

Radicalisation of Russia's Muslim Community

MICROCON Policy Working Paper 9

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Radicalisation of Russia’s Muslim Community

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Abstract: The phenomenon of ‘Islamic radicalism’ is an extremely significant one for Russia because of the large numbers of Muslims living in Russia, and the ethno-political conflicts with an apparent confessional component that have arisen since the collapse of the USSR. This article outlines the situation of Muslim radicalisation in Russia. It looks at the recent dynamics of the spread of radicalism; the participants and activities of radical groups; Muslim leadership; radicalist texts; violence and manifestations of tension; the response of the state and society to radicalism; and the influence of the international situation. In the last few years, a new, previously unknown ‘neo-traditionalist’ trend has been noted in Russia – namely, the radicalisation of traditional Islam, whose major figures have always been conformist-minded towards the state and have sharply criticised their opponents. Islamic radicalism in Russia will not disappear; it will remain a factor of the political and religious life of its Muslim community and of relations between Muslims and the rest of the country’s citizens. It may grow stronger under the influence of the internal situation, acting as a form of protest ideology. The radicals’ activity also depends, among other things, on the international situation – especially on relations between the Muslim world and the West.

Keywords: Radicalisation; Islam; Belgium; youth; terrorism; integration

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Introduction

The phenomenon of ‘Islamic radicalism’ is an extremely significant one for Russia because of at least two circumstances: a) there are about 20 million Muslims living in Russia (including 3.5 to 4 million migrant Muslims), and b) in the 15 years since the collapse of the USSR, Russia has been shaken by ethno-political conflicts with an apparent confessional component.

Islamic radicalism has become an integral feature of the internal situation in Russian society, exerting an influence on the country’s public policy. It includes two closely intertwined components – a purely religious and a political one. To ensure a correct assessment of radicalism, however, it is advisable not to combine these two trends into one. In addition, as noted further on, religious radicals may be loyal to the authorities in respect of specific issues.

Not infrequently, information about Islamic radicals’ activities is inaccurate. Its source is law enforcement bodies, which for various reasons present it in a distorted form, and therefore this type of information needs to be verified.³ Information coming from their opponents, who aim at presenting themselves solely as fighters for social justice and for purity of religion, also needs verification. Nor are the mass media always objective in covering issues relating to Islamic radicalism either.

Russia’s Muslim community is not uniform. Singled out in it may be two socio-cultural realms, the Northern Caucasian and the Tatar-Bashkir (for simplicity we call it Tatar), which, as a consequence of increased migrations, have recently been in active contact with each other alongside the direct participation of a third force – Central Asian Muslims. Without touching upon the differences between them, we note one characteristic: in the Northern Caucasus, radical tendencies and sentiments are stronger than in the rest of Russia. This characteristic sometimes makes it necessary separately to describe processes and situations related to Islamic radicalism.

³ This tendency is explained by the fact that religious radicalism (and extremism) in Russia is used as a political tool of the ruling establishment. In certain periods, the role of extremism was exaggerated, so that the authorities had a sufficient pretext for a general tightening of the screws, curtailing the freedom of the press, etc. Since approximately 2003, however, the ruling circles have been trying in every way to demonstrate their successes in the struggle against radicals, and therefore restricting information about their activities.

1. The spread of radicalism

The eastern and central parts of the Northern Caucasus – Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, and also the adjoining districts of the Stavropol territory with its substantial Muslim population – are the most radicalised regions. While it is true that radical elements in Chechnya are being squeezed out of the republic, they are settling down in the neighbouring territories. As a result, Dagestan's Islamic *jamaats* [Muslim communities] are growing stronger, indicative of which is the increasing activity of the republic's law enforcement bodies, which are compelled regularly to carry out special operations against militants. Radical sentiments are quite widespread in Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachai, although the situation there is somewhat quieter than in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. The level of Islamic radicalism is lowest in the Republic of Adygeya and the Krasnodar territory in which it is located, among other things because ethno-nationalism has not yet been superseded there by religious radicalism. Nevertheless, Islamic radicals have been stepping up their activity in the Republic of Adygeya.

In the rest of Russia, there is less activity by radicals and it is not structured. Their small groups are scattered across the Volga area, the southern Urals and southern Siberia. Manifestations of radicalism have been noted in Tatarstan (Naberezhniye Chelny, Almetyevsk, Nizhnekamsk and Kukmor), in Bashkiria (Agidel, Baimak, Oktyabrsky, Sibai and Ufa), in Mordovia (Belozerye), in the Samara region (Togliatti), and in the Kurgan, Orenburg, Penza, Perm, Ulyanovsk, Chelyabinsk and Tyumen regions. Radicals have also been detected in Moscow, although no activities on a permanent basis have been observed there on their part. Small, unconnected groups of radicals exist even in cities remote from Islamic hotbeds such as in Kaliningrad on the Baltic Sea and Vladivostok on the Pacific. If you were to mark 'areas of Islamic radicalism' on the map of Russia, the resulting picture would be quite impressive.

Opposition forces advocating radical Islamic ideology are called fundamentalists and Islamists; the term 'Wahhabites' has become particularly widespread in Russia. It would be more correct to call them Salafists, since their ideology goes back to the 8th–9th centuries AD, when those who urged believers to adhere to the norms of religious and everyday life followed by the 'righteous ancestors' (*as-Salaf as-Salihun*) called

themselves Salafists. Today's radicals act as preservers of that tradition, referring to the medieval ideologists of Salafism; adjusted for time, they may be regarded as neo-Salafists.

On the other hand, there exist various schools of thought within the framework of Islamic radicalism. In particular there are differences between Salafists proper and Hizb ut-Tahrir al Islamiyya (HTI – the Islamic Liberation Party),⁴ which has come to Russia from Central Asia. The main goal of HTI is a political one – the establishment in the territory of Central Asia (and its subsequent expansion) of an Islamic state, the caliphate, whereas the Salafists are focused on a gradual (re-)Islamisation of society and the establishment of sharia. In addition, the ideology of Salafism places emphasis not only and not so much on struggle against the regime as on its transformation from within. The Salafists, acting very diplomatically, are gradually penetrating administrative bodies, avoiding making outspoken statements that contradict the official precepts. But they remain radicals, even though their radicalism is of a more subtle character.

In Russia, the authorities turn out to be somewhat disoriented, for in confronting Islamic opposition groups, whose members they call 'bandits', they are in fact fighting against one of the movements in Islam that enjoys wide popularity and claims to possess the 'final truth' in both religion and the socio-political sphere.

2. Radical movement participants and their activities

In the Northern Caucasus, the basic cell of radicalism is the *jamaat*. The Arabic word *jama'ah* means 'society' or 'community'. *Jamaats* are an elementary, grass root form of organisation of Muslim society. It is an association of Muslims performing congregational prayer; ideally, a *jamaat* is a group of Muslims attending the same mosque. The spiritual leader of a *jamaat* is an imam – the prayer leader in a mosque who delivers a sermon on Fridays, a person who plays a great role in the life of the community because of his authority and knowledge. Underlying an imam's authority is the fact that as a rule, he is elected by the entire community from among the worthiest Muslims on a whole number of criteria: he should not only have the best knowledge of the Koran, the

⁴ Hizb ut-Tahrir, founded in 1953 in East Jerusalem, has managed to retain its influence in Central Asia, above all in Uzbekistan.

Sunna and the cult, but also be a model of morality and a fulfilment of the precepts of the Muslim religion. Normally, a *jamaat* and an imam are closely bound to each other with a hundred cords; they meet together not only on Fridays for a communal prayer but also on many other varied occasions. Naturally, it is very difficult for the imams of large *jamaats* to maintain strong ties with their congregations, particularly so in major cities.

In Russia, the very notion of a '*jamaat*' implicitly suggests the definition of 'radical'. Every time the word '*jamaat*' is mentioned in the Russian scholarly press or mass media, it implies precisely a collective of radically-minded Muslims, which more often than not corresponds to the actual state of affairs.

Characterised by the young age of their participants, these may be called 'youth *jamaats*'. Organisationally, they took shape in the late 1980s and early 1990s. What contributed to their separation into distinct bodies was the sharply oppositional attitude of a substantial share of the young persons who formed their backbone. They were in opposition, on the one hand, towards the official Islamic bodies – the Muslim religious boards – and on the other towards so-called 'traditional Islam', whose proponents are mainly members of the older generation advocating the observance of all the popular traditions. In the opinion of youth leaders, these popular traditions are often contrary to Islam. In Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, Muslim youth leaders have often spoken out against the local form of Sufism, which they consider full of 'pagan remnants'. (Most often, funeral and commemorative rituals have acted as irritants.)

Initially, local youth *jamaats* were headed by young imams. In most cases, they were self-taught. The level of knowledge possessed by these leaders and other mullahs was approximately the same, and polemics were conducted in a rather half-hearted fashion, only occasionally reaching fierce proportions. The leaders of youth *jamaats* made use of that time for strengthening themselves organisationally. Perfecting their ideology was the task of the next generation of leaders, who entered the scene in the early 1990s. At that time, young men who had obtained an education abroad, mostly in the countries of the Middle East, began to return home. They gradually became urban and rural leaders and united *jamaats* into a kind of network of associations of Islamic youth.

The 'breeding ground' of youth *jamaats* is the Republic of Dagestan, where these associations (circles) began to be formed among the disciples of local Sufi sheikhs as far

back as the 1970s. It is precisely these circles that the Soviet security services dubbed 'Wahhabite' for the first time (following the example of the sheikhs, who had lost control over their disciples). At the time, however, the State Security Committee (KGB) quite soon got a handle on them.

Wahhabism in Dagestan reached its heyday in the 1990s. It was then that the Wahhabite communities in Kizilyurt, Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, Gubden and other Dagestani populated areas began to gain in strength. Despite the bitter opposition of the Sufis, they succeeded in establishing their rule in a number of districts. In particular, Wahhabites managed to establish an independent territory in the so-called 'Kadar zone', which included three villages in the Buinaksk District of Dagestan–Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar. Even though up to half the residents of the enclave did not support the Wahhabites' ideology or practice, the latter were able to keep their rule and their power for three years (1997–99).

During that period, the secular authorities were in fact non-existent in the enclave. And yet the enclave had all the attributes of a self-governing territory: it had a *shura* [council] – a body of government of an 'Islamic territory', its own militia (police) and even its own court of sharia law (*Mahkama Shariyya*). Throughout the three years of its actual independence, the extremist *jamaat* flourished thanks to its members' entrepreneurial activities, and the surrounding mountains were a convenient place for the training of future mujahideen. In the enclave itself, especially in the villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi, extremists entrenched themselves in quite a professional manner militarily, which proved true in the course of a military operation against them conducted in 1999. Notwithstanding several nooses drawn around them, practically all of the extremists' leaders managed to leave the fighting zone and get across into Chechnya. It is from that time that extremists in Dagestan began step-by-step searches for possibilities to preserve their movement. Gradually they adopted the network principle, which thereafter formed the basis of their activity.

In the mid-2000s, after the end of the war in Chechnya and the suppression of a number of major Wahhabite centres in Dagestan, the Kabardino-Balkarian Jamaat became the best-known and best-organised network association. Other networks of youth *jamaats* known to exist today are those in Dagestan, Chechnya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia

and the Stavropol territory. Today, youth *jamaats* are being formed before our eyes in the Republic of Adygeya.

Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, these networks were already connected to one another and exchanged information about themselves and their activities. Their leaders were personally well acquainted with one another and were thoroughly familiar with the state of affairs in the neighbouring *jamaats*. Nevertheless, *jamaats* have always preserved broad internal autonomy.

Ideologically, youth *jamaats* are unstable. Their members represent highly varied views, spanning the ideological spectrum from extremism to moderate radicalism. The activities and form of organisation of youth *jamaats* have been patterned after the forms and experience of Muslim organisations in the Middle East, which are distinguished by the unity of ranks, internal mutual assistance and charity.

In the Caucasus, youth *jamaats* turned out to be quite an easy catch for destructive forces, including separatists, which gradually infiltrated the youth setting, exerting an ever-greater effect on it. As a result, in the 1990s a substantial proportion of youth *jamaats* turned into a base of the separatist movement, whose ethnic character (war for the liberation of Chechnya) was replaced by a religious one – the proclamation of a Northern Caucasian emirate as a first step towards building a worldwide Islamic state.

The second half of the 1990s saw a slow but steady change in the qualitative composition of the leadership of the radical Islamic movement in the Caucasus. Its first semi-literate leaders, who at best had received a local education in the late Soviet and early post-Soviet years, were replaced by young imams, who had obtained a fundamental Islamic education abroad, mainly in the Middle East. A few examples of such leaders are Musa Mukozhev, Anzor Astemirov (the Kabardino-Balkarian Jamaat) and Kurman Ismailov (the *jamaat* of Russia' famous health resort of Mineralniye Vody) among others.

Anzor Astemirov, calling himself Amir Sayfullah [Sword of Allah], a descendant of a family of Kabardin princes, was born in 1976. In the early 1990s, the Muslim religious board of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic sent him to study at Imam Muhammad bin Saud University in Saudi Arabia to obtain a theological education.

Having graduated from the university, he returned home, where he preached at one of the mosques in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.

In 1993, with the active participation of Astemirov and his associates, the Islamic Centre of Kabardino-Balkaria (ICKB) was founded. Soon a Kabardino-Balkarian Jamaat emerged on the basis of the ICKB, and then later became the most serious force in opposition to the official Muslim religious board of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. Anzor Astemirov was a close friend and deputy to Artur (Musa) Mukozhev, the amir [head] of the *jamaat*. The numerical strength of the *jamaat* kept growing and reached, according to its leaders, 10,000 persons (in all, there are about 650,000 so-called 'ethnic Muslims' living in the republic).

In 1999–2001, Anzor Astemirov was more than once suspected of committing wrongful acts. Attempts were mainly made to charge him with participation in preparations for terrorist acts; however, the law enforcement authorities failed to prove his guilt. The persecution of the Kabardino-Balkarian Jamaat members increased, and Anzor Astemirov drifted towards more radical positions.

On 14 December 2004, there was an attack on the Department of the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation for the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic in Nalchik. The law enforcement authorities accused Anzor Astemirov and Ilyas Gorchkhanov, a resident of Ingushetia (leader of the 'Taliban Jamaat'), of mounting the attack.

On 13 October 2005, more than 200 militants attacked all the buildings in Nalchik associated with the security forces of the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. In the two days of fighting, 80 militants, 33 law enforcement officers and 12 civilians were killed in the city. Subsequently, about 70 persons who (in the opinion of the security services) had been involved in the raid were arrested and more than 20 others were put on the wanted list.

On 17 October 2005, in a statement posted on the Chechen-separatist website KavkazCentre.com, Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev claimed that the attack on Nalchik was carried out by combatants of the Kabardino-Balkarian segment of the 'Caucasian Front' under the command of Amir Sayfullah – that is, Anzor Astemirov. In a video

recording attached to the statement, the latter was shown beside Basayev during a sitting of the *majlis* [council] of Kabardino-Balkarian mujahideen in a forest outside Nalchik on the eve of the 13 October events. The law enforcement agencies of the Russian Federation put Astemirov on the wanted list.

On an ever-greater scale, young intellectuals are joining the Islamist movement. One example is the Dagestani Abuzagir Mantayev, who defended his candidate's degree in Political Science on the topic of Wahhabism in Moscow and then turned up in the ranks of the extremists. Mantayev was killed together with other extremists by security forces in Makhachkala on 9 October 2005. Another example is Makhach (better known as Yasin) Rasulov, born in 1975. This graduate of Dagestan State University worked for some time as a religious columnist for the newspaper *Novoye delo* and anchored a religious show on Dagestani television. Over the course of a year, he secretly cooperated with extremists and even earned the title 'Amir of Makhachkala', having participated in several audacious attacks on Dagestani police officers. On 10 April 2006, the authorities announced that he had been killed in the course of a special operation in Makhachkala.

Since the late 1990s, a major restructuring of the separatist underground has been taking place in the Northern Caucasus. This restructuring includes the distribution of forces across the widest possible territory and the creation of a network structure, in which the nodes are formally autonomous yet closely communicate with each other to coordinate their actions using communication agents and electronic means of telecommunication. In setting up this network, use is also made of 'influence agents', particularly disgruntled local residents and especially those who have been abused by the local law enforcement agencies.

The organisational structure of the separatist communities – *jamaats* – does not coincide with that of traditional Muslim communities in the region, which are also called *jamaats*. The traditional *jamaats* incorporate the population of a single village or one or several city districts grouped around a mosque. That is, the traditional *jamaats* are organised according to a territorial principle, whereas the separatist *jamaats* are extra-territorial and dispersed. One *jamaat* may encompass many small groups, united into one or several networks. Such is the case, for example, with the Dagestani *jamaats* 'Shariat' and 'Dzhennet'. They were created on the basis of loyalty to the ideology and practice of

the separatist movement. Organisationally, these *jamaats* do not represent any kind of united association. Their structure includes de facto autonomous groups, made up of a small number of members who frequently are not acquainted with the members of the other cells. It is particularly difficult to unravel such a network since finding one cell usually does not lead to uncovering others. While making it difficult to manage such a network, this kind of organisation helps the entire network to survive confrontations with the security forces.

The *jamaats* are international in composition; usually their members are from the different ethnic groups of the Northern Caucasus, but there are also representatives of other countries, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Pakistan and the countries of the Middle East. Official Russian statements typically describe them as mercenaries, yet many of them have come to the region for ideological reasons, as participants in a ‘world jihad against *kafirs* [non-Muslims], Jews and Crusaders’. Those who have extensive battlefield experience work as instructors. Foreigners, however, do not always become instructors: sometimes they are just rank-and-file fighters, which particularly applies to those coming from Central Asia. Through the foreigners, the groups often establish ties with donors from Islamic countries. Delivery of financial aid to the separatists is frequently criminalised: for example, through these channels counterfeit hard currency is laundered. Other types of fundraising are also employed such as donations from various supporters and ransoms collected from the relatives of hostages.

Sometimes the separatists form special units – ‘battalions’ organised along ethnic lines. Thus have come into existence the ‘Nogai’, the ‘Karachai’ and other ethnic battalions. In reality, no such battalions exist as permanent military units. Armed forays and terrorist acts ascribed to one ethnic battalion or another are carried out by the members of separatist *jamaats* of the corresponding nationality (even though the *jamaat* itself is international). In particular, the Nogai battalion typically includes members of the Shelkovskoi Jamaat, which is based in the Shelkovskoi District of Chechnya and the Neftekumsky District of the Stavropol territory. The Shelkovskoi Jamaat has become notorious for large-scale actions against the federal troops, including the recent clashes in the village of Tukui-Mekteb of the Neftekumsky District. Its activities receive wide attention because raids often take place beyond the borders of the Northern Caucasian

republics, angering the federal government. And yet the Shelkovskoi Jamaat is not the largest network structure of the separatist forces.

With respect to the rest of the Muslim space in Russia, the concept of *jamaat* is practically never used. What is found in its place is simply a small community or even just a circle composed of a few persons or two to three dozen.

The communities exist in towns or they are formed around mosques. The latter is less and less frequently the case, since an overwhelming majority of mosques are controlled by Muslim religious boards loyal to the authorities and are constantly monitored by the security services. In 1999, Islamist communities were formed in Kumkor (200 persons), Vyatskiye Polyany (in the Kirov region – 100–150 persons), and Neftekamsk (in the Perm region – up to 50 persons). In the Republic of Tatarstan, in an abandoned village located in the Ogryz District, 30 Islamists attempted to reproduce the experience of the Dagestan village of Karamakhi and formed a so-called ‘Islamic territory’. Quite soon, however, the community was dispersed by the local administration and law enforcement bodies.

A mosque may also turn out to be a centre of religious radicalism. Similarly, a madrasah or Islamic institute functioning at a mosque may turn out to be such a centre. It should be noted that the title of institute rarely corresponds to the level of education provided by an Islamic educational institution positioning itself in this way. An overwhelming majority of Russia’s Islamic institutes may be ranked with certain reservations as secondary educational institutions.

In the Northern Caucasus, where the *jamaat* is the organisational basis, the mosque may be regarded rather as its adjunct, whereas in the Tatar-Bashkir area a mosque and an Islamic educational institution act as an independent or even the main centre of attraction.

In nearly each region with a sizable Muslim community, there is one or sometimes several radically-oriented mosques (with a madrasah or institute it runs). They include, for example, the White (Gilyan) Mosque in the Astrakhan region, the so-called ‘Historical Mosque’ in the Samara region, the Rahman and al-Bukhari mosques in the territory of the Ural Federal District, the mosque at the Imam Fakhretdinov Institute in Almetyevsk (Bashkortostan) and the mosques in Nizhnekamsk (Tatarstan). In Moscow,

the authorities have brought charges of supporting radicals against the Historical Mosque and the recently built mosque on Poklonnaya Hill.

A stressful situation developed around a mosque and madrasah in the city of Buguruslan in the Orenburg region (bordering on Kazakhstan). According to the law enforcement agencies, the training of militants was conducted at that madrasah: six men who took part in terrorist acts in Moscow (the seizure of hostages at the theatre on Dubrovka street) and Beslan (the hostage-taking and murder of schoolchildren) had been trained at that madrasah.⁵

In 1999–2002, the most prominent hotbed of Islamism was the Yodyz Mosque and madrasah in Naberezhniye Chelny, where ‘Arabian Islam’ was taught and where, according to the security services, militants were also trained. Later on, some of them were detained on suspicion of connections with al-Qaeda.

In addition to *jamaats*, mosques and Islamic educational institutions, several radical Islamic organisations have been active in Russia. At one time, the most prominent of them was the Islamic Revival Party established in Astrakhan in 1990, which gave an impetus to the politisation of Islam back in Soviet times. It had a branch in Dagestan, which adopted the name of the ‘Islamic Party of Dagestan’. Despite the relatively hard phraseology of its leaders, the Islamic Revival Party can hardly be fully identified with Islamic radicalism. It may be described as a moderately radical organisation. Ahmed Qadi Akhtayev, the leader of the party, was rather in favour of dialogue with both Islamic traditionalists and the secular authorities. Yet after his death in 1998, radical and even extremist sentiments grew stronger in the Islamic Revival Party; it was true, however, that by that time the party was close to disintegration and soon it ceased to exist.

In Tatarstan, the Iman Youth Islamic Cultural Centre, formed in 1990, characteristic of which were separatist sentiments, adhered to radical positions. (In 1991, the Iman Centre even applied to the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) with a request to accept Tatarstan as a member.) That same year, the radical nationalist party Ittifaq was founded in the republic, with the Islamic component very prominent in its

⁵ See “Uspekhi zavisi ot kazhdogo” [Success Depends on Everyone], an interview with Kharun Karchayev, Head of the Department of the Federal Security Service of Russia for the Orenburg region, *Pervaya Redaktsiya*, Orenburg, 8-14 March 2008, p. 3.

ideology. The programme of Ittifaq stated that the party “fights for purity of religion, for faithfulness to the precepts of the Koran”.⁶

On the whole, in contrast to the Northern Caucasian *jamaats*, radical groups in the rest of Muslim Russia do not pose any serious threat to stability. They are supported by an insignificant number of Muslims. On the other hand, it should not be ignored that 15 years ago there were no such groups in Russia except in Tatarstan and three or four Russian cities. Therefore, while recognising their insignificance in the overall religious and political palette, one cannot but notice the presence, even if slowly growing, of Islamic radicalism in the Russian Federation.

3. The absence of charismatic Muslim leadership

In Muslim Russia today there are no charismatic figures whose influence would encompass the entire Islamic community. For example, Talgat Tadzhutdin, Chairman of the Central Religious Board of Muslims of Russia, claims the status of an all-Russia Muslim authority, yet even in the Republic of Bashkortostan where his residence is located, he has been recognised as a spiritual leader by only 18.5% of Muslims (Yunusova 1999). Ravil Gainutdin, Chairman of the Council of Muftis of Russia, Chief Imam of the Moscow Cathedral Mosque, enjoys countrywide popularity in Russia, but he also lacks strong influence. It should be noted that neither Tadzhutdin nor Gainutdin can be classed among the radicals.

Perhaps Mukaddas Bibarsov, Chairman of the Muslim Religious Board for the Volga area, who, despite his general loyalty to the authorities, sometimes ventures risky statements and acts, has some elements of regional-level influence.

Certain features of charismatic leadership, albeit ‘inert’, are displayed by Nafigulla Ashirov, Chairman of the Religious Board of Muslims of Asian Russia. While not directly participating in the activities of radical organisations, Ashirov has won renown for his numerous statements in support of Hamas, the Taliban and even al-Qaeda, as well as his criticisms of the Russian Orthodox Church, his call to remove the cross from the coat of arms of the Russian Federation, etc. He occupies an intermediate position

⁶ See *Altyn Urda*, No. 6, Kazan, 1993.

between 'classical' radicalism and the clergy loyal to the authorities. Still, it is true that in the last few years his popularity has waned.

In the mid-1990s, Geydar Dzhemal, one of the founders of the Islamic Revival Party, who later on became chairman of the 'Islamic Committee of Russia', claimed the role of a charismatic figure in Russia's Muslim community. He failed to reach this goal, however. Coming from the Soviet and subsequently post-Soviet intellectual underground, he was perceived as an Islamic ideologist mainly by Russian non-Muslims, scaring them with his radicalism and even with his formidable appearance, and he actually turned into a sophisticated showman.

Finally, we mention Tatar poet Fauziya Bairamova, an ideologist of local nationalism, who is also not averse to Islamic rhetoric. Even so, her appeal is limited to the narrow circle of admirers of her literary talent.

The authority and popularity of the radicals proper do not go beyond the boundaries of their milieu. The political conditions for the emergence of charismatic figures existed in the Northern Caucasus. It was there that politicians and ideologists with leadership ambitions emerged in the 1990s. They included the above-mentioned Ahmed Qadi Akhtayev, Sheikh Bagauddin (Bagauddin Kebedov), a leading ideologist of the Salafists in the 1990s, and Nadirshah Khachilayev, head of the Union of Muslims of Russia (killed in 1999). But none of them ever succeeded in becoming a full-fledged popular leader.

Perhaps Shamil Basayev, one of the leaders of Chechen separatism (killed by the federal security services in 2004), approached closest to it; however, his charisma was mainly of a political nature, while Islam served above all as an instrument for preserving his political prestige.

It seems highly unlikely that charismatic figures will emerge in Russia's Muslim community in the near future. First, there are no appropriate political conditions for this; second, the security services, ready at any time to isolate an exceptional personality, are keeping a close watch on Muslims; third, a majority of Russia's Muslims are not very susceptible to radical ideas and slogans tinged with a revolutionist hue. Today, only one Muslim politician, Ramzan Kadyrov, the young president of Chechnya, boasts charisma.

There is a growing Islamic motivation in Ramzan's politics, but he cannot be classed with Islamic radicals and therefore his portrait is not a subject of our analysis.

4. Texts propagating the ideas of radicalism and their impact

Texts propagating the ideas of radicalism in Muslim Russia – not only in the Caucasus but also in other regions – are quite varied. In the Northern Caucasus, they have a broader audience; in the 2000s, however, materials of this kind have become relatively widespread in Tatarstan, the southern Urals, western Siberia and the Volga area. In the 1990s, at a number of bookstores in Russia one could buy fundamentalist literature – Russian translations of works by Ibn Taimi and Ibn Abd al-Wahhab, the founders and ideologists of fundamentalism, Hassan al-Banna, the first head of the Muslim Brotherhood organisation, and Sayyid and Muhammad Qutb. Works by contemporary Islamic radicals, such as Abd as-Salam Farag, Ayman az-Zawahiri, Abbud az-Zumr and natives of Russia Magomed Tagayev (*The Army of the Imam*) and Nadir Khachilayev (*Our Road to Gazavat*), are being published.

The most traditional forms of presenting the material are leaflets, brochures and sermons. In the early 1990s, publications of texts in religious newspapers and magazines played a crucial role. Their impact can hardly be overestimated; for example, a whole generation of young Islamic radicals in the region has been brought up reading the Dagestani newspaper *Al-Qaf*. In the Urals, western Siberia and the Volga area, Islamic radicals read *al-Wa'i*, a printed organ of HTI.

Sermons were video-recorded, and their dissemination was one of the leading methods of propagandising radical ideas among the peoples of the Caucasus in the 1990s. By the late 1990s and early 2000s, video began to be ousted by the Internet, which today has become one of the main resources for spreading radical views and an efficient lever for influencing young Muslims in Russia.

In addition, mention should be made of lectures delivered by ideologists of radicalism at educational institutions and militant training camps that operated in the Caucasus throughout the 1990s. Sometimes texts of the lectures were disseminated in other regions of Russia as well, including Moscow. Records of the lectures that have come down to us are amazing for the scale of ideological brainwashing of young

students, who were offered a systematic, integral view of the world through a radical interpretation. This approach was clearly presented and substantiated with quotations from the Koran and the Sunna, along with examples from history and the present-day world political situation.⁷

Still another method of propagandising radical ideas was the use of possibilities offered by seemingly innocuous Arabic language textbooks. Sheikh Bagauddin, a major, radical ideologist of the Caucasus, widely used the principles of the Wahhabite doctrine in an Arabic language textbook that he had written. In his textbook for the first year of study, a great deal of interesting thoughts are to be found in texts for translation into Arabic, such as the following: “We are fighting with gyaurs (i.e. infidels), and gyaurs are constantly fighting with us. Today they are possessors of power and possessors of numerous weapons, but we are possessors of iman [faith], that is why we will definitely win, for we have Allah and they have Satan.” (Muhammad 1992). Here are a few more characteristic quotations from the textbook: “I have understood the lesson well. We must be soldiers of Islam. We must learn at schools and at institutes and at universities. And we must defend our religion and our homeland. We must defend our Muslim brothers. Long live our state, a state of Islam!” (Muhammad 1992). Next, “This article has been written about spreading Islam among the peoples of the world, especially among young people. Why among young people? Because they [young people] are quick in understanding everything, and as for old people, they never understand.” (Muhammad 1992:124). And, finally, “Big and small states all over the world should unite and create a Great Islamic Power.” (Muhammad 1992:161).

By way of an illustration of Sheikh Bagauddin’s methods, we draw from records made by one of his ‘students’, which can be unequivocally described by the title, the Wahhabite Student’s Summary Notes.⁸

The basis of the Wahhabite doctrine is the requirement for comprehensive implementation of the principle of *tawhid* [monotheism]. This requirement proceeds from a literal understanding of this principle with very strict limitations. The Wahhabite

⁷ Similar texts are familiar to the authors from materials obtained in Central Asia.

⁸ Here and further below, the text cited (with minor punctuation corrections) is from lecture summary notes kept in one of the author’s personal archives. Some of these summary notes have been published; however, since their unpublished parts will often be cited, reference is made to the author’s personal archives.

Student's Summary Notes read, "Most Muslims, who very often repeat, 'There is no god but Allah,' know no sincerity or meaning or do this out of tradition or custom. Most of their deeds are emulation or following the example, and they best correspond to the Word of Supreme Allah in His Koran: 'We follow what we found our fathers upon.'" In other words, it is recognised here that most Muslims are not sincere believers and their Islam is mainly 'inherited', and they regard themselves as Muslims by force of habit.

The ideology of the Caucasus Wahhabites is based on recognition of only the Koran and the authentic – as they emphasise – Sunna as the source of the doctrine. The Wahhabite Student's Summary Notes add that "Muslims must wholeheartedly embrace the teaching of Islam embodied in the Holy Koran – the Word of Allah, and the Sunna – sayings of the Prophet Muhammad". Hence, there is the Wahhabites' call for cleansing Islam of 'impermissible innovations' (*bid'ah*) with which, in their opinion, Islam has become fouled in the Northern Caucasus. They come out sharply against many of the local Muslims' customs and rituals such as the cycle of commemorative rites including Koran reading for the deceased, the ritual for redeeming the sins of the deceased (*deur*), distribution of alms at the graveyard and the celebration of *Mawlid* (the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad). Moreover, the Wahhabites are particularly irreconcilable towards local Sufism and the related cult of saints. The Wahhabites regard the veneration of sheikhs, *zikrs* [religious remembrances], pilgrimages to the graves of holy sheikhs (*ziyarat*) and many other things from the practices of the followers of local *tarikats* [Islamic religious orders] as an indication of their most profound and conscious fallacy, polytheism (*shirk*) and disbelief (*kufir*). Not only are the followers of *tarikats* accused of disbelief: the Wahhabites also declare as infidels all the Muslims who do not share their point of view. There is only one way out for them: they must repent and "embrace Islam once again": "A Muslim who has committed at least one of these [deeds] must renew his Islam by doing *Tawba* [repentance], and embracing Islam once again, since all the above is the abandonment of Islam or the gravest sin."⁹

The ideologists of Wahhabism allot one of the leading places to jihad, understood as an armed struggle for the faith. The Wahhabite Student's Summary Notes state that

⁹ Derived from the author's (A.Ya.) personal archives, the Wahhabite Student's Summary Notes.

“Islam is a religion of jihad and life. Islam prescribes to every Muslim to spare neither his property nor his energies for the sake of the victory of Islam.”¹⁰ In other words, the Wahhabites regard the conducting of jihad as an obligation of every Muslim. For example, in 1999, in declaring the “revival of the Islamic state of Dagestan”, the ‘Islamic Shura of Dagestan’ expressly pointed out that “jihad in Dagestan is farz‘ain [i.e. personal religious obligation] for every Muslim” (Gadzhiev 2004:262). They believe that today jihad invariably takes the form of an armed struggle against the enemies of Islam. In one of the leaflets disseminated in Dagestan by the so-called ‘Badr Islamic Call Centre’, jihad (again, naturally understood as an armed struggle) is named under number four among the ten pillars of an Islamic *jamaat*. Sheikh Bagauddin pursued this idea consistently and methodically: he called for conducting an armed struggle against “infidels” not only in his sermons and writings but also in such literature, seemingly remote from ideological disputes, as Arabic language textbooks.

Another accusation advanced by the Wahhabites against the rest of Muslims is an accusation of departure from monotheism (*shirk*). In the Wahhabites’ opinion, they are becoming *mushriks*, i.e. polytheists, or *kafirs*, i.e. infidels. This applies in the first place to the Northern Caucasian followers of Sufism and near-Sufi cults. Here is what we find in the Wahhabite Student’s Summary Notes:

Mushriks venerating their sheikhs or their graves utter the testimony La-ilaha-illallah [there is no god but Allah] with their tongues and contradict its meaning with their deeds. They utter the testimony and then deify someone else besides Allah, turning their

worship to him, be it love, praise, fear of him, hope, recumbence, prayer, and its other varieties, for all of these are worship, but Allah, the Exalted and Mighty, is the only one who deserves to be worshipped.¹¹

This last statement, which is quite correct from the point of view of any Muslim believer, is treated out of proportion by the Wahhabites. Basing themselves on this

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Derived from the author’s (A.Ya.) personal archives, The Wahhabite Student’s Summary Notes.

postulate, the Wahhabites flatly refuse to recognise any religious authority whatsoever and emphatically express defiance against the traditions of respecting elders, widespread in the Northern Caucasus (which they interpret as veneration of feeble old men). In a Wahhabite community, an emphasised equality of all of its members reigns supreme. No one, not even the amir is given any special deference. Interestingly, it is precisely their lack of deference to elders that opponents of the Wahhabites from among ordinary Muslims have often mentioned as the Wahhabites' negative trait.

Naturally, the ideology of a Great Islamic Power or of the caliphate has always had (and still has) limited popularity in Russia. In the late 1990s, it spread in the Northern Caucasus, when Shamil Basayev spoke of a "Dagestani-Chechen Caliphate", which was subsequently to incorporate the rest of the Northern Caucasus. Incidentally, most of the Dagestanis and the peoples of the Northern Caucasus in general held a cautious, negative attitude towards the idea of a caliphate, viewing it above all as an embodiment of the ambitions of the Chechen separatist leadership.

At approximately that time, there appeared leaflets and other texts mentioning a 'Volga Caliphate', which was to incorporate the Ulyanovsk, Saratov, Samara, Volgograd and Astrakhan regions, and also Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. Interestingly, the leaflets were anonymous (or signed by fictitious names, which gave rise to talk that they were a provocation of the security services). None of the Islamic authorities of any significance admitted to being their author.

At the same time, the talk about the possibility of creating a caliphate in the territory of the Russian Federation attests to the existence among Muslims of radical sentiments, which of course reflect certain utopias but which, on the other hand, stay on in the mind, awakening in it feelings of religious solidarity with radicals in the rest of the world – in the Middle East, Iraq, Afghanistan and Europe. This also promotes the emergence of hope for a future Islamisation of Russia.

It should be noted that the Russian authorities are keeping a close watch on religious literature, imposing a strict censorship on publications that, in their opinion, preach religious intolerance. Books by Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and a number of other classics of Islamic radicalism have been banned in Russia. In 2008, still another list of banned

literature was drawn up. It was stressed that the banned books that are already in libraries (mainly at Islamic educational institutions and mosques) are subject to destruction.

This censorship sparked strong protests, including public ones, on the part of the Muslim community. Curiously, certain Russian liberals sided with this view, believing that in this case works by Vladimir Lenin (the founder of the Soviet state, who openly preached hatred among various groups of society and hatred for religion) should also be destroyed.

5. A 'portrait' of adherents of radicalism and converts

Recently, the qualitative composition of radically-minded Muslims as a group has changed substantially. Now they are by no means poor, uneducated, jobless persons having a low social status. Today, the young and the intelligentsia are perhaps the main sources for replenishing the ranks of radically-minded Muslims. The young respond very keenly to the problems of a society thoroughly penetrated with corruption, clannishness and economic problems. The intelligentsia also respond to the problems of society, for they are by definition prone to reflecting on the subject.

Contributing to the broad spread of radicalism is also the de facto absence of civil society and actual public discussion, alongside a growth in nationalism – both Russian nationalism and the nationalism of ethnic minorities. In the Northern Caucasus as well as among natives of that region living in the centre of Russia, negative emotions are nourished by a feeling of their 'second-ratedness' compared with the non-Muslim majority.

Today's Muslim radical is, as a rule, a young man engaged in some business such as trade or the transit of goods. He is an active, energetic and sociable individual. The last trait is of particular significance, for the ability to establish contact with another person and convince him of one's rightfulness constitutes half the success of propaganda. It is hard to single out any specific group that is most prone to radical propaganda. It is designed for everyone, including drunkards, drug addicts and 'life wasters', as well as intellectuals who are indifferent to Islam.

It should be added that many, if not a majority, of Muslim radicals avoid public expression of their views. In this respect, they may be likened to Soviet dissidents, who

expressed their true convictions, in the phrase of the day, 'while sitting in the kitchen'. This line of conduct is widespread, in particular among students. The short period of existence of post-Soviet Russia does not make it possible draw a conclusion about the stability of Islam's impact on the minds of the young. World experience tells us that as an individual grows older, s/he becomes more pragmatic and backs away from radical attitudes. And yet the same experience attests to the possibility of a permanent reproduction of radicalism in the youth milieu. Somehow or other, a stable niche of Islamic radicalism has been formed among the young, which is expanding, albeit slowly. Contributing to the above-mentioned causes is the growing level of Islamophobia in society. Therefore, Islamic radicalism is to a certain extent a reaction to the negative view of Islam.

Finally, a growing number of neophytes of Slavic origin are to be found among Islamic radicals. It is known that in the late 1980s, the conversion of Slavs (Russians and Ukrainians) to Islam had to do with the shock that Soviet servicemen went through in Afghanistan. Psychologists explained their conversion to the enemy's religion by a feeling of guilt before the people against whom they had been fighting and by the recognition of the strength of Islam. Later on, the conversion of some individuals to Islam was their response to and a kind of resentment against the attitude towards them by Russian society and the state. It was also because of their disenchantment with 'their own' Orthodox faith. It may be said that the change of religion was, in a sense, a result of a crisis of Russian (on a broader scale, Slavic) identity, which began back in the days of perestroika.¹²

Today, for some the conversion to Islam (the number of neophytes runs into hundreds and probably already thousands) is a continuation of their search for identity, an attempt to find a radical, even extreme, form of self-expression, for Islam is perceived as a religion of resolute action. Anti-Americanism, which is widespread in Russian society, also leads one to embrace Islam. Islamic radicals of Slavic origin have been noticed in the Rostov, Samara and Saratov regions, in the Stavropol territory, in the Urals and in

¹² In 1995, Vladimir Khotinenko, the noted Russian film director, made the film *The Muslim*, telling the story of a Russian soldier who had embraced Islam. The Council of Muftis of Russia awarded the film director a special Golden Minbar prize.

Tyumen. Russian Muslim Viktor Senchenko participated in the attack on Nalchik on the militants' side (Pateyev 2008). Another Russian Muslim, Vyacheslav Panin, distributed HTI leaflets (Semyonov 2007). Certainly, the role of Slavic Islamists should not be overestimated; however, Muslim ideologists and propagandists consider their presence valuable, for it offers proof of the supranational nature of Islam and neophytes' readiness to take a direct part in jihad, as well as still another confirmation of the point that the Islamisation of Russia has gotten underway.

6. Methods of violence or manifestations of tension

Violence inevitably follows from the ideology of radicalism. In the Caucasus, practical violence substantiated by religious ideology may be divided into two types with respect to its object: violence in relation to non-Muslims, including that against the state and its structures, and violence in relation to Muslims. A list of the numerous major terrorist acts in Russia from 1994 to 2006 is given in appendix A.

Radicals represent the modern secular state to be devoid of divine blessing and therefore deserving destruction. It should be replaced with a state founded on 'divine' laws, which will be built by an appropriate society. From this follows, first, participation by 'true Muslims' in militant *jamaats* and the conduct of military actions against power structures – the army, the security services, the militia, etc. Second, acts of terrorism are called for to spread panic among peaceful populations and to stir anti-Russian sentiments in its midst. Quite often, acts of terrorism are directed against carriers of Russian cultural influence – Russians and Russian-speaking people, as well as teachers, public servants, etc.

The concept of charging fellow Muslims with unbelief (*takfir*) gives the radicals grounds to state that many Muslim politicians have actually renounced Islam. Hence, there is the active use of violence against ethnic Muslims serving in state power structures – and not against them alone. Militia officers who are members of the local ethnic groups in Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia and the eastern districts of the Stavropol territory are among the terrorists' main targets. Islamists believe that the family members of militia officers and other representatives of the authorities may be killed because they voluntarily stay with apostates and therefore support their position. A true Muslim must

disown such relatives. Those who accidentally die in acts of terrorism will become *shahids* [martyrs] and go directly to paradise.

With the exception of the Northern Caucasus, calls to violence on the part of Islamic radicals in the other regions practically have not been noticed. Quite the contrary, even HTI followers stress in every way possible that they do not view confrontation with the authorities as their main objective, laying the key emphasis on propaganda. An interesting fact is that, in detaining HTI members in the territory of Russia, none of them could be charged with violent methods of struggle. The detention, however, was done not without grounds by the authorities of the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, to which the detainees were extradited.

In the mid-1990s, the question began to be debated among some of the young Tatars, especially those who had been in contact with the Chechen separatists, about possible direct support of the separatist fighting in Chechnya and about rendering it assistance with concrete actions in the rest of the territory of the Russian Federation. Yet, things never came to practical action: only a few Tatars took part in the first Chechen war on the separatists' side. (No accurate data on the subject are available.)

In 1995, one of the authors of this paper had a chance to talk in Kazan with a radically-minded member of the All-Tatar Public Centre, who literally said the following: "We, the Tatars, are weaker in character than the Chechens and we have no mountains or we would have also shown to Moscow" [*sic*]. It should be noted that shortly before the meeting, the author's collocutor had spent 15 days in custody on a charge of organising an unauthorised rally. We repeat once again, however, that even in that period, which was quite tense for Moscow, calls for violence voiced by Tatar and Bashkir radicals were not supported by practical actions.

It is quite clear that today calls for violence are even less likely to find any substantial support among the Tatars or among Muslim migrants from Central Asia who come to Russia to earn money and not at all to participate in jihad. Quite the contrary, Muslim migrants themselves are under constant pressure not only by the Russian militia but also by Russian nationalists. (It is known that in the last two years attacks on and even killings of immigrants from Central Asia have become a kind of routine, and their

number has grown so much that the federal authorities have been compelled to pay attention to this.)

7. Response of the state and society to Islamic radicalism

The response of the state to the activities of Islamic radicals is by far not always adequate and quite often may provoke conflicts between the authorities and the Muslim community at large.

At both the federal and local levels, the state takes a very rigid position in respect of 'Islamic dissidents'. In the Northern Caucasus, they are outlawed and an unceasing warfare is carried on against them. The authorities, however, are ignoring the fact that nearly the entire Muslim community in the region is, in varied form and degree, drawn into this warfare. A substantial share of it sides or at least sympathises with radicals and is embittered by extremely rigorous and not always justified measures against them and especially against their relatives on the part of the militia and other power structures.

In particular, an exceptionally repressive policy has led to radicalisation of the Kabardino-Balkarian *jamaat*. From the middle of 2004, militarised extremist cells began to step up their activities in the Northern Caucasus, including in the Kabardino-Balkarian Republic. The acme of the destructive activity of the local Wahhabite Yarmuk Jamaat was the previously mentioned attack on the Department of the Federal Drug Control Service in Nalchik in December 2004. The federal and republican power bodies scored a success when they liquidated the leading nucleus of the *jamaat* with its amir, Muslim Atayev, in the course of a special operation in Nalchik at the end of January 2005. This move, however, turned out to be a Pyrrhic victory. It was quite clear that the *jamaat* itself was not eliminated. As a result, the situation became even more exacerbated: Kabardino-Balkaria turned into still another explosive territory and its Islamic youth structures began de facto actively to cooperate with the Chechen radicals.

The Muslim religious boards have turned into bureaucratic structures having no control over the religious situation at the local level and enjoying no authority among believers. Moreover, they may stir conflicts within Muslim communities with their incompetent actions. It is not to be ruled out that the authorities will be compelled to switch from unqualified support of the Muslim religious boards, which are failing to cope

with their tasks to engage in dialogue with and even to draw to their side informal Islamic structures, having legitimised them. These latter structures are communities of ‘new Muslims’, which, while not being Wahhabites, refuse to recognise the authority of the religious boards. In addition, such communities have levers of influence for radicalising young persons whom the authorities could use in their own interests. Naturally, the state will not undertake a compromise with extremist groups, yet at the same time it should clearly determine whom it regards as extremists and who, their radicalism notwithstanding, have not yet overstepped this boundary. What presents an additional complexity for the state is the non-uniformity of youth communities in the Northern Caucasus – which, because of lack of registration, find themselves outside the legal framework, thus fostering the preservation and growth of radicals’ and extremists’ influence on them.

Although the state policy in respect of Islamic radicalism remains mainly repressive, some of the public officials speak up from time to time for the need for a more balanced approach to the opponents and sometimes even admit errors (although very rarely) committed by the authorities. In this connection one may note the views of Yevgeny Primakov, former Minister of Foreign Affairs and Prime Minister of Russia, who does not consider Islamic fundamentalism an indubitable evil, and also ex-premier Sergei Stepashin, who said during his visit to the Dagestani territory controlled by radicals in August 1998 that the inhabitants of that enclave were quite “nice” people and “by no means Wahhabites”.¹³

Arsen Kanokov, who became president of Kabardino-Balkaria in 2005, publicly admitted that ill-considered actions by the local Ministry of Internal Affairs, which systematically refused dialogue with young Muslims, had been one of the causes of the Nalchik tragedy.

It is also known that in the Astrakhan region (Southern Federal District) the local administration took a relatively reserved attitude towards local radicals and their head, Ayub Astrakhansky, which was instrumental in avoiding an exacerbation of the situation. Still, such examples remain exceptions.

¹³ It is true, however, that certain experts believe that Stepashin, who was the minister of internal affairs of Russia at the time, made a grave mistake when he assessed local radicals in this way.

The relatively brief history of the existence in the Northern Caucasus of Islamic radicalism has shown that its emergence was brought about by a profound crisis that had swept the region and its society. To neutralise protest sentiments, the federal authorities are attempting partially to replace the elites in the republics and show resolve to combat total corruption and the inefficiency of the local economies. The replacement of the republics' leaders in Dagestan, Adygeya and Kabardino-Balkaria, demonstrative actions against corrupt officials, and the implementation of economic projects, including those for the development of tourism, are well received by the local population. Given the scale of the problems the region is facing, however, cosmetic measures alone (such as those taken in the past years) are clearly insufficient. The Northern Caucasus needs systemic reform, which the Kremlin is having a hard time deciding to conduct. No less important is the shaping of a common national identity: this is impeded by the growth in Russia of anti-Caucasus sentiments, which is understandably very painfully perceived by Muslim youth. The integration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus into civil society is moving forward with insufficient decisiveness and speed, and is thus fraught with serious consequences.

In the Muslim Volga area, the Urals and Siberia, the situation is more tranquil. Terrorist acts that took place in the second half of the 1990s and early 2000s were linked to events in the Northern Caucasus. The authorities systematically carry out 'preventive' measures, keeping a close watch on radicals' activities and detaining Muslims who, from their point of view, pose the most danger. Every year, court trials of members of radical groups are held in Russia. The main conclusions drawn after the trials are that religious radicals' activities are directed from abroad.

In addition, one cannot fail to notice that struggle against extremism serves the Russian authorities as a pretext for tightening the screws, for imposing even more harsh control on the mass media and for persecution of the opposition. Quite often, measures taken by the authorities are absolutely unrelated to the struggle against extremism. Thus, for example, after the terrorist act in Beslan the direct elections of governors were abolished – allegedly to promote security. Sometimes the authorities deliberately exaggerate the factor of extremism and the struggle against it. Certain cities and even regions of Russia are nearly declared hotbeds of Wahhabism (Viktorin 2008). Yet even in

1999, when the aggravation of the situation in the Northern Caucasus reached its height, it was quite clear that Wahhabism was by no means the main problem for Tatarstan or for the Muslim Volga area in general (Mukhametshin 2005).

8. Influence of the international situation and current world events

Radicalisation of the Muslim community in Russia has mainly internal causes, and therefore it may be positively stated that world events have a secondary, even though marked, influence on this process. Nevertheless, radically-minded Islamic ideologists are making wide use of the world situation in their reasoning and propaganda.

Of much significance is the playing on anti-Western feelings. The Wahhabite Student's Summary Notes read, "If one takes a look at the history of the West's relations with the Muslim peoples, one may find that the Europeans' souls were so much filled with spite and animosity that these things have driven them to the brink of insanity. Spite, animosity and fear is what they feel towards Islam" (Mukhametshin 2005). The Summary Notes also describe in detail problems that are painful for Muslims and which they tie in with the politics of the West. Zionism and Israel's politics are one of the most irritating factors. The Summary Notes mention Eritrea, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Lebanon, whose difficulties are regarded as consequences of the Western forces' inimical activities. The Summary Notes end with an eloquent appeal: "We Muslims are slaves of All-Mighty and Great Allah. We must break our fetters and restore our strength and our power! And deliver the world from the tyranny of the Western kafirs!" (Mukhametshin 2005).

The above example reflects broader sentiments widespread among Russia's Muslim community. Muslims' overall and in a sense, formal loyalty does not imply their total solidarity with Moscow's stand on Islam and the Islamic world. On the one hand, Russia's Muslims support Moscow's official policy on the Middle East and its stand on Iran and Afghanistan. From 2004, a parliamentary association named "Russia and the Islamic World: Strategic Dialogue" has been functioning at Russia's State Duma (parliament). According to State Duma Deputy Shamil Sultanov, its aims are as follows:

Providing legislative support for the development of Russia's relations with Muslim countries and international Islamic organisations, above all the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC)...putting forward initiatives for

participation in integration processes in the Islamic world; ...creating conditions for constructive dialogue between the political and economic elites of Russia and the Islamic world, [etc.]¹⁴

Veniamin Popov, former special envoy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has repeated more than once that “Russia can and must come out in favour of maintaining Christian-Muslim dialogue”. Islam, according to Popov, is the only religion that has established its own inter-state structure – the Organisation of the Islamic Conference.¹⁵

Conducive to the establishment of special relations with Islamic countries is the admission of Russia as an observer – a country with a Muslim minority – in the OIC. (The OIC, established in 1969, has today 57 countries as members, including two European and two Latin American countries, and also six member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States.) There were sporadic contacts with the OIC back in the Soviet times. In particular, the OIC was instrumental in liberating prisoners of war from Afghanistan. In 1994 and 1997, the organisation’s secretaries general visited Russia.

Islamic radicals are – publicly or unofficially – in agreement with the intensity of Russia’s policy in the Muslim area. Visits by Hamas delegations to Moscow, which began in March 2006, and active support of Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad are regarded by the radicals (and by the rest of Muslims) as evidence that Moscow seeks to play an intermediary role in relations between the Muslim world and the West, which are anything but simple. Sometimes Moscow’s position de facto comes out on the side of the anti-Western segment of the Muslim community, thus encouraging Islamic radicals and convincing them of their rightfulness.

It should be noted that Moscow’s contacts with Hamas are regarded with approval by the moderate part of Russia’s Muslim community as well. For example, in 2006 Jafar Bikmayev, Mufti of the Rostov region, said during his meeting with Sergei Lavrov,

¹⁴ Derived from “Rossia i Islam” [Russia and Islam], an interview with Russia’s State Duma Deputy Sh. Sultanov, *Literaturnaya Gazeta*, 13-19 October 2004.

¹⁵ See “Islamskii mir i vneshnyaya politika Rossii” [The Islamic World and Russia’s Foreign Policy], *Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn*, No. 5, 2005, pp. 77-79.

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation that “if there is hope for alleviation of that organisation’s position, meetings should be held with it”.¹⁶

At the same time, there is awareness in the Russian establishment that ‘external’ Islamic radicalism is an ally of internal radicalism, which has developed as a response to the complexities that have arisen in Russia’s public and political life. The barrier between ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ radicalism is, in a sense, conventional and the ties among Russia’s Muslims – whether in the Northern Caucasus or to a lesser degree, in the Volga area and the southern Urals – are regular and versatile. On the territory of the Russian Federation, a whole variety of charity organisations with an ideological and political bias, such as the International Islamic Relief Organisation, Jamiat Ihia Al-Turath Al-Islamiya [Revival of Islamic Heritage Society], Al-Harameyn [The Two Holy Places], El-Hairiya [Charity], the Benevolence International Foundation, ‘Qatar’ and also such groups as Hizb ut-Tahrir, al-Qaeda and the Muslim Brothers, have been and are active even though today on a reduced scale.

What could Islamists’ practical – tangible, so to say – goals be in Russia?

Certainly, today only through a flight of fancy can one imagine the creation of a caliphate in the territories of the eastern Caucasus. It is also hard to imagine the formation under radical slogans of an all-Russia Muslim separatist movement. Yet, the spreading of Islamist sentiments among believers, principally among young believers, and the infiltration of Islamist preachers into mosques have turned out to be quite practicable. The lack of centralised structures at the Islamic radicals’ disposal and the passivity of the followers of Islamism do not signify its disappearance. Rather, it is biding its time. Islamist ideology easily gets through state borders. A symbiosis is taking place between internal and external Islamic radicalism.

9. A new trend

In the last few years, a new, previously unknown trend has been noted in Russia – namely, the radicalisation of traditional Islam, whose major figures have always been conformist-minded towards the state and have sharply criticised their opponents, the

¹⁶ See the Regnum News Agency website (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/598661.html>).

Salafists. This trend may be conventionally described as ‘neo-traditionalist’. It is present in Russia on a nationwide scale; however, it is in the Northern Caucasus that this trend is seen most clearly.

In Dagestan, the radicalisation of traditional Islam is directly related to the activity of the Sufi Nakshbandiya, Kadiriya and Shaziliya *tarikats*. The spiritual guides of the Nakshbandiya *tarikat*, who have open support from the authorities, enjoy the greatest influence, just as they always have. Today, it is from sheikhs and their loyal *murids* [disciples] – many of whom hold responsible posts in local administration – that the impetus towards shariatisation of society originates. Dagestani sheikhs, under slogans of struggle against Wahhabism, have created, not without assistance from the authorities, their own system of education operating under their patronage.

Formally, the Sufis, just as before, come out flatly against Wahhabites; at the same time, they are ready to side with them concerning certain general Muslim issues such as support of the Palestinians and criticism of the US policy in the Middle East, in Iran and in Afghanistan. Moreover, in 2000 there were cases in which followers of traditional Islam became members of Wahhabite *jamaats*, while preserving the specific features of their understanding of Islam.

Traditionalists and Wahhabites are united by a call for shariatisation of society, which both regard as quite a feasible goal. Furthermore, present-day Sufi communities in Dagestan, led by sheikhs, are establishing a sharia governance framework in their midst without the preliminary consent of the authorities. Practically all litigations in their midst are decided by a sheikh and persons assigned by him – naturally, on the basis of sharia law and not on Russian secular laws. The expansion of sharia law to cover the criminal and state administrative spheres is just a matter of time, for the creeping spread of influence through a network of *murids* is a time-tested and reliable tactic known since the Middle Ages.

The position taken by the clergy in areas of compact residence of Muslims, for example, in Tatarstan, combines “loyalty” to the state with a call to “adhere to the idea of the expediency of gradual Islamisation of Tatar society” and allows for “combining [s]haria law with secular laws” (Mukhametshin 2004). One gets the impression that some of the spiritual leaders see the present stage as transitional to a situation in which the

influence of Islam on society will increase immeasurably. Under this logic, concessions to the state appear temporary and forced, for, as Valiulla Yakubov, Deputy Mufti of Tatarstan, believes, “so far, you cannot come to power on the basis of a religious idea”.¹⁷ This statement coincides with the opinion of popular Dagestani politician Surakat Asiyatillov, former chairman of the Islamic Party of Dagestan, who, while admitting that “today one should not harp on the issue of establishing an Islamic republic in Dagestan”, dreams of the day when “Islamic order will be established in his country and he will be tried by a sharia court and not by the double-headed eagle”. (Asiyatillov 1999:77,27) The idea of a gradual yet inevitable Islamisation is evolving into a final concept. It certainly cannot be regarded as a guide to action, yet it is gradually sticking in the minds of Muslims, prompting them to more vigorous action on the religious path, intensifying their conviction and asserting the primacy of their religious identity.

It should be noted that today neo-traditionalism looks increasingly impressive in the religious domain proper. The niche of Islamic modernisation in Russia is amorphous and unpersuasive. As Dagestani Islam scholar and sociologist Enver Kisriyev believes, the number of Muslims of “modernist” and traditional type “may be approximately estimated as being in equilibrium” (Kisriyev 2004:77), with modernists prevailing in towns and conservators in the countryside. One should think that there is no contradiction in this, since modernism is determined by the urban way of life and by the character of labour activity, in the course of which direct religious consciousness is little demanded. It should be noted, however, that when things concern the topic of Islam, the very same modernists quite often take a protective stand. In other words, people try to make up for their urbanite manner of conduct with affective adherence to Islam.

It is worthy of note that, for example, in Tatarstan (and not only there) neo-traditionalist positions are strong especially among the well-educated segment of the urban population.

¹⁷ See *Iman*, No. 5, March 1998.

Conclusions

Islamic radicalism in Russia will not disappear; it will remain a factor of the political and religious life of its Muslim community and of relations between Muslims and the rest of the country's citizens.

It may grow stronger under the influence of the internal situation, acting as a form of protest ideology. The radicals' activity also depends, among other things, on the international situation – especially on relations between the Muslim world and the West.

Considering the fragility of stability in the Northern Caucasus, this region in particular is most likely to become a field of activity for Islamic radicals.

Competition between Islamic radicals (Salafists and Wahhabites) and traditionalists – both Muslim orders and followers of Hanafism and Shafism (in the Caucasus) will continue. This process is a particular case of general competition between universalist and regional, ethnic Islam.

On the other hand, in the Northern Caucasus there have appeared indications of a 'truce' and even rapprochement on a number of issues between universalist radicals and traditionalists. This concerns, in the first place, the need for a shariatization of Islamic society and a unity of views on relations between Islam and the West.

The state and society are faced with the need to work out a more flexible and selective approach towards Islamic radicalism, singling out in it a relatively moderate and an extremist wing and combining contacts with the former with suppression of the latter.

Today, a repetition of terrorist acts similar to those that took place in the late 1990s and the first half of the 2000s is hardly possible in Russia. Even if terrorist acts were to be committed, they would most probably be limited to the Northern Caucasus and would be a response to the antiterrorist struggle being waged by the power structures.

The question of links between Russia's Muslim radicals with their kindred spirits in Europe remains open. Most likely, however, these links will be gradually developing, the more so as a number of instances of mutual contacts between Russian and European Islamist network structures have already been taking place.

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Appendix A. Major terrorist acts in Russia from 1994 to 2006

Date	Event
28.07.1994	Capture of the Pyatigorsk–Stavropol–Krasnogvardeisk coach – 5 killed
29.07.1994	Mineralnye Vody, hijacking of a helicopter at the airport – 4 killed, 15 wounded
14.06.1995	Budennovsk, Stavropol region, hostage-taking in a hospital (more than 1,600 persons, including children and pregnant women) – 166 killed, more than 400 wounded; a terrorist gang was headed by Shamil Basaev
09.01.1996	Kizlyar, Dagestan, assault and capture of 3,000 hostages, kept in a hospital – 78 killed, hundreds wounded; Salman Raduev headed about 500 terrorists
28.06.1996	Nalchik, explosion of a bus at a bus terminal – 8 killed, 23 wounded
04.09.1998	Makhachkala, explosion on Parkhomenko street – 18 killed, 160 wounded
19.03.1999	Vladikavkaz, explosion in the central market – 62 killed, 118 wounded
04.09.1999	Buinaksk, Dagestan, explosion in an apartment building – 61 killed, 130 wounded
08.09.1999	Moscow, explosion in an apartment building on Guryanova street – 94 killed, 164 wounded
13.09.1999	Moscow, explosion in an apartment building on Kashirskoe street – 124 killed, 9 wounded
16.09.1999	Volgodonsk, Rostov region, explosion near an apartment building – 18 killed, 130 wounded; this series of September explosions is considered one case by intelligence services, masterminded by Arab mercenaries Khattab and Abu Umar; most of the executors were later killed in Chechnya

Appendix A. cont'd

Date	Event
24.03.2001	Explosions of cars in Mineralnye Vody, Essentuki and Cherkessk - 21 killed, 140 wounded
09.05.2002	Kaspiisk, Dagestan, a terrorist act on the Victory Day celebrations - 42 killed, over 100 wounded
23.10.2002	Moscow, hostage-taking at the theatre on Dubrovka street - 129 killed; 41 militants, headed by Movsar Baraev, nephew of terrorist Arbi Baraev, killed by federal forces in Chechnya
05.07.2003	Moscow, explosion at a rock festival in Tushino - 16 killed, 69 wounded; carried out by two female suicide-bombers, Zalikhan Elikhadgieva, a 20-year old from a Chechen village, and Zarema Mugikhoeva, who was arrested five days later in Moscow. They had been trained by Khamzat Tazabeav, who was close to Shamil Basaev and who was killed during the special operation in Ingushetia.
03.09.2003	Stavropol region, explosion on a Kislovodsk-Mineralnye Vody train - 5 killed, about 40 wounded
05.12.2003	Stavropol region, explosion on a Kislovodsk-Mineralnye Vody train - 47 killed, 180 wounded; blamed on members of the 'Nogai battalion'
05.12.2003	Stavropol region, explosion on a Kislovodsk-Mineralnye Vody train - 47 killed, 180 wounded; blamed on members of the 'Nogai battalion'
06.02.2004	Moscow, explosion on the metro between the Avtozavodskaya and Paveletskaya stations - 40 killed, 134 wounded; attributed to an Arab from Chechnya, Abu al-Valid, the successor of the eliminated Khattab
09.05.2004	Grozny, the explosion at Dinamo stadium - 6 killed, over 40 wounded; Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility
22.06.2004	Several terrorist attacks on buildings of the Ingush interior ministry and the 137 th frontier detachment in Nazran, Karabulak and Sleptsovskaya - 100 killed
24.08.2004	Bomb attacks on two airline flights, Moscow-Volgograd and Moscow-Sochi - 89 killed; carried out by female suicide-bombers

Appendix A. cont'd

Date	Event
31.08.2004	Moscow, explosion outside the Rizhskaya metro station - 11 killed, 41 wounded; Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility, the 'Karachai battalion' were accused
01.09.2004	Beslan, North Ossetia, the school hostage siege (over 1,200 children and adults) - 330 killed, several hundreds wounded; Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility, declaring that the attack was carried out by 12 Chechen men and 2 Chechen women, 9 Ingush men, 3 Russian men, 2 Arab men and 2 Ossetian men, 1 Tatar, 1 Kabardinian and 1 from the Zabaikal region
1 st half of 2005	Dagestan, over 60 terrorist attacks; responsibility was attributed to the 'Jenet' and 'Sharia' Dagestan <i>jamaats</i>
13.10.2005	Attack on Nalchik - 33 law enforcement officers and 12 civil servants were killed; a large majority of the over 100 wounded were secret service officers; 80 militants were killed and 27 captured; responsibility claimed by the Kabardino-Balkaria Jamaat
09.02.2006	Battle in the village of Tukui-Mekteb (Stavropol region) - 4 law enforcement officers were killed; 12 militants of the 'Nogai battalion' (which is part of the Chechnya Shelkov <i>jamaat</i>) were killed

Source: Authors' compilation.