed against Russian citizens in Chechnya is urgently needed.

**Tamara U. Elbuzdukayeva** is a Candidate of Historical Sciences and Associate Professor at the Chechen State University. Elbuzdukayeva writes on social and economic developments in the North Caucasus and has published widely on these issues in the early Soviet period. Her contribution to this publication is an historical analysis of the economic development of the Chechen republic since the beginning of the Soviet rule and until the present.

Elbuzdukayeva’s point of departure is the immense consequences of the Civil War upon the Chechen economy at the beginning of the century. She then describes how the industry was repaired by the state, and how the early Soviet regime went about turning Chechnya into a developed, industrialized oil-producing republic. Throughout her analysis, Elbuzdukayeva is concerned with how the macro-economy affected ordinary citizens, and she pays specific attention to the situa-



tion of Chechen women during Soviet rule. Elbuzdukayeva also describes the effects of the Second World War on the economy of the Chechen republic. The 1940s were a time of great destruction, but also of great activity in the republic.

The final and most substantial part of the chapter deals with the aftermath of the two Chechen wars in the 1990s. Elbuzdukayeva details the catastrophic consequences the warfare for the Chechen economy. She makes it clear how the grave social problems facing the Chechen population today are closely linked to the devastation of the economy, and argues that these problems cannot be solved without rebuilding and developing the entire Chechen economy, from heavy industry to the agricultural and social sectors.

**Vakhit Kh. Akayev** is a Doctor of Philosophy and Professor at the Chechen State University, and is also a member of the Chechen Academy of Sciences. Akayev has published widely on Chechen history, culture, society and religion. In this chapter Akayev makes a case for ordinary Chechens as Sufi Muslims and *not* Radical Islamists. After so many years of ‘terrorist talk’ framing Chechnya as a bastion of Wahhabism, such a comprehensive account of the various forms of Islam in the region is indeed pertinent.

Akayev explains the Islamization of the peoples of the North Caucasus, and looks into the recent Islamic revival during perestroika and glasnost. He pinpoints how traditional religious and ethnic identities are closely entangled and also shows how religious structures and politics are intertwined. Sufi brotherhoods have been instrumental in mobilizing regime support, but they also wield influence over political actors. Likewise, neo-Wahhabi ideas influenced the Dudaev regime, but the regime also employed religious slogans for its own purposes.

Akayev’s detailed and informative account emphasises the syncretic and changing character of religion in the region. He notes the misuse of key terms and distinctions in writings on Chechnya and tries to give words such as *taip*, *vird*, *Wahhabi* clear content and definition. As such, his chapter is a reply to other writers in the field but can also serve as an excellent introduction for those seeking a deeper understanding of the social and religious fabric of Chechnya.

The main focus of his chapter is the challenge that the conflict between traditional Sufi Islam and neo-Wahhabism poses to Chechen society. Neo-Wahhabism, a recent arrival, actually contradicts traditional Sufi Islam in a fundamental way, but the war provided fertile ground for these radical ideas. The conflict inherent in the different teachings of Sufism and neo-Wahhabism is underscored by a genera-

tional cleavage between the younger generation, who did not experience the deportation of the Chechens to Central Asia – an experience that in many ways constituted the Chechens as a nation – and the older generation that did. It is the younger generation who endorse neo-Wahhabi ideas and are drawn into the ranks of the Jamatist groups. The conflict between traditional Sufi Islam and neo-Wahhabism has long since left the level of theological debate, and is being played out in the fight for power and positions, very often taking on violent expression.

Despite Akaev's expressed optimism concerning the positive effect of the massive propagandistic counteroffensive launched against neo-Wahhabism in the region in recent years, he seems to believe that the only way to achieve stability in the long run is through establishing a dialogue between those representing traditional Islam and those representing neo-Wahhabism in Chechnya.

We welcome the opportunity to give these scholars the opportunity to make contact with a broader public. At the same time, it must be stressed that the views expressed here, as well as any shortcomings in the material, are the responsibility of the individual authors. Finally, we would like to thank the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs for financing the project which made this publication possible.

# The Chechen Republic: From 'Counter-Terrorist Operation' to Peace (1999–2005)

**Abbas D. Osmayev**

The events of the past decade have again put the Chechen Republic in the world news limelight. Chechnya has become the subject of renewed discussion (albeit without much success) on the part of such international organizations as the UN, OSCE, PACE, the Council of Europe, and influential human rights organizations, in addition to the parliaments and presidents of various democratic countries.

This article focuses on the events of 1999–2005: From the beginning of the second war, disguised under the euphemism of an 'anti-terrorist operation', right through to the election of the parliament, which finalized the formation of the governmental authorities of the republic. Along the way, the people of the republic have had to live through air and artillery shelling, 'cleansing' and terrorist attacks, kidnappings and arrests, a pathetic imitation of democratic procedures, and harassment on the grounds of nationality and religious cleavages. To this day, not all the causes and driving forces of the events in Chechnya are fully clear, a fact which surely bears some connection with processes within the general Russian context and in the world at large.

## **Before the 'second war'**

In the summer of 1999, Chechen and Dagestani Wahhabis and radicals united to form the Congress of Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan. Their efforts were directed at inciting an 'Islamic Jihad' in Dagestan, as the next step towards the 'complete and irreversible emancipation of the Caucasus from oppression by Russia'. In fact, the 'invasion' of the Tsumadin and Novolak (Auhovsky) regions by Wahhabi armed groups and the uprising among Dagestani Wahhabis in the Karamahinsk 'triangle' in August 1999 were the true reasons behind the start of the second Chechen war. The fact that the 'invasion' of Dagestan has been scrutinized and researched by various politicians and researchers subsequent to this can be explained by various factors,

as Aslan Malashenko has outlined in his *Islamic landmarks of the North Caucasus*.<sup>1</sup> Among these he notes the provocation so masterfully rigged by the Kremlin, which resulted in the ultimate defeat of the Chechen faction, as well as the fact that the autumn escalation of federal victories contributed to the victory of the pro-Putin 'Unity' political party in the December 1999 elections to the State Duma, inevitably opening the way to the presidency for Vladimir Putin in March 2000.

It has been hypothesized that there was some collusion between the Kremlin and Shamil Basayev, who agreed to sacrifice himself, in view of his impending defeat, to ensure the success of Vladimir Putin. According to another theory, Shamil Basayev, whose earlier efforts had not met with success in Chechnya – he had failed to achieve the consolidation of society, sideline his competitors (first and foremost, Aslan Maskhadov) from the political arena, or obtain foreign financial aid to facilitate economic recovery – decided now to boost his authority beyond the borders of the republic through of a new successful military operation. That would at the same time enable him to confirm his claim that his political and spiritual aura extended to other republics as well. The reasons for Basayev's militant action could also be seen as fulfilling the desire of the Chechen elite – more precisely, the 'Wahhabi' part of the Chechen elite – to elevate the idea of an Islamic state to a higher, more regionally-based level. In other words, to attempt to make such a state a reality on the basis of Chechnya and Dagestan, with the possibility of incorporating Ingushetia into the arrangement at some future point. (Malashenko 2001, p. 154)

It is worth noting that President Maskhadov and his supporters denounced the Wahhabis' invasion of Dagestan (contrary to the allegations in official Russian propaganda). At the same time, the head of Ichkeria failed to take any real measures aimed at halting the military provocation organized on the territory of which he was head of state. A thorough analysis of the situation, publications in the mass media, and the recollections of eyewitnesses and participants in the second war all indicate that Russia's security services were aware of the preparations being made for the 'invasion of Dagestan' – all the more so because undercover secret service agents had infiltrated the militia to the extent that they numbered among the units' crew. However, to bring about a resolution of the political crisis in Russia, a straightforward transfer of control over this particular situation was apparently in the interests of Russia's ruling elite. That is how the editor-in-chief of *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, Vitaly Tretyakov, explained the causes of the 'invasion':

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<sup>1</sup> A. Malashenko. *Islamic landmarks of the North Caucasus*. Moscow: Gandalf, 2001.

It is completely clear that the Chechens in Dagestan were circumvented here, having been given the chance to mess up this affair in order to secure a legitimate opportunity to restore the federal government in the Republic ... It is clear that this was a Russian secret service operation (not to confuse this affair with the bombing of houses), and that it was politically sanctioned at the very highest level.<sup>2</sup>

On 2 August, 1999 fighting broke out in the Tsumandinskiy district of Dagestan. Two days later, shooting began in the Botlikh district of Dagestan, and a helicopter was hit in the mountainous Chechen village of Kenkhi. The official statements by Moscow and Grozny about the events in Dagestan completely contradicted one another: Moscow claimed that detachments of Chechen militants had been deployed into Dagestan, while Grozny denied any involvement on the part of Chechens in these events.

Meanwhile, in Moscow, the government of Sergey Stepashin, who did not want to unleash a major war, was sent into retirement, and on 9 August, Boris Yeltsin appointed Vladimir Putin as Prime Minister, also identifying him as his successor as the President of Russia.

During the events of the summer of 1999, the absence of a mature civil society in Chechnya became acutely apparent, as well as the lack of any real political parties. While feeling the imminence of war and despite the fact that an absolute majority of the population of Chechnya were against its occurrence, there existed no organization that could feasibly express their collective will or that was capable of preventing the negative development of the situation in the region. In Grozny, rallies were held in opposition to a new war, but very few people participated: they felt that their opinion could not change anything, and that certain parties had huge vested interests in the occurrence of such a war.

### **Military operations**

On the evening of 25 August 1999, Russian planes bombed the villages of Serzhen-Yurt, Benoy, Kenkhi, and Vedensko Ushelie. On 27 August, Vladimir Putin flew to Dagestan, where he presented awards to local militiamen. Two days later, military operations were launched in the Kadar zone (in the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, and Kada) mainly involving the forces of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. On the night of 4 September, a house where the family of a military serviceman were living was blown up, in the town of Buinaksk. Just a day later, on 5 September several hundred militants penetrated Dagestan from Chechnya and came to occupy

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<sup>2</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 12 October 1999.

several villages in the Novolak district. For some reason, there were no Russian military units in the area, although they had previously been stationed there. On the night of 6 September, the Russian air force bombed villages in the Nozhai-Yurt and Gudermes districts, which resulted in dozens of people being killed and wounded.

On 9 September 1999, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin met with the Mufti of the North Caucasus. Also in attendance at the meeting was Mufti of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Akhmad Kadyrov, who, earlier on, had strongly condemned the armed provocation in Dagestan and was a staunch opponent of the development of the so-called Wahhabism in Chechnya.

In my view, neither the August nor the September fighting in Dagestan incited public support within Russian society as regards the idea of sending Russian troops into Chechnya. However, the bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow on 7 and 13 September, both of which were attributed to the Chechens, triggered an explosion of anti-Chechen hysteria, with new air raids and shellings of Chechnya, and numerous arrests of Chechens in Moscow and in other Russian cities. On 14 September, at a meeting of the State Duma, Vladimir Putin declared a temporary quarantine around the perimeter of the Chechen border. Four days later, he declared that Chechnya was a terrorism-controlled zone, where a 'surgical operation' was needed to excise this disease. He indicated that he would work actively with the Chechen diaspora – up to and including the formation of a government in exile.

On 20 September in Magas, the capital of Ingushetia, a meeting was held between President of Ingushetia Ruslan Aushev, Aslan Maskhadov, and the President of the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania, Alexander Dzasokhov, resulting in a call for a meeting to take place between Boris Yeltsin and Maskhadov. However, no decisive steps on the part of the leadership of the Russian Federation were taken in order to respond to this appeal. A representative of President Yeltsin stated that a meeting would be possible on condition that Aslan Maskhadov refused to have anything to do with Chechen criminal factions and that he should take concrete measures towards their detention, either singlehandedly or together with Russian federal armed forces.

On 23 September, a new round of bombing attacks on Chechen territory began, including the bombing of the airport. It was on this day that Vladimir Putin made his much-cited statement, 'we will wipe out the terrorists even in the outhouse'. Aslan Maskhadov tried to arrange a meeting with the Chairman of the State Council of the Republic of Dagestan, Magomedali Magomedov, but on 30 September this meeting was prevented from taking place, allegedly due to indignant resi-

dents of Dagestan, who had closed off the roads. Thereby the flywheel of the war was launched, and all avenues that might have prevented this from happening were blocked.

In September, the mass exodus of refugees from Chechnya had already begun. By the end of the month, there were about 10 thousand people in Ingushetia alone. Other regions of Russia did not accept the refugees.<sup>3</sup>

On 2 October, the Chemists' House of Culture in Grozny hosted the Congress of the Chechen People, convened by Aslan Maskhadov.<sup>4</sup> Congress participants collectively adopted a resolution condemning terrorism, expressing their condolences with respect to the victims of the bombings in Moscow and other cities, and putting forward proposals for a peaceful settlement to the situation. In the case that these proposals were not accepted, Aslan Maskhadov would have to form a State Defence Committee, declare martial law in Chechnya, and prepare for an impending war. Nevertheless, on 2 October, Russia proceeded to launch ground operations. Units of the Russian army entered the village of Borozdinovskaya on the border with Dagestan, while land forces advanced 8 to 10 km into the territory of Chechnya via the Nogai steppe.

During September 1999, even before any large-scale land operations had begun, the Russian air force carried out air strikes on Grozny and its suburbs and the villages of the Nozhai-Yurt, Vedenovskaya, Gudermes districts. Most victims of these bombings and missile strikes were innocent civilians. That was also the case in the village of Elistanzhi in the Vedenovskaya district, where, as the result of an unprovoked air strike on 7 October 1999, the number of those killed or wounded totalled 48 people. On 21 October, about 200 others died and over 400 were wounded as a result of tactical 'ground-to-ground' ballistic missile strikes carried out on the central market of Grozny, a maternity hospital and a mosque in the village of Kalinin.<sup>5</sup> Russia's military and political officials initially denied any involvement – but Moscow officials later amended their statements, declaring these were the results as a targeted explosion and that the 'operation was carried out by non-military means and without the use of artillery and aviation'. Moscow has since maintained a *de facto* policy of keeping silent about these events, not to mention any punishment of the perpetrators.

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<sup>3</sup> The saga with respect to refugees from Chechnya deserves a separate study.

<sup>4</sup> Author's note: it is unknown by whom and how the delegates were elected.

<sup>5</sup> 'Targeted strikes'. Preliminary report of the Memorial Human Rights Centre. Moscow: Zvenya Publishing House, 1999, p. 7.

The bombing, shelling and rocketing of cities and villages of Chechnya triggered a mass exodus of the population; however, as noted, the only republic willing to receive the refugees from Chechnya was Ingushetia. By 11 October 1999, the number of refugees had reached 146 thousand people according to official statistical data. Eventually, on 22 October, units of Russia's 'Zapad' military group, under the command of General Vladimir Shamanov, closed the border crossing between Chechnya and Ingushetia. On 26 October, the Russian media reported that, as of 29 October, traffic to Ingushetia would be open through the 'Kavkaz-1' checkpoint on the Rostov–Baku highway. In fact, entry to Ingushetia was not permitted. A refugee convoy that had been turned back by officers was then subject to an aerial attack near the village of Shaami-Yurt. More than 20 people were killed and dozens were injured, some of whom later died. This killing of innocent civilians has gone unpunished, just as with the hundreds killed before them and the thousands to be killed afterwards. The Russian authorities have even denied that any bombing of a refugee convoy took place.

At the same time that the outbreak of military operations in Chechnya was occurring, there began the systematic and gross violation of human rights against Chechens throughout Russia, during what was known as operation 'Vikhr-anti-terror' (translates as 'Anti-terror vortex'). This practice was enforced especially in Moscow and the Moscow Region. The 'Memorial' Human Rights Centre and the 'Grazhdanskoe Sodeistvie' ('Civic Assistance') NGO organization have reported on and provided evidence to show how Russian law enforcement agencies practised arbitrary treatment and abuse of power towards persons of Chechen and Ingush ethnicity.<sup>6</sup>

On 12 October, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov issued a decree authorizing the dismissal of Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov from his post for having spearheaded militant activity in the eastern part of the republic, as well as organizing rallies and calling upon the population to struggle against adherents of the Wahhabi fundamentalist Muslim movement.

Already in mid-October, Moscow was trying to deal with issues of civil administration in the territories where it had managed to take control. On 15 October, Moscow appointed a Special Representative of the Government of the Russian Federation to the Chechen Republic with the rank of Deputy Prime Minister, in the person of Nikolai Koshman. Within the scope of the representative office, the Interim

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<sup>6</sup> 'Discrimination on grounds of place of residence and ethnicity in Moscow and Moscow Region. August 1999–December 2001'. Report of the 'Memorial' Human Rights Centre and the charitable organization 'Civil Support'. Moscow, 2001.



Administration of the Chechen Republic was established. In late October, Bislan Gantamirov was released from prison in Russia, at which time he, with the support of the Russian military, began to undertake the formation of units of the Chechen police, which were to participate in the storming of Grozny.

By the end of December, the lowlands of Chechnya had come under the control of the Russian military. On 26 December, military operations began, aimed at capturing Grozny. The corresponding attacks involved up to 20 thousand troops, effectively unleashing a new round of war.

Fighting continued in almost all districts of Chechnya, with the exception of those in the northern part of the republic. On 9 January, Chechen armed groups counter-attacked, and penetrated the settlements of Shali, Argun, Germenchuk and Mesker-Yurt. In the centre of the city of Shali, a Russian military missile attack killed nearly 150 people, most of whom were civilians, while all of the settlements occupied by the Chechen militants were not subject to blockades by Russian troops during the fighting.

By the end of January 2000, Russian troops had claimed control of a large part of Grozny, which was blasted to ruins in the course of the missile strikes, air and artillery attacks. Russian forces were nevertheless unable to suppress the resistance put up by the armed formations of the Chechen Republic of Icherkia, while they were operating at squad level. In a coordinated effort, on the night of 31 January and early morning of 1 February 2000, the main force of Chechen troops attempted to break past the encirclement around Grozny and proceed towards the villages of Alkhan-Yurt and Alkhan-Kala. Russian generals G. Troshev and V. Shamanov claim that this was, in fact, an operation carried out by federal security services that finally managed to push the Chechen militants to the west, where hundreds of the Chechen radicals were then killed, including many of the most prominent commanders.<sup>7</sup> In fact, however, most of the Chechen troops managed to escape by way of the villages Alkhan-Kala – Zakan-Yurt – Shaami-Yurt – Katyr-Yurt – Gekhi-chu, along which route Russian troops carried out powerful aerial and artillery strikes, including the use of TOS-1 Buratino multiple-rocket launchers (area bombardment system), with numerous civilian casualties. Subsequent to this, many males, aged 16 to 50 years, were arrested in these settlements, as well as throughout Chechnya, on suspicion of involvement in ‘illegal armed formations’. In connection with these arrests and the heavy-handed treatment of a ‘Radio Liberty’ correspondent, A. Babitsky, the atten-

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<sup>7</sup> G. Troshev. *My War*. Moscow: Vagrius, 2002, p. 305.

tion of Russian society and that of the world public became focused on the camp in the Chernokozovo Naursky district, where the Russian military carried out torture, beatings, and even extrajudicial executions. In total, according to the media, there were at least 20 camps in Chechnya and in the adjacent areas in which residents of the republic were detained.

One of the most pressing problems was the ratio of the number of units of Russian armed forces compared to the number of civilians in the region. The first disturbing reports about this, thanks to M. Saidulayev, were received from the village of Alkhan-Yurt, where, in December 1999, 40 civilians were killed and the village itself was subjected to outright looting.

The lack of prosecution of perpetrators encouraged a massive surge in the number of crimes carried out against the civilian population of Chechnya. In February 2000, for instance, in the village of Aldy and in the Staropromyslovsky district of Grozny, massacres were committed against innocent civilians – but not as a result of aerial or artillery strikes, where there is room to speak about possible errors. No, these deaths were a result of deliberate ‘cleansing’, in line with the widespread practice of extrajudicial killings.<sup>8</sup>

In mid-February 2000, the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation opened a criminal case against the president of the Chechen Republic of Ishkaria, Aslan Maskhadov. He had previously been accepted by Russian politicians, at least in words, as the legitimately elected head of the republic, and as someone with whom it was possible to hold negotiations.

Intense fighting continued throughout February 2000, with as many as 150 aircraft sorties on some days. On 29 February, Russian Minister of Defence Igor Sergeev reported to Putin that ‘the actual military part of the operations has been completed’. However, only a few days later, on the outskirts of Grozny, several officers of the Moscow Region OMON were mistaken for Chechen militants and were killed in an ambush set by federal forces. In the village of Ulus-Kert, troops from the Pskov Airborne Division were also killed. Military operations on a large scale – even judging by the standards of the war in Chechnya – began in the village of Saadi-Khutor (Komsomolskoe), in the Urus-Martanov district. The fighting lasted until 20 March. Attesting to the level of intensity is the fact that a TOS-1 Buratino multiple-rocket launcher was used during the battle in Saadi-Khotur, as well as a UR-77 Zmei Gorynych mine-clearance vehicle, and Tocha-U short-

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Cleansing operations’. Report of the ‘Memorial’ Human Rights Centre. Moscow: Zvenya Publishing House, 2000.

range tactical missiles. Various estimates put the total death toll among Chechen militants at between 600 and 1500 fighters<sup>9</sup> and about 120 Russian soldiers. The village itself was completely destroyed. This was the last major battle in the second war, after which the Chechen paramilitary groups relied on greater use of guerrilla warfare tactics.

### **A political settlement – Kremlin-style**

Against the backdrop of sharp criticism on the part of Western countries about Moscow's policies in Chechnya, the Russian leadership decided to make arrangements so that residents of Chechnya could vote in the upcoming presidential elections of the Russian Federation. Among the candidates for this position was Umar Dzhabrailov, a businessman of Chechen origin, who was registered in Moscow – most likely a puppet, selected to demonstrate that Chechens enjoy equality of legal rights within the Russian Federation. Upon visiting Chechnya, the OSCE delegation concluded that there was a total lack of the generally accepted conditions for holding elections and for pre-electoral campaign activity. Nevertheless, the elections were held. Indeed, according to official figures, 79.41% of the total electorate of the Chechen Republic took part in the election, in which over 50% of the vote was for Vladimir Putin. On 27 March 2000, the second day after the presidential elections, a total of 90 sorties were flown, and Putin reiterated that the fighting in Chechnya would continue. Incidentally, exactly two weeks prior to the elections, the Russian secret services took the notorious Chechen field commander Salman Raduyev prisoner. In late March, Colonel Yuri Budanov, commander of the 160th tank regiment, was arrested on charges of raping and murdering an 18-year-old Chechen woman, Elza Kungayeva. His trial dragged on for a long time before he was finally convicted, and with great difficulty, as the colonel was even acknowledged to be insane. That was in fact the position most advantageous of the Russian government, as reflected in statements of Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov, who met with the editors of five leading newspaper in Russia, stating, 'But as a human being, yes, a I am also sympathetic towards him [*Yuri Budanov*]. If you would like, Budanov is a victim of circumstances, and the shortcomings of the legislation that exists today ... And he, as a commander, could not see how his soldiers had to kill and kill ...'<sup>10</sup> This text should make it clear why, of the thousands and thousands of the crimes and killings committed in Chechnya by representatives of the Russian security forces, the total number of cases resulting in a conviction does not even amount to fifty.

<sup>9</sup> This figure is difficult to pinpoint because of evidence that corpses were also brought here from other parts of Chechnya.

<sup>10</sup> *Trud-7*, 17 May 2001.

During March 2000, a number of active and retired Russian politicians repeatedly raised the question of introducing 'direct presidential rule' in the Chechen Republic. Numerous heads of administrations and the administrative commandants of the districts in Chechnya approached Putin on 27 March to request such a form of rule in Chechnya. Initially, the Kremlin seemed somewhat favourably inclined, but it is highly probable that it abandoned the idea upon realizing that it might lead to the president being subject to an intense wave of criticism.

On 15 April, the Russian government announced that the military part of its counterterrorist operation had been completed. The idea of holding negotiations with Maskhadov was actively promoted in Russian and foreign media alike. The radio station 'Radio Liberty' (RFE) even presented its version that the arrest of Aпти Batalov, former Chief of the Chechen presidential administration, had been made as part of the preparations for such negotiations. It is possible that the catalyst for such rumours was the decision taken at the April session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, whereby Russia was stripped of its voting rights in relation to Chechnya policy.

May 2000 was marked by minor skirmishes between Russian units and Chechen forces, with the media reporting virtually on a daily basis with reference to the number of casualties among the militants, which typically numbered in the dozens for every one or two Russian soldiers that were reported either killed or wounded. Press reports also provided coverage about the so-called 'sweeps', in which dozens of young men were detained 'on suspicion of involvement in armed gangs'. Such 'mopping-up' operations carried out among the population of Chechnya have been generally associated with widespread and arbitrary arrests, looting, extortion, torture, the destruction of the homes of families that had members in the Chechen armed forces. Areas subject to such 'cleansing' or 'special operations for verifying the passport regime' included Grozny, Argun, Urus-Martan, and villages located in the districts of Tsatsan-Yurt, Alkhan-Kala, Starie Atagi, Novie Atagi, Chiri-Yurt, Avtury, Serzhen-Yurt, and Vedenov, in addition to others in the territory between the Sunzha River and the Black Mountains, where the majority of the population is concentrated in Chechnya.

The outcome of these 'special operations' was massive public discontent, demonstrations, and protests. Even the Head of Administration of the Chechen Republic, Akhmad Kadyrov, stated that the continued practice of massive 'cleansing' could lead to popular indignation and public outrage – in which case he would be forced to recognize that the people are human, and he would also remain on the side of the

people.<sup>11</sup> All these factors, coupled with appeals to the international community, led Prosecutor-General Vladimir Ustinov to issue Directive no. 46, as well as Order no.80 of the Commander of the Combined Forces in the North Caucasus, governing conduct to be applied during ‘special operations’.

Nevertheless, with few exceptions, operations continued according to the same regime of lawlessness. In November 2002 alone, during such ‘sweeps’, 29 people were killed in the Urus-Martan district, in addition to 18 people in the Kurchaloi district, 20 people in the Shali district, and numerous casualties in the regions of Vedeno, Gudermes, Nozhai-Yurt, and Shelkovskoy.<sup>12</sup> Among the many murders and extrajudicial killings carried out in this region, some incidents stand out: the deaths of five students from the Chechen State Polytechnical Institute as a result of gunfire by a Russian military unit in the ‘Olympic’ neighbourhood in Grozny on 20 December 20; the mass shooting of seven civilians by soldiers from Russian special forces near the village of Samashki on 14 June 2001; and an incident involving the main intelligence directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, in which its officers shot and burned six civilians, including pregnant women, on 11 January 2002 in the village of Dai.

In every one of these instances, the identities of the offenders are well known, but the jury in their trials, held in Rostov-on-Don, demonstrated a determined stubbornness to acquit them (the cases of Ulman, Arakcheyev and Khudyakov, etc.). The Ulman case still has not been transferred to the military collegium of the court, but even before receiving his sentence, Ulman fled and, at present, is allegedly being sought by Russian law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, in its press release, the Prosecutor’s Office of the Chechen Republic stated: ‘no exceptions are being made, and the genuine equality of citizens before the law will be provided for. The Military Prosecutor has agreed to produce 132 criminal cases involving crimes that have been committed by soldiers against civilians.’<sup>13</sup>

By mid-May and early June, the Chechen troops were able to recover from the heavy losses they had incurred in the winter-spring of 2000. They began to liaise better and coordinate their actions amongst themselves. This was evidenced by the attacks subsequently carried out on checkpoints and on commandants, the detonation of bombs in almost all districts of Chechnya, as well as an attempt to kidnap the Mayor of Grozny, S. Mahchayev, on 30 May. In June, a series of new explosions marked the beginning of a new kind of activity on the part of the

<sup>11</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 19 September 2000.

<sup>12</sup> *Daimokhk* (‘Fatherland’), no. 41, 10 December 2002.

<sup>13</sup> *Ogra*, no. 17–18, 1 May 2002.

Chechen militia. On 3 June, an infantry combat vehicle was blown up by a ground bomb on the road from Grozny to Shatoi, and on 8 June in the village of Alkhan-Yurt, at the site where the Omsk unit of OMON was stationed, there were two attacks by suicide bombers, one of which involved a woman. In both cases, the bombs were detonated in vehicles that were wired with explosives. Explosions bearing similarities to these incidents soon became a common occurrence in Chechnya, causing the deaths of hundreds of people.

At the same time as the fighting, 'cleansing', shelling and aerial bombing was occurring, a search was underway for a strong leader who was both loyal to Moscow and also had the backing of the majority of the population in Chechnya.

Since the end of 1999 there had come repeated statements confirming the process of rebuilding the economy and the restoration of the social sphere in Chechnya. In reality, however, any achievements as of May 2000 were fairly modest. In the 2000 Federal Russian budget there were no items indicating any expenditures on Chechnya in full measure, with the exception of payments for child allowances in the amount of 516 rubles, the creation of a fund to support a plant for processing petroleum products and foodstuffs in the amount of 58 million rubles, and financial compensation for residential and other kinds of property lost during the war, budgeted at 428 million rubles. Ultimately, the financing directed towards the Chechen Republic in 2000 was based on the reallocation of funds for some planned expense line-items of the federal budget and on account of extra-budgetary funds. Mayor S. Mahchayev reported in late May that an estimated 70% of Grozny had been devastated, while not a single penny had been allocated by the Russian government towards the restoration of the city. The following day, Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Koshman said virtually the same thing, adding that the considerable sums for Chechnya that Mikhail Kasyanov had referred to (2.5 billion rubles per month) were actually for maintaining the army and the Ministry of the Interior; the money that so far had been allocated for Chechnya covered only the salaries of public servants and repairs to schools, hospitals and cultural institutions in the republic.

Significant progress was made in restoring electricity in the republic, except in Grozny, as well as the supply of natural gas. Most schools began to function again. Here we must note that schooling was never interrupted except during periods of actual military operations, although some Russian politicians and bureaucrats like to claim that education in Chechnya has been virtually at a stand-still since 1991. The institutions of higher education located in Grozny have resumed

their work, in large part thanks to the perseverance of their rectors (presidents).

On 8 June 2000, President Vladimir Putin signed a Decree and Resolution ‘On the organization of a provisional system of executive authority in the Chechen Republic’. On the same day, the State Duma introduced a draft law with the same name. Neither this Decree nor any other normative act actually appoints a clearly-identified head of administration of the Chechen Republic, though the press widely discussed the potential appointment of Bislan Gantamirov, Ruslan Khasbulatov, Akhmad Kadyrov, or Gennady Troshev to this post. The possible appointment of Mr. Kadyrov was indicated by the fact that he was the only political figure among the potential candidates for Chechnya’s leadership to have been invited to Moscow for the presidential inauguration of Vladimir Putin on 7 May 2000. On 12 June, after holding out for a period, President Putin signed the Decree appointing A. Kadyrov as the Head of Administration for Chechnya. According to a statement made by Putin himself, ‘... it was difficult for me to appoint him [*Akhmad Kadyrov*] as the head of the republic. In Russia, this appointment is evaluated in different ways. I had to personally exert influence here.’<sup>14</sup> Akhmad Kadyrov, who, at the beginning of his activity, held far less authority than his predecessor Nikolai Koshman, started to work steadily and consistently towards transforming his administration into full-fledged government of Chechnya ‘capable of independently forming its own professional personnel makeup of the executive branches in the republic and to exercising control of financial flows’.<sup>15</sup> But in Moscow, the proposals put forward by Akhmad Kadyrov were treated with great caution, and nobody seemed in a hurry to boost his status.

The situation in the Chechen Republic itself was far from stable and peaceful. Infantry clashes continued, as well as air and artillery strikes, in addition to ‘cleansing’ operations that involved sealing off the perimeter around various settlements. More often than not, entry into Grozny necessitated spending many hours in queue. People began to discover mass graves at the bases of Russian military units or near to them; the killing of religious leaders also began at this time. On 3 July, at Russian security force bases in the cities of Argun, Gudermes, and Shali and in the village of Novogrozny, suicide bombers blew up trucks that were loaded with explosives.

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<sup>14</sup> *Kommersant*, no. 123 (2008), 8 July 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Igor Kosikov. ‘The federal centre and Chechnya: a new system of relations in the sphere of public administration and economics (the formation of the state apparatus)’ in *Chechnya: from conflict to stability (the problems of reconstruction)*. Moscow, 2001, p. 175.

The media reported on a meeting held by the leadership of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, at which time Aslan Maskhadov was given additional powers until the end of the war; any decisions taken in any branches of government were to be endorsed by him and agreed upon with the State Defence Committee. This decision was most likely driven by the need to protect Maskhadov against impeachment by the Parliament of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, specifically by several deputies who were loyal supporters of Akhmad Kadyrov.

While armed skirmishes, shelling, air raids, and ‘cleansing’ operations were being carried out (as when, on 24 July 2000, Russian military forces forced everyone out of the village of Shuani in the Nozhai-Yurt district and then began pillaging), the political campaign for elections to the State Duma was underway. Back in May that year, Moscow had taken the decision to organize these elections, to demonstrate to everyone in Russia and the rest of the world that the situation in Chechnya had become stable enough to allow people to take part in free elections. Less significant was who would actually win – the main thing was for elections to take place. After the elections, the new deputy elected to the State Duma from the Chechen Republic was Aslanbek Aslakhonov; already on 29 August, he held a meeting with President Vladimir Putin.

The August tragedy of the sinking of the nuclear submarine ‘Kursk’ and the subsequent matter of the assistance offered by the state to the families of the deceased crew members turned the focus onto the paucity of the assistance offered to family members of the Russian military killed in Chechnya, not to mention the dearth of assistance to the families of the tens of thousands of Russian citizens residing in Chechnya who had died and continued to die as a result of shelling, shoot-outs, ‘cleansing sweeps’, and extrajudicial executions. This second issue, however, was only ever posed by the residents of Chechnya themselves, and an adequate response has never been given by the Russian authorities.

In the second half of 2000 in Chechnya – especially in the steppe regions of the republic, from the right bank of the Terek River to the Black Mountains – there was a devastating wave of bloody ‘sweeps’, resulting in the forced detention of thousands of people by the Russian military. They were subjected to inhumane treatment, humiliation, and torture. Following such sweeps, local residents often found mass burial sites filled with the corpses of those who had been detained only days earlier. Such horrendous acts showed a cynical disregard for Russian military law on the part of soldiers. In September 2000, the new authorities of the Chechen Republic finally pushed Akhmad



Kadyrov to declare that he was losing the loyalty and trust of the people, which he had acquired with great difficulty.

Not one day in the autumn and winter of 2000 passed without reports of armed clashes, cleansing operations, artillery/air strikes, or raids on the central market, inevitably followed by organized plundering. Bislan Gantamirov was among the most vocal critics of such tragedies and behaviour, though his efforts and complaints met with no success.

### **Chechen Civilians: Between a rock and a hard place**

The residents of Chechnya have not only been devastated as a result of acts of outrage and despotism on the part of the military: they also suffered at the hands of militants who, purportedly on behalf of a ‘sharia court’, took it upon themselves to ‘deal with’ the heads of local administrations, the imams of various mosques, and people whom they labelled as ‘national traitors’ simply because they did not suit their needs.

In January 2001, Vladimir Putin met with Akhmad Kadyrov. The latter proposed a programme for restoring the economic and social spheres in the Chechen Republic, along with the partial withdrawal of Russian troops from the republic and an increase in the size of the police force in Chechnya. Subsequently, the Russian President signed the decree ‘On the system of institutions of executive power in the Chechen Republic’, naming Kadyrov as the highest official in the republic prior to the occurrence of the elections and Stanislav Ilyasov was appointed the Head of Government. Following a decree issued by President Putin, headquarters of the department for combating terrorism in the North Caucasus was set up just a few days later, with German Ugryumov as its new head. A decision was also taken with respect to the reduction and partial withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya.

The fight against terrorism in the Chechen Republic was mainly carried out by employing ‘sweeps’, and those most affected were undoubtedly ordinary civilians. For instance, during a regular ‘cleansing’ operation in the city of Argun on 20 January 2001, according to testimony by the city’s deputy mayor, more than 100 people were arrested. Eleven of them were never found, and one was later found dead. The same military operation involved instances of plundering committed against the local population.<sup>16</sup> Similar ‘sweeps’, carried out by federal forces in the villages of Assinovskaya and Sernovodskaya in July 2001, received wide publicity.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>16</sup> Aired on Chechen state television, 01 February 2001.

<sup>17</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 13 July 2001.

As to the combined tally of those who fell victim to incidents of military outrage and attacks by Chechen militants, data from the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic indicate that for the first eight months of 2001 alone, the death toll included 12 senior local officials, 24 policemen and three religious leaders.

Both republican and local governmental authorities were practically restored in full, as well as the judiciary; the structure of law enforcement agencies within the republic was also developed. At the same time, an Advisory Board was established under the Head of the Chechen Administration, one of its tasks being the drafting of the Constitution of the Chechen Republic and the regulatory and legal framework for holding elections. The Government Commission for restoring the social sphere and economy of the Chechen Republic was also actively operating. This body was headed by Victor Khristenko and Vladimir Elagin, Russia's minister responsible for coordinating the activities of federal executive authorities with respect to the socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic.

From March 2000, killings of public and social leaders became increasingly frequent, with those targeted including public servants serving at the city and village level, imams serving at mosques, and law enforcement officers. From 1999 to November 2002, 230 personnel from the Internal Affairs Directorate of the Russian Ministry of the Interior serving in Chechnya were killed;<sup>18</sup> and in 2001 and the first three months of 2002, a total of nine imams were killed and one was kidnapped. During the same period, 53 violent crimes were committed against leaders and employees of the republican and regional administrations, as well as their family members.<sup>19</sup> Most of these crimes remain unsolved to this day. It is extremely difficult to identify who actually carried out these horrendous acts or who ordered them, although rumours indicate that some of the instances might be attributed to sentences handed down by a sharia court.

On 23 October 2002 in the Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow, where the musical 'Nord-Ost' was being performed, a group of terrorists under the command of Movsar Barayev took nearly one thousand spectators hostage. The terrorists had mined the building and threatened to blow it up unless Putin began withdrawing Russian troops from Chechnya. While several MPs and journalists were allowed to enter the theatre, no substantive negotiations were held as per the terrorists' demands, and their exact demands were not made public. On the night of 26 October, Russian FSB and OMON swat teams stormed the theatre with

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<sup>18</sup> *Daimokhk*, no. 36–37, 26 November 2002.

<sup>19</sup> *Orga*, no. 17–18, 1 May 2002.

the use of a poisonous narcotic gas. As a result of the 'raid', all the terrorists were reported to have been killed.

The evacuation of the hostages was ill-planned. They were taken en masse to hospitals about three hours after the gas had initially been released through the theatre's ventilation system. In the end, 130 of the hostages were also killed – only five of them killed by the terrorists themselves. The others were killed as a result of the botched 'Operation Freedom', with roughly 75% of them dying in the auditorium itself and the remaining 25% dying en route to the hospital. With respect to those hostages who survived the incident, the health of many has also been seriously affected. According to the 'official version' from Moscow, these people died because of a variety of chronic disorders that had been triggered as a result of being subject to a lengthy period without movement, food or water.

Since not a single terrorist is left alive today, no trial with respect to the 'Nord-Ost' hostage-taking has ever been held. Negotiations with the militants were dismissed as impossible; indeed, in my opinion, the Kremlin never made any effort to conduct real negotiations. Without any clear answers, there remain many unanswered questions in relation to the militants' infiltration in Moscow and the theatre in particular, in addition to the smuggling of weapons and many other outstanding issues.

One of the least unexplored issues with respect to both wars in Chechnya concerns the number of civilians killed. While some estimates put the number of dead soldiers at more than three thousand and the number of militants who died in action at more than 13 thousand (the credibility of these figures has been called into doubt), this aggregate figure certainly pales when compared to the number of civilian deaths during the two wars. The number of civilians who perished at that time is estimated at between 40 thousand and 200 thousand people.<sup>20</sup> The reluctance of Russian authorities to clarify the actual number of deaths – which would not represent a serious challenge if the political will were present – gives grounds for all kinds of speculation, including doubts about the figures put forward in the 2002 national census, which gives the population of the Chechen Republic as being 1,080,816 people. On the other hand, one of the most tragic outcomes of the two wars cannot be called into question. Because of these wars, a total of 2,500 children in Chechnya have been completely orphaned and another 24 thousand left with only one surviving parent.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> V.A. Tishkov, *Society in armed conflict. Ethnography of the Chechen war*. Moscow, 2001, p. 532; *Russia's Regions*, no. 302, February 2001, p. 8; and *Novaya Gazeta*, no. 6, 28–30 January 2002.

<sup>21</sup> *Izvestia*, 11 December 2002.

And yet, there is yet an even graver problem – the disappearance of many people following their arrest by various military and armed forces under Russian command. In this regard too, estimates of the number of ‘the disappeared’ vary significantly. Some quote a figure of 12 thousand missing persons,<sup>22</sup> while others quote 3000 (based on the incomplete list from the ‘Memorial’ Human Rights Centre). The report of the Prosecutor-General of the Russian Federation for 2001 claimed that 940 appeals had been filed with respect to ‘missing persons’ who disappeared in 2000, as well as another 246 appeals in 2001. In addition, at a meeting of the Chechen Republic Administration on 20 December 2002, there was mention of ‘more than one thousand people missing’, 170 of whom had been abducted in the course of the two months preceding that meeting.<sup>23</sup>

According to data from the state prosecutor of the Chechen Republic as of 1 January 2005, since the time when anti-terrorist operations began in the region, 1793 criminal cases were opened involving the abduction of 2503 people. In 2004, another 164 criminal cases were opened regarding instances involving the kidnapping of 218 persons. For 2003 the figures were 419 and 561 respectively. However, of all of the criminal cases opened in the republic in this particular category, only 63 cases actually reached the courts, involving charges against 97 accused – this represents only 3.5% of the total number of cases. The relatives of the missing people have appealed to the authorities, but their complaints and petitions directed towards various federal government agencies and administrations have tended to be forwarded to the heads of those state authorities about which the complaints had been made in the first place – the complaints were either due to officials’ actions or failure to act in specific regard to these instances.<sup>24</sup>

A major problem that still remains is the large number of refugees found throughout various regions of Russia, as well as in both the ‘near abroad’ (former Soviet countries) and elsewhere. During the summer of 2002, some 77 thousand refugees from Chechnya tried to return to their home republic.<sup>25</sup> However, the main obstacles – the lack of security for the population and the fact that housing has been destroyed – have still not been resolved. Even in Ingushetia, the refugee population numbered somewhere between 50 thousand and 130 thousand at that time.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> *Terra incognita*, no. 2, February 2002, p. 16.

<sup>23</sup> *Terra incognita*, no. 4, p. 40; and TV programme *Vesti Chechenskoi Respubliki* (Chechen Republic News), aired 20 December 2002.

<sup>24</sup> *Stolitsa Plus*, no. 49, 22 June 2005.

<sup>25</sup> *Daimokhk*, no. 25, 1 October 2002.

<sup>26</sup> *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, no. 259, 3 December 2002.

The military operations carried out in Chechnya have resulted in a sharp reduction of the populations living in the mountain regions. They have effectively been pushed out by their constant subjugation to abuse at the hands of both the Russian military and the Chechen militias. According to the All-Russia population census of 2002, for many settlements in the Vedeno district – such as Nizhnie Kurchali, Verkhnie Kurchali, Srednie Kurchali, Shirdi-Mokhk, Bouni, Orsi, Rikha, Tunzhi-evla, Hoi, Dutz-Khutor, Zhani-Vedeno, and Verkhnee Tsa-Vedeno – the populations previously inhabiting these communities no longer live there. They were forced to leave, as were the people of the villages of Yarysh-Mardi of the Grozny district. Very few people still live in the Shatoisk and Itum-Kalinsk districts of Chechnya.<sup>27</sup>

According to information from the Federal Migration Service in the Chechen Republic, ‘about 20 families leave our republic every quarter ... about a quarter of those leaving are destined to places beyond the borders of the Russian Federation. At the same time, the number of people flowing back into the Chechen Republic is twice more than that figure.’<sup>28</sup> The largest groups of refugees from Chechnya are now living in Europe, especially in Austria, Belgium, Norway, France, and the Netherlands. Immigration officials there register people by citizenship and not ethnicity, so no exact figures can be provided. For instance, according to official Norwegian statistics, as of 1 January 2008, there were 12,823 Russian citizens living in the country,<sup>29</sup> whereas in 2000 there had been only 3000. A considerable part of them (between 3000 to 5000 people from Chechnya) have been granted residence/work permits, and have jobs. According to our data, there are at the University of Oslo and the University of Stavanger Chechen students who have also completed secondary school in Norway previous to that. In general, the number of refugees from Chechnya in other European countries is estimated at between 50–60 thousand and 100–110 thousand persons.

Many pressing social problems are left for the Chechen Republic to deal with today. The number of disabled persons suffering from serious chronic disease now stands at 56,895, and there are 18,404 children with physical disabilities. The number of disabled persons continues to rise, having increased more than five-fold over the past five years. The number of children deemed socially vulnerable or ‘at risk’ is estimated at 347,743 – that means an incredible 76% of all children in the republic. In the second quarter of 2005, unemployment stood at 78.7%; the average per capita income was roughly 1400

<sup>27</sup> ‘Number and distribution of the population. Results of the All-Russia population census of 2002. Statistical handbook’. Grozny, 2004.

<sup>28</sup> *Golos Chechenkoi Respubliki*, no. 19, October 2005.

<sup>29</sup> <http://www.ssb.no/english/subjects/02/01/10/innibef-en/tab-2008-04-29-11-en.html>

rubles – and that is more than 1000 rubles below the official minimum subsistence level. The number of physicians available to treat the population is shockingly low, at just 17.8 doctors per 10 thousand people, constituting only 42% of the average figure for the Russian Federation as a whole.<sup>30</sup>

### **Chechenization**

Despite the enormous difficulties, the lack of sufficient amounts of funding, and the continuation of terrorist attacks in the republic, local residents sought to restore tranquillity to Chechnya – and managed to do so with great difficulty. On 12 December 2002, President Vladimir Putin signed the decree ‘On Approving the Resolution on Holding a Referendum in the Chechen Republic on the Draft Constitution of the Chechen Republic’ and Bills of the Chechen Republic ‘On the Election of the President of the Chechen Republic’ and ‘On the Elections to Parliament of the Chechen Republic’. Later, on 4 July 2003, shortly before the presidential election in Chechnya, the Government of the Russian Federation adopted regulation no. 404, stipulating the formal procedures and period for the payment of financial compensation to residents of the Chechen Republic whose housing was destroyed and who otherwise lost property during the conflict. The compensation entitlement specified under this government regulation was 350 thousand rubles.

A tremendous amount of effort went into the preparations for the referendum. Equally much effort was applied, by both Moscow and Grozny, in holding this event. Prior to the referendum, the republic was visited by a whole series of leading figures of Chechen nationality, including S. Khadzhiev, D. Zavgayev, U. Avturkhanov, U. Dzhabraïlov as well as many others.

The Deputy Head of the Presidential Administration of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Surkov, promised the republic a wide degree of autonomy, but Kremlin spokesperson Sergei Yastrzhembsky explicitly set out the choice before Chechnya as follows: ‘either a referendum or the continuation of lawlessness’. After arriving in the Chechen Republic on 13 March, Head of the Presidential Administration Alexander Voloshin stated that the referendum would be followed by the beginning of work on drafting a treaty on the delimitation of powers between the federal authorities in the centre and Chechnya, underlining that, although he generally did not support such agreements, this instance represented a special case. On 16 March, President Vladimir Putin delivered a televised address to the Chechen people.

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<sup>30</sup> Data from *Stolitsa Plus*, no. 74, 14 September 2005.

The referendum was held on 23 March 2003. According to official reports, the absolute majority of participants (80%) voted in favour of the draft Constitution of the Chechen Republic, as well as the laws on the presidential and parliamentary elections. However, these figures have been called into question by many human rights organizations. According to the official results, virtually all participants in the voting process identified the outcome of the referendum with the population's desire and hopes for peace, the rebuilding of the republic, and the restoration of their violated rights. Already on 24 March, the day after the referendum, upon commenting on the preliminary results of the vote, Putin noted that the people of Chechnya had opted for peace and a positive development, alongside Russia. 'We have pulled the plug on the last major issue related to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation', commented President Putin while speaking at the Kremlin during a regular meeting with members of the Russian government.

Almost immediately after the referendum, preparations for electing a president of the Chechen Republic got underway. Among the numerous figures who came forth as candidates, there were several – Aslambek Aslakhonov, Malik Saidullayev, and Khusein Dzhabrailov – who might have represented serious competition for Akhmad Kadyrov in the presidential race. However, for various reasons (not least, pressure from the Kremlin), these figures either withdrew their candidacies (as in the case of Aslan Aslakhonov and Khusein Dzhabrailov) or ended up not registering their candidacy (as in the case of Malik Saidullayev). According to official sources, 87.7% of eligible voters in Chechnya took part in the presidential elections on 5 October 2003, with 81% of them voting for Akhmad Kadyrov.<sup>31</sup> Some human rights activist groups, such as the Moscow Helsinki Group, and even several observer countries (particularly the USA, in contrast to the UK) declared that the conduct of the elections in Chechnya had not followed international standards, and that they would not recognize the official results as legitimate.<sup>32</sup> By contrast, the League of Arab States and observers from other CIS countries claimed that the elections had been 'legitimate, free and democratic'.<sup>33</sup>

Local law enforcement agencies, under the command of Ramzan Kadyrov, received very broad powers in elaborating the 'political settlement' plan developed and introduced by Moscow. This process was based on the Kremlin's refusal to negotiate with the warring parties, as well as the fact that it favoured the creation of republican-level power structures and the transfer of certain functions and powers to the Che-

<sup>31</sup> *Grozny Rabochiy*, no. 21, 10 October 2003.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Golos Chechenskoj Respubliki*, no.15, October 2003.

chens themselves, including the task of searching for and eliminating extremist militants. It was in this way that the ‘Chechenization’ of the conflict suddenly emerged, with much of the responsibility for carrying out ‘anti-terrorist operations’ transferred to law enforcement agencies of a kind specific to the republic. This new force, now made up of ethnic Chechens, had received a *de facto* mandate for the indiscriminate use of violence.

The politics of ‘Chechenization’ has implied a transformation – from a situation characterized by conflict with an external party, into an outright civil war. As an outcome of this tactical approach, the gradually increasing number of local residents involved in the conflict on the side of the federally-controlled forces not only suppressed any notion that the conflict was rooted in separatist motives, but also effectively spared Moscow from being accused of unwillingness to hold negotiations with ‘Ichkeria-mongers’.

The starting point of this ‘Chechenization’ of the conflict can be traced back to the referendum on the constitution and the laws on holding presidential and parliamentary elections in the republic. An increasingly important role in the republic came to be played by legitimately armed units formed from amongst local residents themselves. According to estimates from human rights organizations, starting in 2004, the vast majority of civil rights violations recorded in Chechnya took place at the hands of officers associated with these recently-introduced law enforcement institutions.

The changing status of Akhmad Kadyrov did not necessarily mean that the military immediately vested him with full authority. Instead, he won it back from them bit by bit and with great difficulty, by skillfully playing on the religious factor. Abductions continued as before, becoming one of the biggest problems for both the population and civic authorities, which had tried in vain to fight this scourge in 2000. Numerous outrageous and highly publicized crimes (*author’s note: these have still not been investigated*) were carried out in late March in the village of Duba-Yurt, located in the Shali district. In that month, representatives of an unknown federal agency (apart from their own cars, the kidnappers also had two armoured personnel carriers) detained eight local residents and removed them from their home village. Their corpses were eventually found, all of which exhibited signs of torture and targeted gunshots. Their bodies were dumped on the outskirts of the village of Serzhen-Yurt on 9 April. Just one day earlier, another tragedy occurred in the village of Rigakhoi. As a result of a federal aircraft bombing raid, six people were killed – a mother and



her five children<sup>34</sup> – in their own home. However, bringing the perpetrators in the Russian military to justice, despite every effort on the part of the republic's governmental authorities, has not met with any success.

Another serious challenge for Russian citizens of Chechen nationality was the anti-Chechen hysteria demonstrated by some politicians and media representatives in the wake of an explosion in the Moscow metro on 6 February 2004, with numerous casualties. Protests were held in many towns and villages across the Chechen Republic, condemning terrorism as well as the chronic search for a 'Chechen footprint' in every major crime occurring in the Russian Federation. A week after the explosion in Moscow, another less-publicized explosion took place in Doha, the capital of Qatar. That blast claimed the life of the former president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, in addition to seriously wounding his 13-year-old son.

Two weeks later, on 28 February 2004, a well-known Chechen field leader, Ruslan Gelayev, was killed in Dagestan. In March, former Defence Minister of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Magomed Khambiyev, surrendered on the basis of guarantees provided by police head Ramzan Kadyrov. However, according to media reports, Khambiyev decided to give himself up only after his family members has been arrested.<sup>35</sup>

In my view, Akhmad Kadyrov's appearance on the popular TV programme 'Svoboda Slova' played an important role in enhancing his credibility as President of the Chechen Republic. Speaking on this show on 20 February 2004, he said: 'I must protect my people, who have entrusted me with their fate. I will do this, and I will defend their rights against both 'the Feds' and the bandits'. He summed up by saying 'I do not want to stop the war; I want to end it.'

The authorities of the Chechen Republic became actively engaged in preparations for and the holding of the Russian Federation presidential elections. Ramzan Kadyrov was appointed to head Vladimir Putin's campaign headquarters in the Chechen republic. After the elections, held on 14 March, official sources claimed that the incumbent president received 92.3% of the vote in Chechnya (equal to 521,317 votes) of the total number of voters (564,784) who participated (94% voter turnout). The two other key candidates – Irina Hakamada and Nikolai

<sup>34</sup> S.A. Gannushkina. 'On the situation of Chechens in Russia. June 2003–May 2004'. Moscow, 2004, pp. 93–97; and *Vesti Respubliki*, 25 May 2004.

<sup>35</sup> *Novaya Gazeta*, no. 16, 11–14 March 2004; and *Chechenskoe Obshestvo*, no. 5, 9 March 2004.

Kharitonov – scored just over 2% of the vote each, while no other candidate managed to receive even one percent of the vote.<sup>36</sup> It is doubtful whether voter turnout really amounted to as much as 94% of the eligible voting population, but these are the official figures from by the Electoral Commission of the Chechen Republic. According to some analysts, the successful outcome of the elections provided grounds for Akhmad Kadyrov, within a few days after the election, to assure members of the Chechen government that a Chechen oil company would be created, that the roadblocks would be removed, and that Grozny airport could be re-opened.

Soon, however, a heavy blow was dealt to the relatively peaceful development of the political situation in the Chechen Republic (with its ‘cleansing’ campaigns, abductions, armed clashes, and handing over militants in hopes of amnesty). On 9 May 2004, a terrorist attack at Dinamo Stadium in Grozny resulted in the death of the President of Chechnya, Akhmad Kadyrov, as well as the Chairman of the Chechen State Council, Hussein Isaev. Colonel-General Valery Baranov was seriously wounded. Many analysts and observers interpreted this as marking the end of Putin-led policy within the Chechen Republic. In fact, it would appear that the Russian president himself did not share that view, since there have come no major policy changes since that time.

On 11 May, Vladimir Putin arrived in Chechnya and awarded the Star Medal of the Hero of Russia to Akhmad Kadyrov’s son Ramzan, as well as presenting the Order of Courage to Rosa Isaeva, which she received on behalf of her deceased husband Hussein Isaev. The President of the Russian Federation issued a decree to perpetuate the memory of Akhmad Kadyrov, noting that he (Kadyrov) had left this life undefeated, and that a people who have produced such a son are worthy of respect. Flying over Grozny by helicopter, Putin noted, ‘it looks terrible’,<sup>37</sup> and instructed Russia’s Minister of Economic Development and Trade, German Gref, to deal with the issue of restoring the Chechen Republic.

On the last day of the funeral for Akhmad Kadyrov, in his native village of Tsentoroi, a ceremonial parade was held, involving all of the law enforcement forces and security agencies of the republic, including special forces, special intelligence units and policemen. About five thousand armed men gathered, indicating that they were in favour of appointing Ramzan Kadyrov as the successor to his father Akhmad. That same day, the State Council, the Government, the Security Council and the Muslim Spiritual Authority of Chechnya approached

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<sup>36</sup> *Stolitsa Plus*, no. 22, 20 March 2004.

<sup>37</sup> *Izvestia*, 15 March 2004.

Putin, requesting that he make an exception by allowing Ramzan Kadyrov to run for the post of president of Chechnya. Kadyrov himself had categorically stated that he would not run, specifically because ‘the law and the Constitution do not allow it’,<sup>38</sup> although he had indicated shortly before that he would listen to the will of the people. Interestingly, the decision on the candidacy of Alu Alkhanov, who hails from the town of Urus-Martan, was adopted at the gathering on 10 June in Akhmad Kadyrov’s native village of Tsentoroi. Already on 15 June, Putin held a meeting with Alu Alkhanov in the Kremlin. Following this meeting, there was practically no doubt about who would become the next president of the Chechen Republic.

The militants also sought to take advantage of the sensitive situation and carried out a number of violent acts. Among the tragedies were the infamous terrorist attack in Ingushetia on the night of 22 June 2004, armed clashes in the village of Avtury in the Shali district, an assassination attempt on Acting Chechen President Sergei Abramov on 17 July, and an attack on Grozny on 21 August, along the lines of the scenario in Ingushetia. The latter event resulted in the death of about 70 officers of the Chechen Ministry of the Interior. Further terrorist attacks came on 24 August, which resulted in two separate passenger planes crashing and a death toll of 89 people. Despite these setbacks, preparations for presidential elections in Chechnya continued, with seven candidates registered. However, Malik Saidullayev, who might otherwise have posed serious competition for Alu Alkhanov, was not allowed to register his candidacy, allegedly due to a passport error discovered by the Elections Commission of the Chechen Republic.

On 22 August, the eve of Akhmad Kadyrov’s birthday, Putin flew to Kadyrov’s native village of Tsentoroi and, together with Ramzan Kadyrov and Alu Alkhanov, laid a wreath on the grave. Thereafter, they all flew to Sochi, where, according to a newspaper account:

Alu Alkhanov briefed Vladimir Putin on the socio-economic situation in the republic. He identified the main sore point as being the payment of financial compensation. Putin called on the Chechen leadership to not diminish their attention to the issue of compensation for lost property. Vladimir Putin supported the proposal to channel funds from the export of Chechen oil towards the restoration of the Chechen Republic. However, in the event of a positive solution to this issue, Putin urged the Chechen leadership to monitor the expenditure of funds strictly.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 24 August 2004. (Author’s note: the proposal ‘supported’ by Putin was never realized in the end.).

Residents of the Chechen Republic cast their votes in the early presidential elections on 29 August. Only 14 hours later, it was announced that elections were to be considered valid, since more than 30% of the electorate had participated. The official results, tallied later, were as follows: 82.25% of all eligible voters had participated in the elections; Alu Alkhanov had captured 73.67% of the popular vote, thereby winning in the first round<sup>40</sup>. Following the elections, international observers from the Executive Committee of the CIS issued a lengthy statement, noting that ‘the election campaign was mainly in line with legislative requirements ... we recognize the early election of the President of the Chechen Republic as legitimate.’<sup>41</sup> However, the position taken by the OSCE and PACE was more sceptical.

Only two days after the Chechen presidential elections, a group of terrorists seized school no. 1 in Beslan in North Ossetia and took more than a thousand hostages – pupils, parents and teachers. The terrorists mined the building and demanded that the Russian President begin withdrawing federal forces from Chechnya. Former President of Ingushetia Ruslan Aushev was permitted to enter the school and managed to get 26 of the hostages released. No substantive negotiations were held as to the demands made by the terrorists, nor were the demands made public. During the day on 3 September, there was an explosion in the school and Russian special forces led an assault, during which ‘Shmel’ static flame-throwers were used, as well as tanks. In total, 330 hostages were killed, 186 of them children. All the terrorists were killed, with the exception of Nurpashi Kulayev, who was captured by local residents. Upon finally appearing before the court, he was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Nevertheless, many questions have remained unanswered to this day – not least concerning the terrorists’ actual aims and expectations. It seems unlikely that the leaders of the terrorist group, which planned the seizure at a time when the ‘Nord Ost’ hostage-taking in Moscow’s Dubrovka Theatre was still fresh in Russian minds, really held out hopes of negotiations with Russian authorities or that the government would concede to their demands. Perhaps their aim was just to cause another explosion in the North Caucasus. In Chechnya, many rallies were held, condemning the acts of these terrorists and, while the siege lasted, demanding the release of the hostages. The leadership of the republic appealed to the people of North Ossetia to denounce these crimes and offer assistance.<sup>42</sup> Later, members of the Chechen Ministry of the Interior made a contribution of 5 million rubles as assistance to Beslan.

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<sup>40</sup> *Daimokhk*, no. 71, 6 September 2004.

<sup>41</sup> *Molodezhnaya Smena*, no. 69, 1 September 2004.

<sup>42</sup> *Vesti Respubliki*, no. 70, 3 September 2004.

After Beslan, the Russian government, acting with direct reference to the need to combat terrorism, amended electoral legislation: this involved the cancellation of direct elections for the heads of regional administrations and direct elections for MPs of Russian Duma, as well as establishing a Civic Chamber. Various other legislative amendments were also introduced. For instance, it was decided that referendums on highly important issues would no longer be held, and that parliamentary investigations into the Beslan tragedy could not be permitted. Procedures to be followed in conducting public rallies or protests were also significantly changed. In essence, they meant the curtailment of virtually all the democratic instruments in the country. Also, any possibility that might otherwise have existed with respect to holding negotiations was effectively buried. At a meeting with foreign journalists, Vladimir Putin stressed: ‘no one has a moral right to tell us to talk to child killers’, and went on to ask, ‘why don’t you hold a meeting with Osama bin Laden?’<sup>43</sup>

On 5 October 2004, Alu Alkhanov was inaugurated as President of the Chechen Republic. We may note that the documents certifying his presidency were not awarded by the Chairman of Elections Committee, as expected, but by Deputy Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov. With the presidency, Alkhanov inherited some heavy baggage – the tragic legacy of war, along with a shattered economy and severe social problems within the republic.

In January 2005, there was active discussion about a special agreement, jointly developed by the federal central authorities and the leadership of the Chechen Republic, stipulating that, in the course of the coming ten years, Chechnya would be able to freely exploit and control all the natural wealth of its territory, as well as the resources obtained from their use, transportation, and sale. President Alu Alkhanov publicly commented on this document, indicating that it should not be taken as an incitement to indulgence, but should instead be seen an economically sound decision dictated by the need for more intensive development and the reconstruction of Chechnya.<sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding such statements, the final adoption of the agreement was repeatedly delayed. It now appears as if the Kremlin had no real intention of adopting this document.

Aslan Maskhadov and his entourage also tried to remain in the picture. Several media publications reported on the 14 January 2005 order from Maskhadov ‘On the unilateral suspension of offensive military actions throughout the territory of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria

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<sup>43</sup> *Trud-7*, 9 September 2004.

<sup>44</sup> *Trud-7*, 26 January 2005.

and beyond its borders for the month of February'. On the very same day, the website 'Kavkaz-Centre' published an order by Shamil Basayev, issued pursuant to the order of Aslan Maskhadov. These measures emphasized that 'this step should be taken as a sign of goodwill'. On 25 February, a tripartite meeting was held in London between representatives of the Government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia (SKSM), and representatives of the European Union. The participating parties adopted a memorandum entitled 'The Road to Peace in Chechnya'— which ultimately failed to bring any results due to the fact that state officials in Moscow and Grozny would never permit someone such as Maskhadov or his representatives to participate in any peace process on behalf of the Chechen Republic. The sole exception would be for those who had surrendered their weapons in exchange for guarantees of security by the leadership of the Chechen Republic.

Then on 8 March 2005, Aslan Maskhadov, the 54-year-old President of the non-existent Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, was murdered in the village of Tolstoy-Yurt in the Grozny district. Animated commentary ensued on the part of Russian and foreign media and politicians. The Russian print and electronic media differed, in that the latter took the opportunity to spread graphic images of Maskhadov's half-naked corpse. The next day, the media reported that Abdul-Halim Sadulayev had become the Acting President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. Prior to that, he had been the Chairman of the Supreme Sharia Court of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. His term of office was short, as he was killed in Argun on 17 June.

Financing the process of recovery within the republic left much to be desired. The 23 December 2005 issue of the newspaper *Vesti Respubliki* commented on the situation:

Although those in Moscow like to say that heavy investments have been made in Chechnya (unfortunately, our people also believe that a lot of money has been released for the restoration of the republic), the fact is that, in all, only about 15 billion rubles have been allocated for these purposes in the entire post-war period. That is a really low amount for a republic. For comparison, a sum of 45 billion rubles was allocated for the reconstruction of the Bolshoi Theatre in Moscow. For the reconstruction of the Mariinsky Theater in St. Petersburg, 35 billion rubles were allocated, and for holding celebrations for the millennium anniversary of Kazan, the figure came to 68 billion rubles.

At the same time as the process of peaceful restoration was underway, there were also continued clashes involving various militant bands, which sometimes entered villages (including Avtury, Alleroi, Roshni-Chu, Dyshni-Vedeno), killing officials of the Ministry of the Interior

and the heads of local administrations. The Chechen Ministry of the Interior, in conjunction with Russia's Joint Forces, reacted harshly to these attacks. According to the Commander of the Joint Forces in the North Caucasus, Colonel-General Yevgeniy Lazebin:

In 2005, 290 militants were killed in Chechnya and about 270 of the militias' bases and thousands more weapons caches were found. Among the militants who were wiped out were 72 band leaders. The trophies recovered by the Special Forces include 380 grenades, 41 flame-throwers, 27 missile launchers, and 8 shoulder-fired air defense systems, in addition to thousands of guns, shells and mines. 346 improvised explosive devices and more than a tonne of explosives were also confiscated and disposed of.<sup>45</sup>

Of course, generals dislike admitting that during operations involving the shelling of militants' positions, everyday civilians often end up suffering. In August 2005, for instance, an artillery shell hit a private home in the village of Avtury owned by Chechnya's Minister of Housing, Abu Sugaipov. In November, several shells landed in one of the neighbourhoods of the village of Starie Atagi, destroying the homes of the Yusupov and Khataev families. And in both Avtury and Starie Atagi, civilians were injured by these shelling attacks, including young children. There were serious public reactions following events that took place in early June in the village of Borozdinovskaya in the Shelkovsky district, predominantly inhabited by ethnic Avars. The village was subject to a devastating 'sweep operation', carried out by the 'Vostok' battalion detachment.<sup>46</sup>

One of the most significant events in 2005 was the organization of the 'Train of Friendship'. It featured a delegation from the Chechen Republic composed of representatives of the republic in various spheres, among them political figures, artists, scientists, leaders of community and social organizations, as well as journalists. This Friendship Train, which aimed to promote positive information about the Chechen Republic and its people, travelled through 21 regions of the Russian Federation, from the Baltic Sea to the Far East.

In August, Vladimir Putin signed a decree on elections to the Parliament of the Chechen Republic, according to the Constitution. The Parliament was to consist of two chambers – the People's Assembly and the Council of the Republic. Elections were held in November 2005, with the victory claimed by the United Russia Party, as had been expected. In the new Parliament were also representatives of the regional

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<sup>45</sup> *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 12 January 2006.

<sup>46</sup> *Editor's note: the Avar are a Dagestani ethnic group. The ensuing 'sweep operation' resulted in the mass exodus of almost the entire population of the village.*

branch of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation and the Union of Right Forces (*Soyuz Pravykh Sil*, SPS). Among the SPS members was the former Minister of Defence from the Maskhadov government, Umar Khanbiev. Several other leading politicians from the days of the Maskhadov presidency also became MPs, and the general rules of the democratic game were actually adhered to. Thus, those parties who advocated an independent Chechnya also took part in these elections.

The first session of Parliament of the Chechen Republic was held on 12 December 2005. Among those in attendance was Russian President Vladimir Putin, who remarked that the juridical process involved in restoring constitutional order in the republic had finally been completed.

### Conclusion

During the so-called ‘anti-terrorist operations’ carried out in Chechnya, the Kremlin resorted to indiscriminate large-scale military operations involving aircraft and artillery, as well as special ‘mop-up operations’. Widespread and unprovoked violence was widely applied, causing the death and disappearance of thousands of people, and ultimately resulting in a ‘political settlement’. State authorities of the Chechen Republic were finally formed through the use of a range of political methods – with the government first being controlled by Akhmad Kadyrov, and then by Ramzan Kadyrov following the death of his father, although Alu Alkhanov also served as president for nearly two and a half years. Power and offers of amnesty for former militants eventually led them to switch over to the side of Akhmad Kadyrov, and subsequently to support Ramzan Kadyrov. It was these groups that acted as the mainstay of the policy of ‘Chechenization’, which was characterized by relative selectivity in the conduct of ‘anti-terrorist operations’, while gross violations of human rights continued. It was during this period, with the reduction of military confrontation in the Chechen Republic, that the armed conflict began to ‘sprawl’ beyond the borders of Chechnya and into other republics in the North Caucasus.

This period saw a shift in Kremlin policies with respect to the Chechen Republic – a transition from a situation summed up in Putin’s earlier ‘we will wipe out the terrorists even in the outhouse’, to his opening statement to the Chechen Parliament: ‘to be free, independent, and thrive is possible only together with a free and prosperous Russia.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Speech by Vladimir Putin at the opening session of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic, available at: <http://kreml.org/other/104906339>.



# Economic Recovery in Chechnya: History and Modernity

**Tamara U. Elbuzdukayeva**

Today's Chechen Republic is facing problems in economic and social development. In the 1990s, Chechnya was deeply submerged in armed conflict that set development back by decades. The republic has undergone a virtual humanitarian disaster. Rectifying this situation is largely dependent on the policies of the federal authorities and the capacity to deal with multiple challenges within a short timeframe. Chechnya needs to rise above the ruins of destruction, resolve social problems, and integrate the republic with the wider economic and legal framework of the Russian Federation.

In this contribution, the author traces the dynamics of the economic reconstruction of Chechnya by placing the current situation in the historical context of the Soviet as well as the post-Soviet periods.

## **Economic development after the Russian Civil War (1918–1920)**

The Civil War of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century left behind a trail of ruin in Chechnya. What had been relatively new industries were burnt to ashes, heavily strewn with rubble and charred rubbish. With respect to older industries, only a few buildings and drilling rigs survived. Most of the oil refineries in Zavodsky district were destroyed, while those that were left remained inactive. During the war, oil production plummeted – a more than six-fold drop compared with 1917. Of the nine oil wells that were set on fire in Novogroznensky district, five continued to burn for one and a half years. It is estimated that 90% of the industrial infrastructure in the district was completely destroyed. In the city of Grozny itself, oil refineries and mechanical plants were in very poor condition, and the railway terminal lay in ruins. Total losses for Grozny's oil industry as a result of the Civil War amounted to 126 million rubles.

A dire situation developed in relation to the work force. Many oil workers had been killed; others moved to more rural settlements. En-

gineers and technicians also abandoned their jobs. Foreign specialists fled the region. There was an acute shortage of housing, clothing and food. Workers and their families were practically left starving.

As soon as Grozny was freed of the White Russia troops of Lieutenant General Denikin, the government took measures to restore the oil industry quickly, and to organize the export of petroleum products. In April 1920, a state institution, the Central Petroleum Directorate (TSNU), was established to oversee the oil fields and factories, with I.V. Kosior as its head. Two regiments of the Caucasus Labour Army were sent to Grozny to aid local workers in carrying out the necessary reconstruction. Established in April 1920, the Labour Army was put to work rebuilding dormitories, repairing roads and clearing the wreckage from industrial sites. From May to August 1920, the number of operating oil wells rose from 72 to 101, while oil production increased more than five-fold.<sup>1</sup>

Oil refineries began to operate better, as the pumps were repaired, along with the tanks and distilling apparatus. The government allocated and delineated the oil district of Grozny, recognizing its economic and political importance for both the region and the country as a whole.

The Labour and Defence Council (LDC) implemented a series of urgent measures to assist the oil industry. On 15 July 1921, the oil industry and its composite enterprises were allocated their own special protective security force. A special commission on oil issues, Glavkomneft, was established, and within it a special fund was set up to assist in managing oil-related affairs.

In 1921 and 1922 oil workers continued under difficult circumstances. In 1921 the food shortage was exacerbated as a result of famine in the Volga region. Rations allocated to the Caucasian Labour Army were not issued on a regular basis and there were delays in the payment of workers' wages. From June onwards, the families of executives and administrators were removed from the list of those receiving subsistence allowances, while the allowance permitted for the families of workers was reduced to one-third of the previous level. A significant decline in labour discipline and employee morale ensued. Workers tended to either engage in handicrafts or return to village life. Anti-Soviet sentiment was on the rise, and acts of arson and theft became more frequent in the oilfields.

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<sup>1</sup> *Essays on the history of Chechen-Ingushetia*. Vol. 2. Grozny: 1972, p. 97.

At the outset of 1922, the Labour and Defence Council authorized Grozneft to sell two million *poods* (the equivalent of 32,760 tonnes) of petroleum abroad and to use the proceeds to purchase essential materials and equipment. In mid-1923, several shipments from England, Germany and the Netherlands were delivered to Grozny. Among the items were 30 oil motors, 35 steam engines, five machining tools, three iron drilling rigs, pipes, belts, hoses, steel cables, as well as 10 thousand workers' uniforms and 30 thousand pairs of shoes. In addition, Grozny received equipment and materials from other cities in Russia.

These efforts led to the growth of Grozny's oil industry. New drilling rigs were built, and shell pumps and bailers were replaced with deep pumps and rotary percussion drills.

In 1921/1922, total oil production amounted to 1.436 million tonnes, and the number of wells in use rose to 208. The economic situation of Grozneft improved, with net profits of more than 3.7 billion rubles<sup>2</sup>The recovery of the oil industry was accompanied by technical improvements. By the autumn of 1925, 349 Grozneft oil production units had been hooked up to an electrical power supply, and 66% of all operating wells had been converted to deep-pumping production.

The oilfields became more profitable. In 1922/23, the labour productivity in the oil production sector doubled as compared to 1918 levels, effectively reducing production costs. The industry underwent stable development and innovative measures were introduced. The export of petroleum products abroad in 1924/1925 was more than 17 times the level recorded in 1913.<sup>3</sup>

By the end of 1925 the oil industry had experienced a full recovery, accompanied by technological modernization. This included the universal implementation of the electrification and mechanization of enterprises, the introduction of rotary drilling, and deep-pump crude oil production. Crude oil refining activity was developing successfully and new kinds of petroleum products were introduced to the market. Grozneft's net profits in 1925 reached 19.5 million rubles<sup>4</sup>.

Along with the restoration and development of the oil industry in Chechnya and Ingushetia, headway was also made in establishing local industries. These included the processing of agricultural products,

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<sup>2</sup> A.V. Bolbukh. *The history of the workers of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic*. Grozny: 1986, p. 19.

<sup>3</sup> Government Archives of the Chechen-Ingush Oblast, fund 242, register 1, file 74, sheet 35.

<sup>4</sup> Central State Archive of the Chechen Republic, fund 16, register 2, file 745, sheet 329.

the expansion of construction activity, the development of hydro-power from the region's mountain rivers, and the utilization of other natural resources.

In March 1923, the All-Russian Central Executive Committee resolved to transfer to Chechnya the control of local flour mills, dairies and creameries, as well as factories and plants for the production of alcohol, mechanical equipment and products, leather, bricks and tiles. In 1924, the Autonomous Soviet Mountain Republic, which included Ingushetia, devolved control of ten production-based industrial enterprises to Ingushetia. These included flour mills, wine distilleries, tanneries, plants for producing starch and soap, and lumber mills. By the end of 1926, there were 28 such industrial enterprises operating in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

The restoration of the region's industrial base led to the revival of the working class. A central feature of the industrialization of the national areas of the North Caucasus was that it was carried out under conditions involving only minor representation of blue-collar workers in the social structure of the local population. The objectives of industrialization and the training of skilled workers were tasks that were addressed simultaneously.

The Communists who were in power were convinced that the region's potential was being held back by underdevelopment, and that the solution lay in developing large-scale modern industry. The wide scope of industrialization required new workers, and it was determined that these new workers should be increasingly be drawn from local ethnic groups.

Attempts to engage the mountain dwellers in industry and in the construction, transport and other sectors of the economy began with the re-organization of the Autonomous Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic. However, difficulties were encountered in this process of building up a workforce from amongst the local residents, due mainly to their specific national characteristics and socio-economic conditions, not to mention the cultural, domestic and religious factors of their development. The main source for recruitment of the new workforce were farmers, craftsman and artisans, the children of other blue-collar workers and other personnel working in the various industrial areas of the country, including women. A characteristic feature of this process was the massive rejuvenation of the working class. Another characteristic of the working class here was that it remained multinational in composition. It expanded, first and foremost, due to the recruitment of the local population and involvement of ethnic Russian workers from other parts of the country. Prior to the fulfilment of the first five-year

plan, there were very few representatives of the Chechen and Ingush ethnic groups among the workers of Grozny's industrial sector; those that were enlisted were working as unskilled labourers (manual diggers, messengers, watchmen, etc.)

The government contradistinguished Grozny as a proletarian centre, referring to it as a large village where natural forms of farming were preserved and where the Chechen population was characterized by low cultural levels (literacy in the native language was no higher than 10 per cent) and a significant presence of patriarchal, tribal and religious relations. In this regard, the objectives established by the government included as much involvement of Chechens in industry as possible, to provide them with useful skills, and to promote their adaptation to the new conditions of life in the country.<sup>5</sup> The main reason for involving the Chechens in the oil production industry in Grozny was to enable them to realize their proletarian influence on the remaining masses of the Chechen peasantry.

In this context, the question of the social selection of the workforce moved to the forefront. By creating national contingents of the working class, the command-administrative system pursued the objective of expanding the social base of the new regime. It was only by relying on the poor, classless parts of the population, and the recruitment of Soviet bureaucracy from amongst them, that this system was able to function effectively.

On 25 August 1931, the Presidium of the Council on Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR adopted the decree 'On the development of industry in national republics and regions, the growth of the local proletariat, and the technical skills of the indigenous nationalities and supporting their socio-cultural needs'. This document indicated that the national republics and regions had not taken sufficient measures to prepare industrial workers from amongst the indigenous population – in particular, regarding the involvement of representatives of the indigenous population as workers in the industrial sector. It further stated that local authorities had failed to establish accountability in this area. With respect to the enterprises operating in the national republics and regions, the administrations themselves had often failed to provide proper living and working conditions for workers from the indigenous population. Having such arrangements would have been conducive to the consolidation of industry in those regions.

Women were identified as yet another important source for reinforcing the working class during the first Soviet five-year plan. In addition

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<sup>5</sup> Government Archives of the Chechen-Ingush Oblast, fund 241, register 1, file 78, sheets 11–13.

to the economic significance of this move, special political importance was attached to the involvement of women in industrial production, especially women from the mountainous regions. This was seen as imperative for changing the entire lifestyles of the mountain peoples. A significant step was the resolution of the Plenum of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party (b) of 1925 'The Immediate tasks of the Party in its work among working women, peasants and toilers of the East'. In this document, the Party paid particular attention to the need for maximizing the involvement of women in building cooperatives, in trade unions and in economic development in general.

The March 1925 meeting of the National Commission of the North Caucasian Regional Committee of the All-Union Communist Party outlined three main tasks to this end: 1) engaging the mountain dwellers in cooperatives; 2) the development of local women's handicrafts (including basketry, wool spinning, weaving and other crafts) and their organization into cooperatives; and 3) involving the mountain dwellers in production activities at factories and plants.<sup>6</sup>

Major work in encouraging the involvement of women mountain dwellers in production activities was carried out by the Commissions on Improving Working and Living Conditions that were organized under Soviet Committees at the provincial and district levels. Among the tasks assigned to the Commissions was the responsibility for studying the working and living conditions of women mountain dwellers, to attract them to social labour, and to organize non-agricultural producers' cooperative associations. In Chechnya, workshops were organized for felt production, knitting of hosiery and wool spinning.<sup>7</sup>

Such women's cooperative associations were not always profitable, due to the inadequacy of the material and technical infrastructure and their members' lack of experience and ability to work in social production. These associations were expedient, however, in terms of achieving the policy for involving mountain women in social labour. As for the oil industry, given its specific nature (the majority of field operations involve extremely hard physical labour), women were reluctant to engage in such work.

The production process became difficult to manage due to the influx at factories, fisheries and construction sites of thousands of people (among them peasants, youth, and women) who did not have the

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<sup>6</sup> Central State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund P-268, register 1, file 132, sheet 6.

<sup>7</sup> Government Archives of the Chechen-Ingush Oblast, fund 1, register 1, file 262, sheet 76.

slightest idea about industry, its organization or required work pace. Misconduct, tardiness, truancy, and absence from the workplace were all factors that caused the emergence of troubling decisions on the part of the heads of the Party's organs. Inexperienced and hastily trained workers were rendering expensive equipment unusable. Soviet historiography has consistently denied the involvement of any kind of people's movement in these occurrences. Be that as it may, resistance to a new factory or plant atmosphere at times drove the new workers to the deliberate breaking of machinery. This is confirmed by the aggressiveness in these acts that eventually led to claims of subversive activity or sabotage.

The situation was compounded by other phenomena – notably labour mobility and turnover – which grew on a frightening scale during the first five-year plan.

Rapid industrialization demanded more and more skilled labour, while the time allowed for the training of such specialists grew slimmer and the technology involved grew more complicated. This contradiction gave rise to and subsequently reinforced the phenomenon of unprofessionalism in the workplace. Production facilities were subject to an influx of people with only the most basic awareness of any professional skill or expertise.

To sum up, in the 1920s and 1930s, the economy of Chechnya underwent significant changes, and the economic potential of the republic increased significantly. Dozens of new businesses were launched every year, new industries were established, and major developments could be seen in energy and transportation. The economic and strategic importance of the Grozny oil district was huge, and the government fully supported the reconstruction and further development of industry sectors. Oil refining also underwent remarkable advances. Grozny oil became a crucial factor in the industrialization of the country, an important export commodity for the Soviet Union. The associated material and human costs remained disproportionately high, and the results achieved did not always match initial projections. Nevertheless, the main outcome was undeniable – a major industry had emerged in Checheno-Ingushetia.

### **Consequences of the Second World War (1941-1945) on the economy**

The Second World War – or the Great Patriotic War, as it is known in the Soviet Union – radically changed the living and working conditions of the multi-ethnic population of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR.

Issues surrounding the military and the mobilization of troops moved to the forefront. The republic faced the task of having to increase its oil production sharply. The new tasks included the provision of a broad exploration drilling and transmission programme for the untapped areas in the Oysungur, Adu-Yurt, Sernovodsk, Alhazovo, Alhanchurt regions. The demanding challenge of increasing agricultural production fell to the region's farmers.<sup>8</sup>

Industrial enterprises were ultimately converted to military purposes. The Krasny Molot plant, the mechanical shops of Grozneft, and the Krasny Trud plant were re-tooled for arms production. By early September 1941, 28 enterprises had been converted to producing weaponry, military equipment, and ammunition.<sup>9</sup> This was made possible due to the command-based economic system that prevailed in the Soviet economy in the 1920s and 1930s.

By October 1941, the front was drawing nearer to the boundary of the North Caucasus. In response, on 28 October 1941, the State Defence Committee of the USSR decided to dismantle the factories, the oil industry field sites and machine engineering enterprises of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR and evacuate them further into the interior of the Soviet Union.

Between 3 November and 11 December 1941, the drilling equipment from state oil companies was completely dismantled and partially transported to Baku. In addition, 678 marginal production wells of Grozneftekombinat were stripped. The Krasny Molot plant was dismantled, including its repair, mechanical plant and workshops. The dismantling of production wells resulted in a sharp drop in oil production, with total production of Grozneftekombinat falling to 6500 tonnes per day. Drilling operations were completely discontinued as well.<sup>10</sup>

On 29 November 1941, Soviet troops liberated Rostov-on-Don from the occupying Nazi troops. This effectively eliminated the threat of an enemy breakthrough into the North Caucasus. By early January 1942, the oil workers of the republic had carried out a great deal of work in rebuilding the top-priority factories and plants. They also succeeded in restoring 190 production wells. During the first half of 1942, all of the enterprises that had seen their equipment dismantled had been restored, and these oil enterprises could resume operations in May/June.

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<sup>8</sup> State Archives of the Russian Federation, fund 17, register 22, file 3670, sheets 17–18.

<sup>9</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 16, register 13, file 125, sheet 152.

<sup>10</sup> *History of Chechnya from ancient times to the present day*. Vol. 2. Grozny: 2008, p. 480.



This work brought oil production up to 6984 tonnes per day in January of 1943.<sup>11</sup>

The Krasnyi Molot Machine-Building Plant was fully restored by the end of January 1942 and once again began to manufacture war materials for the front.

During the course of restructuring the economy to a war footing, the republic's leadership and management bodies encountered great difficulties. Army recruitment of workers from heavy industry, the transport and agriculture sectors caused a significant shortage of manpower as well as of expertise. The transformation of industrial enterprises to defence-oriented production required large numbers of workers with new skills, including engineers and technicians. However, these challenges were resolved. Women played an important role in replenishing the labour force in both industry and transportation during the war years. In the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, as well as throughout the country, a movement began to promote the mobilization and involvement of women in industrial and transportation enterprises. In 1942, the Krasny Molot Plant was employing 385 women, making up 22% of all employees.<sup>12</sup> By 1 January 1944, the number of women working in the oil industry had reached 6691, accounting for 44.2% of the oil workforce.

Railroad transport played a vital role in restructuring the national economy to the conditions of war. From the beginning of the war, the republic's railways operated according to a military timetable.

In accordance with the general plan for the summer offensive of 1942, the German Wehrmacht High Command (OKW) had developed a plan to capture the Caucasus, code-named 'Edelweiss'.<sup>13</sup> In planning the offensive in the Caucasus, the Nazi command established a specific target for its troops – by 17 September they were to capture Grozny, and by September 25, they were to overtake Baku and push the advance further into the Caucasus.

On July 30, 1942, the General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief established the Transcaucasian Front. It was charged with presenting a defensive line along the Terek River, the Uruk River and the mountain passes of the Main Caucasian range, as well as creating multiple lines of defence along the Grozny–Makhachkala–Baku route.

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<sup>11</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 1, register 32, file 164, sheet 19.

<sup>12</sup> V.V. Nikitin. *Goryuchee-Frontu* (To the Fuel Front). Moscow: 1984, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> V.V. Nikitin. *Goryuchee-Frontu* (To the Fuel Front). Moscow: 1984, p. 45.

Taking advantage of its superiority in manpower and military equipment, the Nazi forces broke through several of the Soviet troops' lines of defence. By early September 1942, they were already close to the borders of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. The invading forces captured Mozdok and the villages of Ischerskaya, Naurskaya and Nichol-aevskaya, located on the road to Grozny.

On 7 August 1942, martial law was imposed throughout the territory of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. A contingency plan was established in accordance with the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet 'On martial law', dated 22 June 1941.<sup>14</sup>

In the summer of 1942, the republic was once again subject to the dismantling and evacuation of its industrial enterprises, as well as the evacuation of its population. While industrial operations were discontinued, Grozny nevertheless continued to supply the front with fuel and food. In accordance with the Resolution of the State Defence Committee of 22 September 1942, the workers, civil servants and technical personnel of the republic's oil industry were mobilized to a wartime footing for the duration of the war. Equipment from the Grozneftkombinat plant, the power plants and networks of Ordzhen-ergo, and enterprises from the republic's other industrial branches were loaded into railway cars for shipment deeper into the interior of the Soviet Union. The Malgobekneft and Gorskneft state enterprises in the active oil districts were completely put out of commission. In all, 2328 wells were abandoned.<sup>15</sup> In order to meet the needs of the front, several oil wells remained operative, in addition to small reserves of crude oil, benzene; lube oil and light oils such as kerosene.

Industrial enterprises were fully transferred to the maintenance of military units. The enterprises that remained in the republic continued to operate smoothly. As 1942 drew to a close, machine engineering plants, mechanical factories and the workshops of Grozneftkombinat were manufacturing military production worth 35.5 million rubles<sup>16</sup>.

Then, by the end of 1942, the military situation had changed in favour of the Soviet forces defending the Caucasus. The threat of enemy troops penetrating Grozny as gone.

In late November that year, the partial restoration of wells got underway, and programmes for extracting and refining oil began. By 26

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<sup>14</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 1, register 1, file 1197, sheet 18; file 924, sheet 2.

<sup>15</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 1, register 1, file 2, sheets 1–2; fund 16, register 2, file 302, sheet 116.

<sup>16</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 16, register 2, file 302, sheet 116.

November, the most profitable oil wells had been restored, to be followed by all other oil wells.

After the defeat of Nazi forces in the North Caucasus, work began in the republic on the reconstruction of industrial enterprises in Grozny, which had suffered losses due to bombing and shelling, as well as in connection with the evacuation and re-evacuation of local plants and equipment. For the period between August 1941 to 1943, the damage to the republic's oil industry, in monetary terms, amounted to more than half a billion rubles. Losses experienced by the Malgobekneft enterprise were estimated at 231 million, Stargrozneft at over 112 million, Oktyabrneft at 106 million, Gorskneft at 80 million and Grozneftzavod at 22 million rubles.<sup>17</sup> As for the energy, local, food and related industries, agriculture, communications, science, culture, education and health sectors, damages were estimated in the millions of rubles.

From March/April 1943, restoration work got underway in the republic. For the development of the oil industry in Grozny in 1944, the government allocated 69.2 million rubles. Grozny's oil industry continued to evolve, continuously providing fuel to the front, as well as industrial and light oils.

In the post-war period, the economy of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR proceeded within the framework of the planned Soviet economy. Much of this involved the presence of qualified personnel among the working class and professionals, mainly representatives of the Russian-speaking population.

### **Restoring Chechnya's economy and social sphere following the end of hostilities in 1999**

The material losses incurred by the military operations carried out during the Russian–Chechen war are simply incalculable. Of the existing 428 Chechen villages, 380 were exposed to bombardment, 70% of the housing was destroyed, and Grozny was virtually razed to the ground. All of the republic's industry and agriculture was wiped out. In the second Chechen war, oil production infrastructure was not spared, and air and railway links were disrupted. The republic and its people were literally robbed. More than 90% of the working population was left with no regular employment. The republic's most educated, productive, and skilled citizens – precisely that sector of the population that represents the potential and hope for the future – have left Chechnya. During a decade plagued with troubles, an entire generation of young

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<sup>17</sup> State Archives of the Chechen Republic, fund 16, register 2, file 1163, sheets 1 and 15.

people (150–200,000 people) has grown up in Chechnya without proper access to education. Many of them became involved in the armed conflict and do not know how to do anything other than fight.

The cultural losses were immense in Chechnya. Many institutions were subject to looting and destruction – among them the Academy of Sciences, the University, the Petroleum and Pedagogical Institutes, two dozen industry-related scientific and research institutes, just as many colleges, and the majority of schools, hospitals, libraries. Major damage was done to local museums, theatres, archives, private libraries and other property of cultural value.

Since the end of 1999, there have come repeated claims about the work being carried out and progress being made in rebuilding the economy and the social sphere of Chechnya. In practice, however, the actual results have been quite modest.

In 2000 budget of the Russian Federation had no expenditure lines fully dedicated to Chechnya, other than for child allowances (516 million rubles), the establishment of a fund to support the delivery of petroleum products and food products (58 million rubles), and compensation for lost housing and property (a total of 428 million rubles). The financing that was directed towards Chechnya in 2000 was based on the re-allocation of funds from some regular line items of the federal budget, as well as extra-budgetary funds. Although the mayor of Grozny, Ivan S. Makhchaev, reported that 70% of Grozny had been devastated, not a penny has been allocated for its restoration. Nikolai Koshman said virtually the same thing, adding that the impressive amounts that Prime Minister Michail Kasyanov (2.5 billion rubles per month) claimed were being allocated to Chechnya, actually included the amount for maintaining the Russian army and the Ministry of Interior Affairs. The funds allocated directly to the republic were only for the salaries of civil servants and the renovation of local schools, hospitals and cultural institutions.

On 1 December 1999, Resolution no. 1320 of the Russian Federation, ‘On measures to normalize the social and political situation in the Chechen Republic’ was issued in order to provide for the necessities of life in the ‘liberated’ regions of the Chechen Republic and emergency social assistance to people living there.<sup>18</sup>

On 8 June 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed the Decree and the Regulation ‘On the organization of a temporary system of ex-

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<sup>18</sup> ‘On the complex set of priority measures to ensure the normal functioning of the economy and social sphere of the Chechen Republic in 2000’. Government of the Russian Federation.

ecutive authorities in the Chechen Republic'. On that same day, a bill by the same name was introduced in the State Duma. And on 12 June, the President signed a decree appointing Akhmad Kadyrov as the Head of Administration of the Chechen Republic – a move initially met with mixed feelings.

The situation in the Chechen Republic itself was far from stable. Armed fighting continued. Air and artillery strikes were conducted on various parts of the republic. 'Cleansing' operations were still carried out, with entire settlements being sealed off. To enter Grozny, one had to pass through dozens of roadblocks, having already waited many hours in queue. The arbitrary killing of religious leaders, heads of administrations, law enforcement officials, and Russian-speaking citizens also began.

The militants and suicide bombers staged attacks. This situation became further complicated by the fact that various political, law enforcement and security structures of the Russian Federation attempted to pursue policies in Chechnya that would further their own narrow interests, drawing on various political forces and personalities from amongst the Chechens. In the second half of 2000 came a wave of bloody purges, especially in the lowlands, during which thousands of people were detained. Ordinary residents of the republic suffered from despotism at the hands of both the Russian soldiers and the militants. Not a day passed in the autumn and winter of 2000 without reports of clashes, 'cleansing sweeps', artillery and air strikes, and raids in the central market, which spilled over into organized robberies.

In 2000, the main challenges facing the Governmental Commission for the restoration of the Chechen Republic, headed by Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Khristenko, were to create a mechanism for financing the reconstruction of the republic, and a system to manage this process and the functioning of its executive branch.

The financing of activities under the Russian Federation Government Federal special-purpose programme for rebuilding Chechnya in 2002 came from three main sources: 1) the federal budget (about 7.95 billion rubles); 2) extra-budgetary funds (about 1.8 billion rubles), including funds from the Russian Federation Pension Fund and funds derived from export sales of oil produced in Chechnya; and 3) the funds of the commercial entities RAO Unified Energy System of Russia, OJSC Gazprom and the Russian Ministry of Railways (about 2.79 billion rubles).<sup>19</sup> The revenue side of the budget amounted to 5.58 billion rubles, and Chechnya's own budget revenues were projected to

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<sup>19</sup> 'The foundation of Chechnya's restoration has been laid. Interview with Vladimir Yelagin', *Russia's Economy: XXI century*. no. 2 (7), May 2002.

780 million rubles. The bulk of the budget was covered by transfers from the federal budget. There were also plans for covering the deficit of the Chechen Republic and increasing its revenues by privatizing various state-owned enterprises and other property on the territory of Chechnya.

The Russian government has implemented the programme for the restoration of the economy and social sphere of the Chechen Republic, which was approved on 25 January 2001. In 2001, the sum of 14.4 billion rubles was allocated for these purposes. Federal authorities and the Department of the State Employment Service for the Chechen Republic, together with local authorities, organized 69 thousand temporary jobs for 45 thousand people, mainly in the clearing of roads and debris and in the construction of housing. The construction of two combined heating/ power plants was carried out, in addition to brickworks, processing mills for agricultural products, and bakeries in rural areas. In Grozny, work began on restoring the oil refinery, with oil production carried out according to a temporary regime of up to 700 tonnes per day. Transport infrastructure was also rebuilt. From April 2001, there was a weekly passenger train service between Gudermes and Moscow.

The fuel and energy infrastructure of the republic was also restored. A total of 1232 km of high-voltage power lines were put back into commission, out of the 2436 km previously in operation. Seventy of the 108 existing transformer substations were re-commissioned; electricity was again provided to 212 settlements; and the supply of natural gas was restored to 105 villages and numerous districts. Long-distance telephone communications were re-instated, and a mobile telephone network was set up, initially with very limited access. Since its deployment, telecommunications in the Chechen Republic have remained among the most expensive in the world.

In the 2000/2001 academic year, 357 schools were in operation in Chechnya, as well as three institutions of higher education, and 12 polytechnical and vocational-technical colleges. Through the Russian Ministry of Education, 500 seats for preferential admission to Russian universities were reserved for graduates of schools in Chechnya in 2001/2002, including 70 seats in educational institutions located in Moscow and St. Petersburg. By June 2001, the Administration of the Chechen Republic had fully repaid the overdue salaries of public sector employees for the year 2000. Over 50 thousand children from Chechnya left the republic for medical treatment and health retreat stays in other regions of Russia.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *History of Chechnya from ancient times to the present day*. Grozny: 2008, p. 796.

The mechanical engineering industry in the republic, mainly represented by the production of machinery and equipment for the oil industry, was completely destroyed during the war. There is no possibility of its ever being restored to its original form, because the niche previously enjoyed by the machinery building sector in Chechnya has now been claimed by other companies operating in this sphere.

After carrying out an in-depth study, the Ministry of Industry Science of the Russian Federation was tasked with determining the prospects of redeveloping the machine engineering sector in the Chechen Republic. In 2001, work was carried out to restore the workshops of various local factories, including those of Orgtehnika, Avtomashstroy, Transmash and Pischemash. As regards larger industrial projects, studies are currently being carried out to evaluate their prospects of entering the market, as well as the possibility of staffing such plants and factories with qualified personnel. The latter point is an important consideration, since much of the qualified population has left Chechnya altogether.

Since the restoration of the republic's economy is taking place against the background of new socio-political realities, it is necessary to calculate the profitability of integrating local industrial facilities into the market. The internal market of the Chechen Republic is quite comprehensive. True, most products are imported, but domestic production – particularly in the processing of agricultural produce, food production, as well as the consumer goods market, in large part – is effectively stimulating domestic demand within the republic. Examples of this impetus include the sugar factory in Argun, the wine industry in Naursky district, and construction companies throughout the republic.

Despite the complete absence of any stable inflow of investment, small business is actively developing in post-war Chechnya. Even in Grozny, which was totally destroyed during the war, the first few storeys of buildings often remained; here shops and service-based firms have been opened, which speaks to the high energy and industriousness of the Chechen people.

The issue of employment is particularly critical in the republic. In 2002, several industrial enterprises were put into commission, among which were a factory producing knitted fabrics, a dairy, a packaging factory, a footwear plant, a cement plant with output capacity of 300 thousand tonnes per year, and four quarries for the production of concrete aggregate. The most dynamic sectors in the republic are now the agro-industrial complex and the construction industry. In total in 2002, there were 150 thousand regularly paid jobs in the republic.

The petroleum and oil refinery complex of the Chechen Republic are its greatest assets, and there is currently a struggle over their control. There has emerged a gross discrepancy between the interests of the Russian Government, the republic's leadership and the interests of the oil companies themselves. The contradictions inherent in the systemic interests of each of these groups are a key determining factor in the situation in the republic today.

The main oil-producing enterprise of the republic has long been the Grozneft conglomerate, which is part of an integrated production system involved in the extraction, processing and transport of oil and petroleum products. In November 2000, JSC Grozneftegaz – a subsidiary of the oil company Rosneft – was established to manage the oil and gas industry of the republic. In late 2000 and early 2001, this enterprise recorded an output of 300 thousand tonnes of crude oil per day. At that time, there were more than 30 out-of-control wells that were openly gushing, huge amounts of oil were being burned, and up to two thousand tonnes of oil per day were being pilfered. The company Grozneftegaz provided jobs to more than three thousand people. Crude oil production in 2003 amounted to 1.8 million tonnes, and investment in the company reached 3.6 billion rubles. At the same time, 2.3 billion rubles in tax payments were transferred to the federal and local budgets. In 2004, 11 new producing wells were put into commission.

Grozneftegaz involved itself in the restoration of the social sphere and its related establishments in Chechnya. In 2003 alone, the company spent 125.5 million rubles for this purpose, extending charitable aid to various organizations in the republic. Nevertheless, residents of the republic tend to perceive the activities of Rosneft as being specifically targeted at the export of raw materials produced in Chechnya, with no efforts whatsoever to rebuild its oil industry.

The traditional industrial mainstay of the Chechen Republic, oil refining, was completely destroyed during the war. However, the functioning of underground mini-refineries, which operated even during military operations, resolved the problem of petrol and diesel fuel supplies – and not only to consumers in the Chechen Republic, as such mini-plants enabled petroleum products to be supplied to neighbouring regions. On the other hand, such production has severely polluted the environment, and has led to widespread disease and poisoning among the population, in addition to other serious consequences.

Over the past ten years, the system for the distribution of the proceeds from the sale of Grozny oil has constantly changed. When Chechnya's leadership was made up of persons loyal to Moscow, a portion of the



funds were handed over to Chechnya, apparently as a sign of confidence and encouragement. However, in instances characterized by conflict, all of the revenues were instead formally transferred to the federal level. In 2002, a 100% stake in Grozneftegaz was owned by the state-owned company Rosneft; only two years later, that was reduced to 51%, with the remainder transferred to the Ministry of State Property of Chechnya.

Funding directly transferred from the federal budget to Chechnya in 2000 amounted to 967.6 million rubles. In 2001, that figure was 3.1 billion rubles; in 2002, 6.2 billion. In 2003, 8.0 billion were transferred and, for the first seven months of 2004, transfers amounted to 8.3 billion rubles. Unfortunately, with no control mechanism in place for the use of budgetary funds on the part of the Chechen Republic, this has resulted in vast sums being embezzled.<sup>21</sup>

In general, the socio-economic situation in Chechnya has remained difficult. According to German Gref, in charge of overseeing the process of revitalizing the Chechen economy on the federal side, 'there is huge dissatisfaction regarding the facilities that are being financed by the authorities of the Chechen Republic itself, as well as by the Federal government'. The facilities targeted for restoration and for which funds have been allocated by the authorities include facilities that have either been laid up or for which the construction has still not been completed (despite statements indicating that the funding process for these objects is in full swing). It often happens that when money is received for the construction of particular facilities, those funds are then written off, because the projects themselves were long ago demolished.

Local residents have virtually been left without any proper livelihood. Instead, they have turned to illegal business – transactions involving stolen oil, drug smuggling, construction scams, etc. Local youth, who have experienced a lifetime of nothing but war, cannot avail themselves the option to migrate to other parts of Russia to take employment there, since the economic crisis has led to massive unemployment throughout the federation.

In May 2004, the federal government announced that the current federal special-purpose programme for restoring the socio-economic sphere of the Chechen Republic would be subject to further review. According to German Gref, the number of projects funded from the federal budget should be reduced and the funds transferred should concentrate on start-up facilities, particularly infrastructure projects.

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<sup>21</sup> Official website of the Government of the Russian Federation.

The Head of the Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation supported the idea of attracting private enterprises to do business in the Chechen Republic by offering special customs and tax benefits to companies engaged in the processing of agricultural produce and the construction sector. It was proposed that funding for the restoration of social infrastructure be increased and that key industries be further developed, including the agricultural sector, oil refining, and the production of building materials. In addition, it was proposed that the price of natural gas and electricity for local residents be reduced.

The construction industry is indeed a prospective growth area for the republic. Two brick factories have already been restored and are currently in operation, which is also the case for a linoleum production workshop and two woodworking shops. Work is currently being carried out on rebuilding housing, roads and transport facilities. Institutions related to sports, culture, health and education are also functioning again.

Oil-industry workers are seriously concerned about the restoration of the oil fields. According to geologists' estimates, proven recoverable reserves of oil in the republic total more than 50 million tonnes, while potential and projected reserves amount to more than 800 million tonnes. However, in order to convert potential reserves to the status of in-place reserves, further hydrocarbon exploration is required.

In May 2005, at a government meeting in Moscow, a discussion was held on the achievements made in the Chechen Republic within the federal special-purpose programme 'Rebuilding the economy and social sphere of the Chechen Republic (for 2002 and onwards)'.

For the period 2001 to 2004, during the reconstruction work carried out under this programme, a total of 5191 facilities were commissioned and built, as a result of which 19,072 jobs were created. The construction projects were not just for social purposes and municipal use, but also extended to facilities related to the local economy. The republic began to manufacture its own products. From 2005 to 2006, the domestic production of goods grew by 128%. Contributing to this was the reconstruction of the Transmash factory and the construction of new enterprises such as Electropult and Tekhprom, producing reinforced plastic pipes. The process of economic recovery has also reached the rural areas of the republic.

The appointment of Ramzan Kadyrov to the post of President of the Chechen Republic led to the designation of new strategic objectives. 'We are moving into a stage of large-scale global change, and the

Chechen Republic will become an example of rapid economic growth for the whole of Russia,' stated Kadyrov during the 2007 roundtable discussion 'The New Economic Strategy of the Chechen Republic.' It was at this venue that he pledged that the city of Grozny and the whole republic would be restored by the end of 2008.<sup>22</sup> In 2007, the sum of 4.6 billion rubles was allocated for reconstruction work, including 2.8 billion rubles specifically for the reconstruction of housing infrastructure.<sup>23</sup>

Unemployment remains the sore point. By mid-2007, unemployment in Chechnya stood at around 312,200 people, more than two times higher than in the entire Southern Federal District of Russia.<sup>24</sup> The path towards resolving this problem of unemployment is seen as lying in the recovery of local industry, small business development and, above all, the construction industry. Throughout the crisis in the Chechen Republic and up until the present day, local entrepreneurial initiative has been central in saving the republic from absolute social catastrophe. By surmounting all sorts of obstacles, the people themselves managed to ensure the supply of food, essential goods, etc. If the conditions for small business development can be established in Chechnya and public policies to promote it created, we can expect these measures to make a substantial contribution to the economic recovery of the republic as a sound participant in the Russian as well as the global economic sphere.

The new federal programme 'Socio-economic development of the Chechen Republic for 2008–2011', with funding of more than 121 billion rubles (including 110.78 billion rubles from the federal budget), is designed to ensure the republic's transition from its recovery phase to development. Once this programme has been implemented, any funding for economic development purposes will be provided to the republic on an equal footing with other administrative-territorial entities of the Russian Federation. At the same time, the complexity of the underlying conditions for the regional economy calls for a special approach. A major challenge here is creating conditions conducive to investment. Prior to 2005, rating agencies evaluated the republic's investment attractiveness as extremely low, rating it as 'ZD' – low growth potential and extreme risk. Since then, however, the republic has succeeded in improving its position in the region and is now rated as having average potential and moderate risk.

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<sup>22</sup> *RIA Novosti*, February 19, 2007.

<sup>23</sup> *Grozny-Inform*, 5 February 2007.

<sup>24</sup> *Vesti Republic*, no. 201, 2007.

By 2011, it is expected that all work will be achieved in terms of restoring the republic's economy, and Chechnya should be able to catch up with other regions of Russia in economic development. The republic should then be able to resolve its problems on its own. In effect, the question of the sources of funding for continuing work on the republic's economic rehabilitation after 2011 remains open, however.

The problems currently facing the people and the leadership of the Chechen Republic are very serious. What is needed is not for the industrial production complex to be restored, but rather that it be built anew. Crude oil is currently being exported instead of being processed on-site, and most construction materials are imported, thereby increasing the cost per square meter of residential property. For the more than two million tonnes of oil being extracted in the Chechen Republic, the republic's administration receives less than 500 million rubles. In addition, 70% of the taxes that are collected go towards the budget of the Russian Federation. An estimated 40 billion rubles in borrowed funds have been spent on construction projects in the republic. At the same time, thousands of citizens of the Chechen Republic continue to reside in other regions of Russia, as well as further abroad.<sup>25</sup>

The persistence of tensions in the region and the continuing effects of the world financial crisis represent additional risks to the organization and functioning of big business, as well as hindering the inflow of investment into the republic. In essence, the normal operation of the economic mechanism enabling all members of society to live from their own labour has failed. The unemployed adult population, young people not least, represents a potential source of heightened social risk. Poverty and destitution, and the absence of the basic possibility for people to provide for their very livelihood through their own labour are nurturing the roots of major social ills.

The eventual reconstruction of some of the key facilities of the republic's economic support infrastructure – including those in the energy sector (e.g. oil extraction and refining, electricity and natural gas industries), transportation and communications – can only serve as the foundation for building intensive economic development in the region. Even under the most optimistic development scenarios, these facilities and projects will not be able to provide work for significant numbers of the unemployed population. The main area of economic activity with considerable employment potential for the able-bodied population is the construction of massive civil and industrial engineering projects in the republic. Such development should provide a strong impetus for the growth of many local sectors of the national economy, such

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<sup>25</sup> *History of Chechnya from ancient times to the present day*. Grozny, 2008, vol. 2, pp. 824–825.

as heavy industry, as well as agriculture and the services sector. It is unlikely that the federal government will be able to finance such activity to any significant extent. The Russian government today is simply unable to invest that kind of money in the economy of Chechnya.

The Chechen government believes that the recent cessation of counter-terrorist operations, as of 16 April 2009, will have a positive impact on the capacity to attract investment to Chechnya. This, in turn, should significantly improve socio-economic growth and provide a new impetus to the development of small and medium businesses in this North Caucasian republic.



# The Conflict between Traditional Islam and Wahhabism in the North Caucasus: Origins, Dynamics and the Means for its Resolution

**Vakhit Kh. Akayev**

The North Caucasus has become known as a conflict-ridden part of the Russian Federation, in large part because of the severity of the ethno-political conflicts found there. These conflicts are rooted in territorial feuds, separatism, religious extremism, military operations, and acts of terror. In many respects, these processes are interlinked with the broader complex of often contradictory socio-economic, political and cultural transformations underway throughout the Russian Federation.

The Islamic revival in the North Caucasus is a specific phenomenon. Its substance is driving the revival impulses of traditional Islam, which had, for many years, been guided by the dictates of Communist Party ideology and behavioural expectations. Islamic revivalism in the region has acquired a further distinctive aspect, linked to the penetration of radical and extremist elements not part of the traditional spiritual and religious values of Islam previously seen there. At times, these have been linked to the illegal activities of Salafist and Wahhabi groups, whose members have been occasionally referred to as 'ikhwan' ('Muslim Brothers who have forgotten their kin'). Their actions are described in the term 'ikhwanism'<sup>1</sup>.

This chapter describes the contradictory and conflict-driven interaction between the form of Islam that is traditional to the North Caucasus and the behaviour of these non-traditional religious groups, with its negative consequences for the Chechen nation. I examine how Islam has traditionally functioned in the region, why Wahhabism even-

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<sup>1</sup> Kh.A. Nukhayev. *Vedeno or Washington?* Moscow: Artogeya Centre, 2001, pp. 113–114.

tually appeared and spread throughout the North Caucasus, and the conflicts that have arisen between these two opposing forces. I then extract the distinctive features of the social and religious structure of Chechen society, its division into various *taip* (territorial associations) and *virtd* (religious societies), as they form the context for the political and religious situation there. Finally, I inquire into the means by which such expressions of religious and political extremism may be impeded and overcome.

### **How traditional Islam functions in the North Caucasus**

For the most part, the Muslims of the Russian Federation's southern fringe are Sunni, and adhere to the Shafi and Hanafi schools of Islamic law. There are more Sunni Muslims than Shiites in the region, but researchers often make inaccurate statements about their numerical correlation. For instance, in the Russian translation of Horrie and Chippindale's *What is Islam?*, we read that 'Sunni Muslims form the minority in Tatarstan, Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Kalmykia, all of which are part of the Russian Federation'<sup>2</sup>. In fact, Sunni Muslims form the majority in all of these constituent republics of the Russian Federation; taken together, they number about 8 million people – considerably more than even the Shiite population of Azerbaijan.

Certain researchers, going back to the Soviet period, have suggested that Islam in the North Caucasus is a parallel, popular form of the faith that operates outside of the mosque. However, these are judgements based on external, formal characteristics. A distinction should be made, for instance, between Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, the Northeastern Caucasus, and the Northwestern Caucasus, which is made up of North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessk and Adygea. In the former areas, Islam, both historically and today, is dominated by Sufism. In the latter areas, it is closely entwined with elements of popular culture (including paganism), which have often achieved sacred status and have become objects of reverence.

In a 2005 publication about Wahhabism in the North Caucasus, S. Markedonov expressed yet another view: that, in the North Caucasus, traditional Islam is seen as a religion of ritual (primarily in connection with burial rites), which now finds itself confronted by a radical or 'prayerful' Islam. That author notes that traditional Islam is not char-

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<sup>2</sup> Chris Horrie and Peter Chippindale. *What is Islam?* (volume sponsored by *The Observer*, 1990). Russian edition, St. Petersburg: Amfora Publishers, 2008, p. 384. [This erroneous statement is due, in fact, to a mistranslation from English: see the 1994 (pbk) edition, p. 222, tr.]



acteristically ‘prayerful’, in contrast with the practices that have taken hold in the form of ‘North Caucasus Wahhabism’.

As a whole, Islam in this region is a syncretic phenomenon that has absorbed specifically religious as well as popular components, the result being a complex mosaic or pattern within which the various elements have achieved a certain balance. The emergence and spread of Islam throughout the region took place in several different stages in different periods. The process of Islamization in Dagestan is connected with the Arab conquest campaigns from the mid-8th century to the 10th century. As noted in one of the historical writings on this theme, the Arabs subjugated Dagestan ‘... in part by force, bloodshed and destruction, and in part by peace, through the conversion of the population to Islam. In this way, they came to occupy the country and became established in each its parts.’<sup>3</sup> The second stage of the process of converting the population of Dagestan to Islam took place from the 10th to the 16th centuries and is more connected with the activity of local missionaries.

The initial appearance of Muslims in Chechen society can probably be traced back to the military campaigns carried out by 10<sup>th</sup>-century Arab military leaders against Caucasian pagans. Upon Tamerlane’s incursion into the North Caucasus at the end of the 14th century, residents of the eastern part of Chechnya were subjected to total Islamization. However, the Chechen and Ingush people of the mountainous regions near the Georgian border adopted Islam much later, towards the end of the 18th century. The Chechen ethnographer and Russian Army captain, Umalat Laudayev, argued that Chechens adopted Islam from neighbouring Dagestani tribal peoples; he also identified two Muslim preachers – Termaola and Sheikh Bersa (Bersan) – as responsible for converting the Chechen people to Islam.<sup>4</sup> The former preacher employed drastic and at times violent measures in the course of Chechen Islamization. This contrasts with the approach taken by the latter spiritual leader, who tended to use gentler methods of a more verbal and persuasive nature.

The active Islamization of the population of Adygea began in the 16th century, largely under the influence of the Crimea and Turkey. However, for the Kabardians, Shapsugs, and other Adyg peoples, the process of conversion to Islam continued right up to the 19th century. This process was connected not only with influences from Turkey or on the

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Dagestan Chronicles. Extracts from the history of Dagestan, prepared by Muhammad-Rafi, with an introduction by P.U.’ in *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh*, Issue 5. Tiflis, 1871, p. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Umalat Laudayev. ‘The Chechen tribe (with annotations)’ in *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh*, Issue 6. Tiflis, 1872, pp. 54–56.

part of its designated religious preachers, but also with Muslim leaders in the North Caucasus – among them, Sheikh Mansur (1732–1794), Imam Shamil, and his Naib, Magomed-Amin.

The Sufi tradition of Islam in the Northeastern Caucasus is expressed through the *tariqahs* (pathways) of the Naqshbandiyah, Qadiriyyah and Shazaliyyah orders, each of which is based on distinctive ideas or theoretical sources and has its own variants of ritual. Among the theoretical sources of these *tariqahs*, alongside the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad, are the Sufi treatise of Sheikh Jamalutdin of Kazikumukhsk,<sup>5</sup> the *Adabul-Marziya*, the *Tarjamat makalati ... Kunta-sheikh*<sup>6</sup> (speeches and pronouncements of Kunta-hajji, published in 1910 at the Mavrayev printworks in Temir-Khan-Shura), the *Khulasatul adab*<sup>7</sup> or ‘Sufi ethics’ of Hasan of Kakhib (1905, same printing house), and finally *Treasure-house of blessed truths*, by Said Afandi of Chirkey<sup>8</sup>.

The rituals specific to these *tariqahs* are found, above all, in their performance of the *zikr* (invocation of the name of God) which, in the North Caucasus, takes two forms. Adherents of the Naqshbandiyah perform the ‘quiet *zikr*’ (*hufiya*) without loud exclamations or exaggerated movements, whereas followers of the Qadiriyyah perform the ‘loud *zikr*’ (*jahriya*), dancing energetically in a circle or moving forwards and backwards and loudly clapping their hands (or beating a drum, an activity which Chechens term *zhirgla*). Among those who follow the Qadiriyyah, there are also those who play a two-stringed instrument known among the Chechens as the *lad khlokkhu pondar*.

All three *tariqahs* can be found in Dagestan. In Chechnya and Ingushetia, only the Naqshbandiyah and Qadiriyyah are known to function; they are further divided into some 30-odd small religious brotherhoods or *virids*. Their operation and interaction, and their often contradictory relations with one another, form the backdrop to a complex religious and political picture.

Among the *virids* of the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah* in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia are *virid* brotherhoods that carry the names of their respective sheikhs: Tashu-hajji, Akhmatuk-hajji, Elakh-Mullah, Ab-

<sup>5</sup> See Jamalutdin of Kazikumukhsk, ‘Adabul Marziya’ in *Sbornik svedenii o kavkazskikh gortsakh*. Issue 5, Tiflis, 1869. This work was republished in Oxford in 1986.

<sup>6</sup> See *Tarjamat makalati... Kunta sheikh* (in Arabic). Petrovsk, 1911. Based on this source, in his book, ‘Sheikh Kunta-hajji: Life and Teachings’, published in 1994 in Grozny, the author systematized the religious and philosophical teachings of the Chechen Sufi Kunta-hajji Kishiyeu.

<sup>7</sup> See Hasan-Afandi, *Sufi ethics* (*Khulasatul adab*), 2000, no place of publication indicated.

<sup>8</sup> See Said Afandi of Chirkey, *Sokrovishnitsa blagodatnikh znaniya* (‘Treasure-house of blessed truths’). Second edition. Moscow, 2003.

dul-Vakhlaba, Abdul-Aziz Shaptukayev, Deni Arsanov, Yusup-hajji, the Koshkeldinsky *virid*, Bagautdin Arsanov, Umalat-hajji, Sugaip-Mullah, Uzun-hajji, Solsa-hajji, Suleiman-hajji, Albast-hajji, Magomed-Amin, Yangulba-hajji, Kana-hajji, Ibragim-hajji, Kosum-hajji, and Shamsuddin-hajji. Those who bear allegiance to the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah* in the Chechen Republic make up roughly 18% of all Muslims found there. The leaders of the people of Dagestan and Chechnya, during their battles for independence in both the Tsarist and Soviet periods, were followers or sympathizers of the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah*.

The following major *virid* brotherhoods of Chechen and Ingush sheikhs belong to the Qadiriyyah *tariqah*: Kunta-hajji, Bamatgirei-hajji, Batal-hajji, Chimmirzy, Ali Mitayev, Mani-Shaikha, and Vis-hajji. The followers of the Qadiriyyah *tariqah* in today's Chechen republic greatly outnumber the adherents of the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah*, together making up about 70% of all Muslims in Chechnya.

Under the Tsars, the followers of the Qadiriyyah were accused of fanaticism after their involvement in the 'battle of the daggers' near Shali in January 1864, and persecution ensued. They were forced to operate in secret – an underground existence that continued right until the February 1917 Revolution. It was only during the early years of the Soviet regime in Chechnya that adherents of the Qadiriyyah were again able to operate openly, since the new authorities regarded followers of this *tariqah* as a 'social stratum' close to the working class and the peasantry (an assessment included in a confidential OGPU, or secret police, document). The new regime made the most out of the extremely poverty-stricken Qadiriyyah, using them to promote its ideology and policies among the poorest Chechen peasants. This countered the influence of the wealthy mullahs, merchants and landowners who tended to be followers of the Naqshbandiyah. There were, however, some adherents of that *tariqah* (such as Sugail Mullah, Ibragim-hajji and Belu-hajji) who supported the introduction of the Soviet regime in Chechnya because they too had themselves suffered at the hands of the Tsarist authorities.

The policy of cooperation between the new authorities and Muslim spiritual leaders in the 1920s and 1930s subsequently became one of repression. 'Counter-revolutionaries' were sought among the region's Islamic leaders; from the mid-1930s onwards, many were the victims of extra-judicial executions carried out by the OGPU and its successor, the NKVD. Many Muslims could not understand why they had been selected for elimination by the Bolshevik regime; others realized that their only crime in the eyes of that godless system was their belief in Allah.

In the late 1950s, the Chechen and Ingush nations returned from Central Asia, to which they had been deported in 1944, and the Checheno-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic was restored. It was the followers of the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah*, who had demonstrated their loyalty to the Soviet authorities, who now assumed the dominant role in the religious and political sphere. These spiritual leaders of the Chechen and Ingush people, whether openly or more discreetly supported by the Soviet authorities, were to retain this position for as long as the USSR continued to exist. Many Soviet and Communist Party officials of the Checheno-Ingush ASSR were in close contact with well-known leaders of the Naqshbandiyah. They enjoyed their support and used them in pursuit of their own private interests and in carrying out their tasks as the local representatives of the Soviet regime in Moscow.

During the crisis in Checheno-Ingushetia in the summer and autumn of 1991, many Sufi brotherhoods were drawn into the political struggles of the republic. Taking advantage of the attempted August coup in Moscow, the leader of the National Congress of the Chechen Nation, Djokhar Dudayev, and his immediate supporters began an open struggle for control of Chechen territory. For this, they needed to enlist popular support – and they were able to attract the followers of Sheikh Kunta-hajji and his deputy Chimmirza.<sup>9</sup> Yusup Soslanbekov, an active participant in the 1991 ‘Chechen revolution’, offers the following comment: ‘Dudayev was a convinced Communist who did not even leave the CPSU when it was declared to be a criminal organization. He was also a confirmed atheist who announced that he was a member of Kunta-hajji’s *virid* specifically in order to secure the support of that influential brotherhood.’<sup>10</sup>

When Dudayev’s regime was established, the Naqshbandiyah found their position undermined. From 1991 to 1994, leaders of the Qadiriyyah, such as M. Garkayev, M. Nasukhanov and M-hajji Alsabekov, came to dominate the religious and political scene in the republic, posing as supporters of Dudayev and the independence of Chechnya. In the post-Soviet period, the muftis of the republic came exclusively from the *virid* of Kunta-hajji. This influence was further strengthened by the unswervingly anti-Wahhabi activities of Akhmad Kadyrov, and the hostility of adherents of the Qadiriyyah (Zikrists) to the ideology and deeds of Wahhabism.

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<sup>9</sup> Chimmirza was the *vekil* or plenipotentiary of Kunta-hajji, who helped to spread the *tariqah* of the Qadiriyyah in the form promoted by Kunta, the sheikh of the Zikrists. Subsequently, Chimmirza would himself establish a *virid* that became popularly known as ‘the drummers’.

<sup>10</sup> Yusup Soslanbekov. *Chechnya (Nokhchicho), the view from within*, p. 39.

The *virid* brotherhoods of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia came into existence in the 19th and 20th centuries. Their founders entered the pantheon of saints, whose veneration has constituted a very important part of many believers' rituals. Nearly every *virid* has its own distinctive rituals and traditions concerning the life and activities of the Sufi teachers. There is a *ziarat* (mausoleum) that commemorates almost every founder of a *virid* in Chechnya and Ingushetia. For the faithful, such *ziarats* are sites for regular pilgrimage and veneration.

In many respects, the situation within Islam in Chechnya and Ingushetia is determined by the relations that have developed between the *virid* brotherhoods. In Dagestan, by contrast, the situation is shaped by the relations between those who are today the leaders of the Sufi Orders and their followers. Unavoidably drawn into politics, they often find themselves in conflict with one another. The situation is exacerbated by relations between the traditional and non-traditional forms of Islam found in the North Caucasus.

The *tariqah* of Shazaliyah exists successfully in Dagestan thanks to the activities of Said Afandi of Chirkey, who is today a sheikh of two *tariqahs* – the Naqshbandiyah and the Shazaliyah. He wields a firm influence over the official clergy and over the political elite of the important Avar ethnic group. He is also influential within the Spiritual Department for the Muslims of Dagestan which has been, and remains, active in its opposition to Wahhabi activities within the republic. Figures collected by several Dagestan researchers indicate that this Sufi sheikh has up to six thousand followers – a sizable force, capable of determining the further development of the religious and political situation in Dagestan.

In today's Chechen Republic, the most influential Qadiriyyah *virid* is that of Sheikh Kunta-hajji Kishiyev. Its members include the president of the republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, the mufti and a significant proportion of the clergy. There are also supporters of this *virid* in neighbouring Ingushetia, where the Qadiriyyah *virid* of Batal-hajji is considered influential although with fewer followers than the Kunta-hajji. The descendants of this *virid* are today widely represented in the power structures of the Ingush republic. Among the Ingush, also the *virid* of Sheikh Deni Arsanov wields considerable influence.

Arsanov's *virid* had great influence over the faithful during the Soviet period, but now finds itself displaced by the dominant followers of Kunta-hajji. It also has an ideological dispute with the latter, adopting different approaches as to the performance of religious rites. Ramzan Kadyrov has rebuilt the *ziarat* of the Naqshbandiyah sheikh Kunta-hajji. His recent attendance at the celebration to mark its inauguration

in the village of Keni-Yurt was a deliberate diplomatic gesture towards improving relations between the adherents of Qadiriyyah and Naqshbandiyyah.

The followers of Sufism in the Northeastern Caucasus – Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia – are Sunni Muslims who observe the fundamental tenets of Islam and hold close to Sufi traditions. These include the veneration of teachers (*ustazi*), of the sheikhs and *avliyah* known to them, the performance of the loud and the silent *zikr*, pilgrimages to the shrines of the saints, and so on.

As part of its centuries-long adaptation to local ethno-cultural features and folk culture, Islam in the North Caucasus has acquired a character of its own, distinguished by liberality, and tolerance towards other faiths. Since the end of the 1980s, however, tensions have been growing in the region, due to its penetration by a new religious doctrine with a pronounced political character.

Among the local Muslim clergy, this new movement has come to be known as ‘Wahhabism’. Adherents of this teaching, however, consider such a name offensive and refer to themselves as Muslims, proponents of a ‘pure’ Islam and of religious unity (*tawheed*). They see it as their duty to restore the true Islam of the Prophet Muhammad and the four Righteous Caliphs, by cleansing traditional Islam of local accretions, the errors of the Sufi and their followers, and elements of pagan belief that have distorted the Muslim religion. The way to begin this process, in their view, is to make *sharia* part of the entire socio-cultural reality of the Muslims of the North Caucasus. Certain researchers refer to these activists as Salafists (i.e. supporters of the traditions of the earliest Muslims). Others describe them as neo-Wahhabi, thereby distinguishing them from the adherents of Wahhabism, the official ideology of the Islamic state of Saudi Arabia. I have elsewhere referred to this phenomenon as ‘North Caucasian Wahhabism’, in order to highlight this distinction.<sup>11</sup>

Such a term cannot provide an exhaustive account of the essence of this phenomenon. Only a thorough scholarly analysis is capable of doing that by linking this regional phenomenon with the revivalism occurring in those Muslim parts of the world where Salafist, fundamentalist and radical groups are active.

All these processes can be observed among the Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus, including Chechens, whose religious organizations and social structures may be noticeably identified, in large part, by the

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<sup>11</sup> See V.Kh. Akayev, ‘North Caucasian Wahhabism as a variety of Islamic radicalism’, *Nauchnaya mysl Kavkaza*, 2000, no. 3 (in Russian), pp. 40–48.

existence of Sufi brotherhoods (*virids*) and *taips*. Researchers often examine Chechen *virids* and *taips*, only to produce inadequate interpretations. In this process, they have considered it less relevant to focus on the interconnection between *virids* and *taips* in the context of the general religious and political situation within Chechen society.

### **The interaction between Chechen *virids* and *taips* as part of the religious and political situation in the North Caucasus region**

Religious issues are not the only problems that have arisen in the North Caucasus. Relations between the clans that make up Chechen society are also relevant in any attempt to understand the current religious and political situation in the region. Researchers in Rostov-on-Don, Moscow and St. Petersburg have attempted to trace the roots of the religious and political situation in Chechnya back to the social structure of Chechen society. They tend to reduce its present status to that of a society based on relations of tribe and lineage, and ignore the various stages of Soviet modernization experienced by the Chechen nation, as by many other peoples of the former USSR. Chechen society has traditionally had strongly developed democratic and civil elements. Today it is also experiencing the formation of a market economy and the resultant social differentiation.

Certain researchers, with noteworthy determination, refuse to see beyond the confines of the clan or *taip*. Here it is in order to make a few pertinent statements about the clans in Chechen society and the myths associated with them.

It has become commonplace to assert that clan and *taip* in Chechen society are comparable concepts. However, the *taip*, which derives from the Arabic word *taif*, refers to the totality of individuals who live in a certain area. Its members are not necessarily bound by ties of blood or lineage – whereas that is the constituting factor in the definition of a clan.<sup>12</sup> As Lechi Ilyasov rightly notes: ‘many Russian researchers identify *taip* with clan or family and, on this basis, draw conclusions about the structure of Chechen society’.<sup>13</sup>

Clan and *taip*, as social structures, have different foundations. The *taip* is neither a clan nor a tribal structure: it is an association made up of

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<sup>12</sup> I have written in greater detail on the subject in ‘Chechen society in search of geopolitical and socio-cultural identity’, *Contemporary problems of Caucasian geopolitics, Yuzhno-kavkazskoe obozrenie*, Issue 5, V.V. Chernos (ed.). Rostov-on-Don: North Caucasus Research Centre publishers, 2001, p. 126.

<sup>13</sup> Lechi Ilyasov, ‘The Chechen *taip*, myths and reality’, *Chechenskoe obshchestvo segodnya*, 2007, no 1 (9).

various clans and ethnic groups that inhabit the same territory and have established particular socio-cultural ties. Other journalists, government spokesmen and members of the power ministries (e.g. armed forces, law enforcement, and security agencies) divide the Chechen nation into those living on the plains and those living in the mountainous southern regions. Such attitudes would be laughable, had they not been responsible for the employment policies adopted by Moscow. In the past, when the clan system indeed dominated society, Chechens resolved their common problems by summoning the Mekhkan Kkhiel, which, back in the Middle Ages, represented something of a national parliament. The term translates literally as the 'Court of the Land', though Chechen ethnologists prefer to call it the *Council* of the Land. In the past, the organizers and members of this Council were representatives of free societies (*tukkhum*, *taip*), who had gained a good reputation among the people for their honesty and knowledge of *adat*, traditional law, and, later, of *sharia*. It was in times critical for the Chechens that the Mekhkan Kkhiel was convened – when they were threatened by enemy attack, during intense periods of clan strife, or when questions affecting the entire nation needed to be resolved. Its decisions were binding on every Chechen.

During the Dudayev period, there was an attempt, supported by local ethnologists, to revive the Mekhkan Kkhiel. However, those who became its members were distinguished neither by their moral nor their intellectual qualities. As a result, the activities of the body failed to receive popular recognition and support. Instead, several of its leaders acquired dubious fame as the subject of satire. An archaic structure that came into existence when the clans ruled Chechnya, the Mekhkan Kkhiel was artificially revived to aid Djokhar Dudayev. It soon disappeared, unlamented, from the political scene.

Some studies include statements that make direct links between the *taips* and the *virids*, but these cannot be considered accurate from a scholarly point of view. Akhmet Yarlykanov asserts, for instance, that 'the *virids* and *taips* became intertwined in Chechnya and Ingushetia'.<sup>14</sup> Having directly observed how the *taips* and *virids* of Chechnya interact, I would definitely not over-emphasize their 'intertwining'. Until we have established what they might share in common, it is difficult to understand how they might become so entwined. Researchers have not expanded on the matter but, by advancing such erroneous evaluations and judgements, have made it more difficult to grasp this relationship. Even worse, these issues are still treated as practical, political matters.

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<sup>14</sup> Akhmet Yarlykanov, 'The Muslims of the North Caucasus between traditionalism and Arabization', *Russia and Islam: a dialogue of civilizations*, Moscow-Ufa, 2006, p. 150.



Should we perhaps try to establish the impact the *taips* and *virids* of Chechnya and Ingushetia have on one another? No such study has been conducted yet. However, that would enable us to specify how these two forms of social organization relate to one another. In its absence, no clear picture can be drawn, and any statement must remain speculation. It would appear that this question has been artificially raised. Those who study the history and culture of the Chechens do not consider the question as being of particularly scholarly importance – otherwise, a solution would long ago have been proposed and tested.

The principle underlying the religious and political organization of the *virid* brotherhoods does not rely on membership of a single *taip*: *virid* members are usually drawn from a range of different *taips*. Studies carried out by A.A. Salamov, S.Ts. Umarov and V.Yu. Gadayev<sup>15</sup> during the Soviet period revealed a large number of *virid* brotherhoods (or Murid communities). These studies described the activity of these brotherhoods as well as the ‘sacred sites’ (*ziarat*) in the Chechen and Ingushetia regions, providing an account of their political and spiritual role in the lives of the faithful. However, they did not deal with the relationship between *taips* and *virids*, probably because they considered that it was not an issue of substance. Although these Soviet-era studies had an ideological bias, they also presented valuable data that have retained their empirical value.

There are far fewer *virids* than *taips*. M. Mamakayev estimated that Chechen society was made up of 135 *taips*,<sup>16</sup> whereas there were only about 30 *virid* brotherhoods. Some experts have estimated that the *virid* brotherhoods, as a whole, account for about 80% of the faithful. Of that figure, the majority (60%) belong to the Qadiriyyah, among whom the most numerous are followers of Kunta-hajji, while 20% are adherents of the Naqshbandiyyah. Among the remaining Muslims, 15% do not belong to any of the brotherhoods, while the other 5% remain indifferent to religion. This figure is quite different from the estimate that I provided earlier.

Despite a division between such brotherhoods, Islam can be considered as united in Chechnya. The Muslims of this region are primarily Sunni and belong to the Shafi school of theology and law, founded by

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<sup>15</sup> See A.A. Salamov, ‘The truth about “sacred sites” in Checheno-Ingushetia’, *Proceedings of the Checheno-Ingush research institute for language and literature*, Vol. 9, Grozny, 1964; S.Ts. Umarov, ‘The changeable fate of the saints’, *Nauka i religiya*, no. 7, 1976; Umarov, *The social essence of the cult of holy places*, Grozny, 1983; Umarov, *The evolution of the main trends in Islam in Checheno-Ingushetia*, Grozny, 1985; and V.Yu. Gadayev, ‘The Murid communities in Checheno-Ingushetia’, *A teaching aid: the Checheno-Ingush state pedagogical institute*. Grozny, 1987.

<sup>16</sup> M. Mamakayev, *The Chechen taip during its period of disintegration*, Grozny, 1973, p. 18.

Muhammad ash-Shafi. In its simplified form, this school has become widespread in many Muslim regions, including Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. However, sometimes incorrect information is published, misrepresenting the character of the religious situation in the modern-day Chechen Republic. For instance, in *The Great Encyclopaedia in 62 volumes*, Chechens are grouped together with Sunni Muslims, while it is simultaneously stated in parenthesis that they belong to the Hanafites and Wahhabites as well.<sup>17</sup>

This absurd statement demonstrates the authors' lack of competence regarding the religious situation among Chechens. It also offends the religious feelings of Chechens, who have never belonged to the Hanafites, since they adhere to the Shafi *mazhab* (school of Islamic law) – nor have they ever previously been Wahhabites. Even today, with Wahhabism beginning to spread throughout the North Caucasus, the number of followers of this Islamic religious and political movement in Chechnya still amounts to less than 1% of the population. Categorizing all the Chechen people as Wahhabites can be considered as reflecting sheer ignorance or perhaps wishful thinking, but certainly not reality.

As for Wahhabism, it is based on the Hanbali *mazhab*, the fourth Sunni school, known for its intolerance of innovation and its strict observance of the norms of *sharia*. This helps to explain the local hostility to Wahhabism, as it rejects the Sufi traditions followed by the majority of Muslims in Chechnya.

For many Chechens, loyalty to the *virid* brotherhoods is a historical tradition and a sacred aspect of their spiritual life. The spiritual and cultural tradition of the nation is homogeneous, although the variety of *taips* and *virids* often give rise to conflict situations that end up disrupting social and religious unity. The continued existence of such ancient social and religious institutions can be seen as an indication the socio-cultural variety and amorphous state of Chechen society. On another level, however, this is not the case. When the Chechen people's religious interests were offended and external threats arose to their existence, Chechen society mobilized and closed ranks.

The role of the *virids* in such social and political mobilization is quite palpable. During political campaigns and elections, politicians seeking support find themselves obliged to approach the leading figures of a *virid*, who are then often able to mobilize their 'flock'. Such authoritative figures within a *virid* may play a crucial role in reconciling warring parties, particularly feuding families. The descendants of a sheikh

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<sup>17</sup> *Great Encyclopaedia in 62 volumes*. Moscow: Terra, 2006, p. 233.

or other authoritative figures within a *virđ* frequently carry greater weight within Chechen society than those who lead the *taip*. Certain living descendants of Chechen holy men have more influence over the faithful than do the elders within the *taip*, as apparent in their peace-making activities, and the role they play in resolving conflicts among Muslims and reconciling the opposing sides in blood feuds. Often, the official authorities are forced to turn to them in order to gain the support of one or another political figure.

Such socio-cultural traditions have become endowed with many valuable aspects of universal human value. At the same time, they are not without their conservative side – as can easily be seen in the workings of any traditional society, where tradition and social innovation frequently come into sharp opposition until life itself transcends the contradiction. In contemporary Chechen society, religious traditions have played an important role in countering extremist phenomena.

In popular Islam, the ethnic component is more firmly rooted than the religious. The believer often faces a dilemma and has to ask himself ‘Am I a Muslim or a representative of my nation?’ This problem finds acute expression during the confrontation between supporters of neo-Wahhabism and those representing traditional Islam. To neo-Wahhabites, allegiance to one’s religion, especially to Jamat groups that aim to restore the Caliphate, comes before ethnic or family ties. Representatives of traditional Islam, on the contrary, give priority to their ethnic allegiance, while viewing the ideology and behaviour of the radicals as a threat to their own cultural and spiritual foundations. When Akhmad Kadyrov was mufti and, later, president of Chechnya, he spoke out against the deeds and ideas of Wahhabism as not being part of the Chechen tradition. ‘We are Chechens first,’ he declared, ‘and then Muslims.’

Ethnicity is dominant in the Chechen psychology and throughout much of the North Caucasus. However, those who have wanted to foist on them religious and ideological values that were shaped outside the culture and civilization of the region failed to take this into account.

Some ethnographers hold that the traditionalist nature of Islam in the North Caucasus ‘inevitably comes up against another problem, the confrontation between young Muslims and those who represent the older generation and declare themselves defenders of “traditional” Islam’.<sup>18</sup> The response to this claim can be seen in a comment by at least one author: ‘the young thought up several derogatory names for

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<sup>18</sup> Akhmet Yarlykapov, ‘Muslims of the North Caucasus between ‘traditionalism’ and ‘Arabization’ in *Russia and Islam: a dialogue of civilizations*, Moscow-Ufa, 2006, p. 151.

their opponents. The least offensive was “ethnic” Muslims, i.e. those who were born Muslims but did not practice their faith. The most hurtful definition of “ethnic” Islam that I have heard is “funereal” Islam.<sup>19</sup>

In the course of many years working with young Chechens, I have not heard such ‘hurtful definitions’ of traditional Islam. That is not to say that they and, for example, their contemporaries in Kabardia and Karachaevsk, do not criticize a number of the beliefs of popular Sufi Islam. In their attempts to comprehend traditional Islam, such criticism is present since many have received a religious education or are in contact with those who are well educated. In their view, traditional Islam often diverges from the ideology of Salafism, i.e. Islam as it existed at the time of the Caliphs. They feel that the religion of their forefathers should be cleansed of innovations and errors.

This example shows the influence of those non-traditional currents of Islam that have penetrated the North Caucasus. But the conflict also involves two distinct generations in the region. On the one side are the older generation of those Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Karachai who were deported during the war to Kazakhstan and Central Asia by Beria and Stalin. On the other, there is the generation who grew up in the 1960s to 1980s after their fathers had returned from deportation. Thus we may speak of clash between fathers, sons and grandsons. The conflict remains unresolved due to its socio-cultural and psychological complexity and the great loyalty that the nations of the North Caucasus feel towards the traditions of their ancestors.

Members of the young generations of Muslims in the region have become increasingly vociferous in expressing their criticism of traditional religion (the ‘Islam of the fathers’) and proposing a return to the pure Islam of the Prophet Muhammad’s time. Such rebellious youth find their way into Jamatist or Wahhabi groups led by local or foreign emirs, and become opposed not only to traditional Islam but also to the secular authorities. This renders them subject to persecution by the armed forces, law enforcement agencies and security services which, seeking to extirpate Wahhabism, organize literal manhunts for such individuals. These youth have been accused of carrying out anti-national activities and committing acts of terrorism in the North Caucasus.

Such is the complexity and conflict-driven nature of the religious and political situation in the North Caucasus. It forms part of the wider movements of Islamic revivalism in Russia characteristic of the late

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

20th and early 21st centuries. Stability will be achieved not be through force, but through lengthy efforts to establish dialogue between those representing traditional Islam and those representing the Salafist, Wahhabi or Jamatist groups. Today, the latter operate underground, exercising what is often a criminal-like influence over the youth of Chechnya and the other Muslim peoples of the North Caucasus.

### **The emergence of ‘North Caucasian Wahhabism’ and its dangers**

Wahhabism in the North Caucasus is a specific phenomenon, both in religious and political terms. It a regional form of the Salafism ideology, which calls Muslims to return to the so-called ‘pure’ Islam of the times of the Prophet Muhammad and the Four Righteous Caliphs. This ideology holds that it can achieve this ‘pure’ state by cleansing traditional Islam of local accretions, of the mis-persuasions and heresies of the Sufi and adherents of the *tariqahs*, as well as elements of pagan beliefs which its adherents claim have distorted the Muslim religion. Some scholars have described the religious programme of Wahhabism in the North Caucasus as fundamentalism. That term may be applied, with certain reservations, but it is not itself of Islamic origin.

The source of the appearance and spread of North Caucasian Wahhabism can be traced back to the era of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, when the weakening of Communist ideology permitted a gradual process of ‘re-Islamization’. Religious schools and centres sprung up everywhere, the Muslim clergy started to play a more active part in religious and political activities, and previously inaccessible religious literature began to emerge once again. At rallies of Muslims in the cities of Makhachkala, Grozny and Karachaevsk, speakers criticized a secular society that had turned its back on divine commandments, and urged Muslim society to live in strict accordance with *sharia*. In the early 1990s, representatives of the Islamic Party of Revival declared, in Lenin Square in the centre of Grozny, that the Koran should be the Muslims’ constitution.

The following parallel seems appropriate. In the late 1920s, members of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt issued the rallying cry ‘The Koran is our constitution’, which was then adopted by the Islamist movement. Gilles Kepel notes, ‘They thereby let it be known that, in accordance with another of their slogans, “Islam is a full and complete system” that the Koran embodied the foundations of order in soci-

ety.<sup>20</sup> The Islamic renaissance of the early 20th century in some Muslim countries and its underlying ideology were, to a certain extent, repeated at the end of that century, albeit often with certain distinctive local features.

The Islamic renaissance in the North Caucasus was accompanied by the formation of religious parties and movements that aroused interest and support among the region's Muslims. In Dagestan, Chechnya and other parts of the USSR, branches of the Islamic Party of Revival (IPR), founded in Astrakhan in 1990, began to appear. Representatives of the traditional clergy referred to members of this party as 'Wahhabites' because the IPR spoke out against traditional Islam and its cult of saints. In turn, the non-traditionalists accused the official clergy of supporting a corrupt regime, failing to stand up for the rights of ordinary Muslims, and falling away from the principles of Islamic justice. The IPR was the only Islamic organization in the Soviet Union to speak with clarity about the position of Muslims in the USSR and their future prospects, which indicates that its ideologues had given some thought to their analysis of the situation.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the loss of the official Communist ideology created a moral and intellectual vacuum that was filled with various doctrines, among which were Islamic currents that included radical and extremist tendencies. As stated by the Dagestani scholar K.M. Khanbabayev, 'From the late 1980s onward, illegal religious political groupings with a fundamentalist Islamic outlook emerged in a number of towns and districts in Dagestan and Chechnya. Later, this trend would be referred to as Wahhabism.'<sup>21</sup> As a result of their activities and a power struggle within the clergy, the Muslim community of the North Caucasus split into factions. In 1994, a Spiritual Directorate was set up for the Muslims of the entire region with its headquarters in Makhachkala. Since then, six such independent departments have emerged, covering Dagestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessk. In turn, the Dagestan spiritual department split into several petty ethnic groupings.<sup>22</sup> The Wahhabites were actively involved in these developments, criticizing the actions of the official clergy for corruption and collaboration with the Communist regime.

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<sup>20</sup> Gilles Kepel, *Jihad, expansion et déclin de l'Islamisme*. Paris: Gallimard, 2000. Russian edition Moscow: Ladomir Publishers, 2004, p. 33.

<sup>21</sup> K.M. Khanbabayev, 'Stages in the spread of Wahhabism in Dagestan', in *Alimiy i uchenye protiv Wahhabisma* (Religious teachers and scholars against Wahhabism). Makhachkala, 2001, p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> R.G. Gadjeiev, 'Wahhabism: the problems of religious extremism in the Republic of Dagestan', in *The religious factor in the life of contemporary Dagestan society: Materials of the republic-wide conference (27 October 2000)*. Makhachkala: Novy den Publishers, 2002, p. 196.

Various interlinked Jamatist groups also came into existence in the North Caucasus. Each had its own structure and formed part of the Jamat of a given region. Young people, often from less well-off families, were drawn into such groups, which were generally financed from abroad. Members received the fundamentals of a religious upbringing and were taught to wage polemical campaigns against their opponents. Later, they would also be trained to fight and perform acts of sabotage in camps set up by the Arab Khattab. At the head of the Jamat was the Emir, who combined the functions of both a religious and secular leader. There were cases when young men under the influence of the Jamat were ordered by the Emir to kill their own close relatives.

After the 1991 coup that brought Djokhar Dudayev to power in the Checheno-Ingush ASSR, representatives of an 'independent Chechnya' strengthened their position in the republic's newly-established administration. Many of them had come under the influence of the political and religious radicalism and extremism promoted by the region's Wahhabis. From 1992 onwards, their activities took on an active ideological and, later, political and military character in the renamed 'Chechen Republic of Ichkeria'. To begin with, they espoused the idea of monotheism and denied the cult of saints, declaring that there should be no intermediaries (among which they numbered the saints revered in the Sufi tradition) between the Almighty and the faithful. Wahhabism was thereby transformed into an alternative to traditional Islam, with its own ideology, way of life and patterns of behaviour. Yet in this period, the activities of the Wahhabites in the North Caucasus as a whole did not really extend beyond a limited criticism of traditional Islam.

It was with the beginning of the first war in Chechnya in December 1994 that religion started to gain a stronger hold on the public imagination, as Islamic slogans became prominent in the rhetoric of Chechen separatists. The first mufti of Ichkeria, M-hajji Alsabekov declared a holy war or *gazavat* against Russia. Later, finding himself in Znamenka at the centre of the Chechen opposition to the new leadership in Grozny, he was to retract that declaration, explaining that he had said this under pressure from Dudayev. For this, he was punished on 20 August 1996 by the Ichkerian *sharia* court with 80 strokes of the cane.

During the first Chechen war, Islamic units, including a women's *sharia* battalion, were formed to resist the federal Russian army. The war led to a marked radicalization of Islam in Chechnya. Chechens took part in military engagements by defending their villages, towns and the republic from the intervening federal forces. Hardly anyone saw

the Russian troops as saviours delivering them from the unpopular Dudayev regime. They were not alone in this fight, however. ‘Arab mercenaries’, led by Khattab, also somehow found their way to the republic and fought in Ichkeria. In 1995, in the southern town of Shatoi, Akhmad Kadyrov was chosen mufti of the republic on the recommendation of Dudayev. In line with Alsabekov, he also declared *gaza-vat* against the federal troops. Later, when he became president of Chechnya, Kadyrov would repeatedly assert that the first war had indeed been a holy war or *gazavat*; the second campaign, however, was nothing of the kind. This was probably because Kadyrov, as mufti, was highly critical of the behaviour of the Wahhabites on the eve of the second war. He called on President Maskhadov to expel them from Chechnya and send Khattab and his fighters back home to Palestine.

After the first war ended, secular courts in Chechnya were disbanded in October 1996 by the acting president, Zelimkhan Yandarbiev, and the Supreme Sharia Court of Ichkeria was established, along with a network of district courts. For several years, many conflicts of a criminal and civil character came before these tribunals. That period was also marked by an Islamization of the social and cultural life of the nation. However, society as a whole was not prepared for such a drastic turn of events nor the activities of the *sharia* courts and the methods employed in Islamizing the nation. These included a total implementation of *sharia*, which was not popular among Chechens and only served to deepen the contradiction between the traditional culture and the whole-scale introduction of *sharia* by the Wahhabis.

Meanwhile, representatives of traditional Islam were being pushed to the margins of public life. This intensified their negative attitude towards the Wahhabis, who were both limiting their influence over Chechen society and trying to discredit them in the eyes of the faithful. Seeing that the traditional clergy were opposed to its power, the authorities in Ichkeria wanted to form a new clergy from the ranks of the religious radicals who held pronounced anti-Russian attitudes.

The ideology and activities of the ‘North Caucasian Wahhabites’ were effectively directed against the *virids* or religious brotherhoods. This mobilized the traditional clergy against the Wahhabis, further deepening the local conflict within Islam.

The religious extremists pursued wide-ranging goals. First, they intended to create a united Islamic state, embracing Ichkeria and Dagestan, ultimately aiming for a Caucasian caliphate. Their plans proved treacherous and criminally disastrous for the Chechen nation. On 2 August 1999, only six months after Aslan Maskhadov had introduced a totally *sharia*-dominated administration in Chechnya, the armed



bands of Khattab, Shamil Basayev and Magomed Tagayev invaded the mountain area of Dagestan (Botlikh and Tsumadinsky districts) from Chechen territory. The Islamic opposition in Dagestan announced the creation of the Islamic Republic of Dagestan, the election of its supreme body, the Islamic Shura of Dagestan, and the formation of a government headed by Siradjin Ramazanov. From the statements made by Ramazanov, it was clear that he and his supporters had been preparing to seize power in the republic for a decade; further, that the 'liberation' of Dagestan's mountain region was a *jihad* aimed at liberating all of Dagestan, and then the entire North Caucasus, from the power of the infidel (*kufr*).<sup>23</sup> Public statements by other Dagestani opposition figures, in particular Bugautdin Kebedov, Adalo Aliev and Magomed Tagayev, confirmed this. Shortly before, in an interview with the daily newspaper *Kommersant*, N. Khachilayev had expressed the necessity of a *gazavat* or holy war against bankrupt systems of administration that fostered deception and lies.<sup>24</sup>

There was dissatisfaction among certain sectors of the population and the religious radicals in Dagestan with the activities of the exceptionally corrupt Dagestani administration. An opposition was formed, which required powerful support from the armed radical and extremist groups then in Ichkeria. There can be no doubt that the provocative intervention of the North Caucasian Wahhabis led to the second war in Chechnya, a conflict with far graver consequences for the Chechen nation than even the first war of 1994–1996.

### **Conflict between religious tradition and innovation**

Antagonistic relations between traditional Islam and the regional Wahhabism of the North Caucasus developed in the period immediately after the first Chechen war. The Dagestani Wahhabis established an Islamic enclave in the villages of the Kadar zone (Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Durguli), where *sharia* was introduced and used to punish and discourage theft, the drinking of spirits and other improper behaviour. This was their protest against corruption and what they saw as the moral degradation of secular society. There were regular disputes and clashes between the official authorities and the religious radicals, at times leading to bloodshed.

In Chechnya, meanwhile, those who represented separatist and radical ideologies gained a firmer hold on power. Their position had strengthened during the first war with the creation of *sharia* courts, attempts to impose a total Islamization on the social and cultural life of the Che-

<sup>23</sup> Quoted in V.Kh. Akaev, 'North Caucasian Wahhabism as a kind of Islamic radicalism', *Scientific Caucasian Thought*. 2000 (3), p. 46.

<sup>24</sup> See *Kommersant*, 11 February 1999.

chen nation, and efforts to 'cleanse' society of its Soviet background. The ideology and actions of 'North Caucasian Wahhabism' were specifically directed against the *virid* brotherhoods in Chechnya, and that gave rise to conflicts within Islam.

Some of the *virid* brotherhoods played a direct role in the political events of the early 1990s by supporting Djokhar Dudayev, the separatist leader. There were also those who were directly opposed to Dudayev, considering his actions harmful to the nation. This led to their persecution by the newly established regime. Among the persecuted were the followers of the Deni Arsanov *virid*, which exercised significant influence among the faithful of the Nadterechny district of the Chechen Republic as well as among the neighbouring Ingush. The traditional Chechen clergy were, for the most part, adherents of the Naqshbandiyah *tariqah* and did not recognize the *gazavat* proclaimed against the federal Russian forces in autumn 1994 by Dudayev and the Mufti Alsabekov.

The *virid* brotherhoods did not avoid confrontation with the Wahhabis. For instance, the brotherhoods of Tashu-hajji and Kunta-hajji had a bloody encounter with the Wahhabis in Gudermes on 14 June 1998, after which the latter retreated to Urus-Martan. There, they enforced *sharia* law until August 1999. The Wahhabis provoked indignation among the population by forcing women who did not meet *sharia* standards of modesty to get off local buses.

Supporters of Wahhabism were distinguished by their long beards and hair, trimmed moustaches and shortened, folded trousers. These were not accepted by representatives of traditional Islam, who followed their own distinctive patterns of dress and behaviour. The reforms introduced by the Wahhabites were regarded negatively by traditionalists and became the butt of all kinds of local jokes.

E.F. Kisriyev suggests that 'Dagestani Wahhabism should be seen as a reforming, modernist trend in Islam while it is the followers of *tariqah* in Dagestan and the closely connected representatives of the traditional, orthodox clergy (the mullahs and imams serving the cult in the mosques) who have been stirred into action as a response and in every respect display a fundamentalist character.'<sup>25</sup> This point of view is debatable. The assertion that it is the followers of the *tariqahs* and the traditional clergy who are the fundamentalists appears inaccurate. Indeed, the term 'fundamentalism' has no purpose in this setting: it is more appropriate for the North Caucasian Wahhabites than for those representing forms of Islam traditional to the region.

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<sup>25</sup> E.F. Kisriyev, *Islam and the authorities in Dagestan*. Moscow: OGI, 2004, p. 109.

Kisriyev's position is echoed in the work of some Moscow scholars, who regard the Wahhabis as reformers within Islam who purportedly aim to purify the religion of elements of popular culture, including old beliefs that have allegedly contaminated the faith. The actions of the Wahhabis in the North Caucasus, however, show that, in modern-day circumstances, their 'reforming stance' is actually a step backwards, towards the obscurantism of mediaeval times and all that this entails.

The radicalism of the local Wahhabis and their call for an endless jihad against the infidel has proven unacceptable to the traditions of the North Caucasus. There, Islam had taken shape in accordance with the ethno-cultural features of the region. Over a lengthy period, stretching from the Tsarist era to the post-Soviet epoch, it has adapted in both social and religious terms. The conflict between the Wahhabis and their opponents in the North Caucasus was, therefore, not just a theological and political confrontation, but also a clash of social and cultural attitudes. It was not so much a question of two forms of Islam as of a clash between Caucasian culture and Arabo-Semitic culture. However hard the Wahhabis have tried to make Chechen women adopt the veil (*paranja*), for example, they have not succeeded in imposing such attire on those who are not accustomed to concealing their faces but prefer their own traditional form of dress.

As a whole, we may define the Wahhabism foisted on the Muslims of the region in the late 20th century as a way of understanding Islam that prescribes a pattern of social and cultural behaviour onto the believer. It stands in stark contrast to the traditional forms of Islam observed by the people of the North Caucasus, whether we are speaking about the relevant religious concepts, behaviour, the forced introduction of *sharia*, or the dress and appearance required of men and women. The resultant conflict situation is the main reason for hostility towards Wahhabism among the nations and ethnic groups in the region.

The conflict is not over. It runs deep and the two sides now have scores to settle. In the words of Sultan Mirzayev, the mufti of the Chechen Republic:

Since 1997, the murders of more than twenty well-known religious teachers are linked to the activities of the Wahhabis in Chechnya. Moreover, they were killed in the most merciless fashion, often being tortured to death in front of their own families. The crimes that have been committed by the Wahhabites include the burning of people's homes and the execution of individuals, including innocent children.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sultan Mirzayev, 'Counter-acting Wahhabism and reviving Islam are the key tasks of the Muslim clergy in the Chechen Republic', *Islaman zlanarsh*, 27 August 2007, p. 2.

He goes on to cite instances when ‘Wahhabites’ have murdered the faithful even as they were reciting the Koran.

The Wahhabites are today forced to operate underground, where they continue as armed resistance to the authorities. They have deprived themselves of the opportunity to use ideological and political means to openly promote their standpoint. Nevertheless, in Dagestan and Chechnya they continue their activities, albeit relatively muted.

Many young men who support Wahhabism visit mosques and take part in Friday prayers but no longer observe certain additional elements of the obligatory religious ritual performed by traditionalists. This serves to fuel the conflict between traditionalists and non-traditionalists, but the principle of coexistence among the faithful, though they may be adherents of different tendencies within Islam, is still observed in the mosque.

### **How religious extremism is thwarted and defeated**

Many terrorist acts in the North Caucasus have, with reason, been linked to the radical and extremist activities of Wahhabi and Jamatist groups not traditional to the region. The authorities were therefore faced with the necessity of developing means for obstructing and thwarting the ideology and activities of the neo-Wahhabis. Part of the arsenal of their ‘blocking technology’ has been the use of various legislative and propaganda measures, backed by the support of the official clergy as represented by the Spiritual Departments of the region.

In Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and the Karachaevo-Cherkessk Republic, representative and executive bodies have passed legislative acts banning the extremist activities of the Wahhabis. Special police and other units have been formed to enforce these laws and regulations, acting to stem religious and extremist activities, and preempting the terrorist threats that have occasionally arisen as a result of religious and political extremism. Today, such units exist in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and other republics of the North Caucasus.

The President of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov, has repeatedly stated in public that he will do everything to root out ‘Wahhabism’, and he has taken decisive measures to oppose religious extremism and terrorism in the republic. This position is supported by the muftis of Chechnya, headed by Sultan Mirzayev, who have been waging a propaganda campaign against local Wahhabis and transplanted agitators from outside the region. The muftis of the other North Caucasus republics (Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachaevo-Cherkessk) have been carrying out similar work. This involves not just the use of the media but also the targeting of various audiences,

including researchers and academics. In their daily preaching to the faithful, the traditionalists urge Muslims to unite and focus on spiritual matters, while condemning practices like taking drugs and other sinful acts.

The intense revival of traditional Islam in the North Caucasus finds expression not only in the building of mosques and religious schools. The spiritual education of teenage and young adult Muslims reduces the effect of criticism by the radicals that the traditionalists are remote from the needs of the faithful, the problems of the young and so on.

In Gudermes in 2007 and in Grozny in 2008, two conferences were held as part of an international peacemaking forum, 'Islam, a religion of peace and construction'. This forum was of great significance for Muslims and non-Muslims in Chechnya, the North Caucasus and Russia as a whole. The speakers focused on the humane, peace-loving and creative role of Islam. They condemned radical and extremist activities pursued under the cover of religious slogans, and spoke of the necessity of a dialogue between believers of different faiths. This position was supported by the muftis of Dagestan, Chechnya and Karachaevo-Cherkessk, who delivered major addresses that reflected the place and role of traditional Islam in attaining peace and concord in society. Their speeches also criticized the activities of radical and extremist groupings and the terror and violence they had provoked in the North Caucasus.

At the end of these meetings, a resolution was adopted, addressed to President Putin, leaders of the world community and religious figures. Forum participants called on 'people of good will, religious and political leaders, nations and countries, government and non-governmental bodies and the world community as a whole to direct their efforts towards the strengthening of peace throughout the world. We call on them to resolve the problems of mankind's survival, to prevent international and religious conflicts and to eliminate poverty.'<sup>27</sup> The resolution underlined that 'Islam is an ally to the whole world community in the resolution of these problems'.<sup>28</sup>

The Muslims of the Chechen Republic, and the official clergy as represented by the muftis, headed by Sultan Mirzayev, approve and support the efforts of the President of Chechnya Ramzan Kadyrov in restoring the republic's economy and its social infrastructure, as well as reviving the spiritual foundations of the Chechen nation. Emphasizing President Kadyrov's activities in restoring traditional Islam in the

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<sup>27</sup> *Islaman zlanarsh* (The dawn of Islam), 27 August 2007, p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

Chechen Republic, Sultan Mirzayev noted that it was thanks to the president that

more than three hundred mosques have been built in a short period, as well as the magnificent building of the Islamic Institute and more than twenty madrasahs, while cemeteries and ziarats have been reconstructed and the roads leading to them have been rebuilt. In Grozny, the largest mosque in Europe is under construction, and work is being completed on the three-storey Spiritual Directorate for the Muslims of the Chechen Republic and the Islamic Library.<sup>29</sup>

At President Kadyrov's meeting with the King of Saudi Arabia in Mecca in late October 2007, the monarch approved the president's actions against religious radicals and said that it was his duty as the country's leader to take harsh measures to counteract religious extremists and terrorists in order to restore security in the Chechen Republic. As an adherent of traditional Islam, Ramzan Kadyrov received the blessing of an authoritative religious political figure in the Muslim world, and that has served to strengthen his position in Russia and among Muslims worldwide.

A major Islamic complex has been built in the centre of Grozny. It includes the Akhmad Kadyrov Central Mosque, the mufti's building, and the Kunta-hajji Kishiyev Russian Islam University, which opened in 2009. The inauguration ceremony for the latter was attended by representatives from Jordan, Syria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and other Muslim countries. In his address at the opening of this institution, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin underlined the significance of this event for the social and spiritual life of Russia, and the necessity of preparing Muslim clerics on the basis of traditional values that can resist manifestations of religious extremism. Today, this Islamic University has as many as 200 students, who study on the basis of the traditional Islamic values that have spread throughout the North Caucasus.

## Conclusions

The appearance of Islamic radicalism and extremism in the North Caucasus is linked to the active political rise of Wahhabism. There can be no doubt that this was prompted by the transition from one socio-political formation to another within the region, the collapse of the USSR, the disappearance of Communist ideology, the beginning of democratic change, and the weakness of the political and administrative system that subsequently emerged in Russia.

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<sup>29</sup> Sultan Mirzayev, 'Counter-acting Wahhabism and reviving Islam are the key tasks of the Muslim clergy in the Chechen Republic', *Islaman zlanarsh*, 27 August 2007, p. 2.

Traditional Islam in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, is a symbiosis of two traditions – one Muslim, and one ethnically-based. A general characterization of local faith as Islamic must also take into account its ties with popular culture – including Sufi traditions, the functioning of the *virđ* brotherhoods, and the existence of folk beliefs. These are the foundations of the spiritual culture of each nation and determine the religious and political situation in each society.

During the period of political instability in the North Caucasus, the Wahhabis attempted, through armed resistance and terrorist acts, to establish a Caucasian Caliphate. Representatives of traditional Islam showed themselves to be supporters of the territorial integrity of the Russian State and took measures to defuse the threats to state and society that emanated from their religious and political opponents. However, the religious extremists did not accept such a pro-Russian policy. It diverged from their lofty goals of imposing *sharia* in the North Caucasus and establishing an Islamic Caliphate throughout the entire region. For this reason, they suppressed representatives of traditional Islam, well aware that their often bitter experience of dealing with the secular authorities, especially the atheist regime of the Soviet period, made them open opponents of such a hazardous religious and political venture.

A chief object of Wahhabi enmity were the religious and, subsequently, political activities of Akhmad Kadyrov – first as mufti and then as president of the Chechen Republic. Denouncing Wahhabi behaviour in Chechnya when Aslan Maskhadov was president, Kadyrov stated that training camps were being set up in various parts of the country, under the guise of *madrasahs*. The fighters came not so much from Chechnya as from elsewhere in the CIS, from neighbouring North Caucasian republics, Middle Eastern states and even from the USA and Britain. In his view, the republic was being transformed into a centre for international terrorism, and the leaders of the Chechen Wahhabis had established close contacts with Osama bin Laden,<sup>30</sup> who was generously financing any and every project that would see Chechnya transformed into a spear pointing at the heart of Russia. Taking up his father's cause, Ramzan Kadyrov has been using all means to counteract the extremist and terrorist activities still encountered in the North Caucasus.

The Islamic revival now underway in the North Caucasus, especially in contemporary Chechnya, is a complex process with many facets. It mixes clearly positive trends towards peace, constructive work and

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<sup>30</sup> In referring to Wahhabi leaders who were in close contact with bin Laden, Kadyrov chiefly had in mind Abdurakhman, Khattab, Basayev, Udugov, Yandarbiev and Khali-mov.

concord within society with forces pulling in the opposite direction. These latter forces have led to conflict, violence and destabilization of the social and political situation in the region, as is evident from the activities of the so-called Wahhabites. The latter tendency, however, is now clearly on the wane, thanks to the measures implemented by the federal authorities in the North Caucasus and the antagonism demonstrated by the peoples of this region to extremism and terrorist acts.

A complete end to such a threat will depend on the development of our religious culture and freedom of belief, as well as an implacable attitude on the part of society against radicalism and extremism in any form. We must use the power of the law and the creation of firmly grounded civil rights to achieve genuine democratic change. And finally, the threat will end when Chechnya can at last overcome the economic problems linked with high unemployment levels, and improve the well-being of its people.