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# NO CHANGE IN THE RUSSIAN CAUCASUS

## THE WINTER OLYMPICS AMID A LOCAL WAR

Wojciech Górecki

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**OSW** |

CENTRE FOR EASTERN STUDIES

OŚRODEK STUDIÓW WSCHODNICH im. **Marka Karpia**

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# Contents

KEY POINTS /5

INTRODUCTION /8

**I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT /9**

**II. THE CIVIL WAR /13**

**1. Parties to the conflict and their aims /13**

**2. The Caucasus Emirate /15**

2.1. Origins /15

2.2. Structures /18

2.3. Evolving tactics /20

**3. Federal and local security forces /25**

**4. Consequences for the region /26**

**III. SITUATION IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS SUBJECTS  
OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION /29**

**IV. THE ROLE OF AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA /49**

**V. CULTURAL AND CIVILISATIONAL CHANGES /53**

**VI. THE NORTH CAUCASUS IN MOSCOW'S POLICIES /58**

**1. Strategies towards the region /58**

**2. Operation Sochi 2014 /63**

**VII. CONCLUSIONS AND TENTATIVE FORECAST:  
RUSSIA WITHOUT THE CAUCASUS? /67**

APPENDICES /74

MAP /78

## KEY POINTS

- The North Caucasus remains the most volatile region in the Russian Federation, and there is nothing to suggest that the situation could change over the next few years. With the very high level of violence (clashes with the armed Islamic underground and acts of terror claim 700–750 casualties on average yearly) the region may justifiably be considered to be in a state of civil war. Underlying the conflict is a clash between two opposing visions for the North Caucasus as either a confessional (Salafi Islamic) republic independent of Moscow, or as a region that remains part of Russia while maintaining its separate, specific character with a major role for traditional Islam. These two visions are represented by the two sides of the conflict: the Caucasus Emirate, a decentralised terror organisation established in 2007; and the secular regimes in power in the individual North Caucasus republics, backed by the local and federal security forces (FSB and the structures of the Interior Ministry). At the beginning of the present decade (around 2011), the character of the civil war changed from ‘total’, affecting the entire population in varying degrees, to ‘selective’, involving only the militants and the security forces. This development has led to a decline in the number of civilian casualties.
- In cultural terms, the North Caucasus has been drifting ever further away from the rest of Russia. One of the most significant processes in the region concerns its Islamisation, with both currents of Islam gaining ever larger numbers of adherents. The process of de-modernisation is also important, i.e. the revival of traditional social institutions that existed before these lands were incorporated into Russia. Finally a process of de-Russification is visible, whereby the Caucasus languages are pushing out Russian and the knowledge of Russian is declining. There is a growing sense of mutual alienation between the North Caucasus and the rest of Russia, visible in the findings of sociological surveys, which show that more than 50 per cent of Russians would accept the secession of Chechnya from the Russian Federation.
- The processes mentioned above have been felt in the entire region. Nonetheless, the dynamics of developments vary between the North Caucasus republics. For example, in Dagestan, a country marked by high diversity, there are many internal actors (apart from the armed Islamic underground and the local governments there are also criminal business groups, national movement elites and groups centred around religious leaders) who

maintain a dynamic balance among themselves. The most important social change to have taken place in Chechnya concerns the erosion of the traditional role of clans and the gradual development of a modern nation. In Ingushetia, however, the clan structure persists, but the country has political opposition, something Ramzan Kadyrov has managed to eliminate in Chechnya.

- For Moscow, the North Caucasus is important mainly as a border area where important transport routes are located. A further escalation of the situation in the region would pose a risk to the security of this infrastructure. Moreover, if Russia wishes to maintain its influence in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia it must ensure it retains effective control of the North Caucasus. There is also the phenomenon wherein instability gets 'exported' beyond the North Caucasus, with attacks carried out by the Caucasus Emirate in central Russia (for example in the Moscow metro in 2010 or Moscow Domodedovo airport in 2011). Meanwhile, the rise in the number of migrants from the North Caucasus in Russian cities has been generating ethnic clashes, increasingly often taking the form of riots (most recently in Moscow in October 2013).
- In the short term, the absolute priority for the Kremlin is to ensure security for the Olympic Games in Sochi. In the run-up to the Games, Moscow has been avoiding any measures that could escalate tensions. Any attack just before or during the Games, in Sochi or in its surrounding area, would be a blow to the prestige of the Russian state and of President Vladimir Putin personally. While the Emirate has not attacked any targets beyond the region since January 2011, a change of this policy should not be ruled out, since the militants have threatened to attempt to disrupt the Games (which start on 7 February 2014). The attack on a bus in Volgograd on 21 October 2013 might be the first act of violence ending the long hiatus.
- In the longer term, the greatest threat to the region's stability, apart from the activities of the Emirate, will come from the ambitions of the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, whose aim is to establish control first of Ingushetia, and then of at least a part of Dagestan. In Chechnya, Kadyrov's power is almost unlimited and, despite his declarations of loyalty to Moscow (which is financing his government), the Chechen leader is practically more independent of Russia than the separatist leaders Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov were in the past. Kadyrov has been legitimising his rule by references to traditionalist (Sufi) Islam, while introducing some elements

of sharia into the local legislation; he has, however, taken action against Salafi Islam.

- The North Caucasus is the poorest region of Russia, with the highest recorded unemployment and the lowest incomes. The role of the economic factor in social and political instability seems, though, to be limited and of secondary importance. The North Caucasus societies are in reality much wealthier than the statistics would suggest, due to a well-developed grey economy as well as high levels of economic migration and the remittances provided by those working in central Russia to family members who remain in the region.
- Moscow has not yet worked out any coherent strategy for the development of the region. Its policy towards the North Caucasus has evolved from the use of force to 'economic' solutions (involving transfers of large sums of money for various development programmes). The funds are not being spent effectively and increase the levels of criminality in the local economies. They do, nevertheless, buy the loyalty of the local elites and reinforce the local particularisms, making the region easier to manage in line with the principle of divide and rule. Moscow appears not to have decided yet whether to integrate the North Caucasus into the rest of the Federation, or to isolate it, accepting the existence of an informal 'internal abroad' within Russia.

## INTRODUCTION

The present paper is neither a full monographic study of the region, nor a description of the preparations for the Winter Olympics in Sochi. Its purpose is to present the situation in the North Caucasus, with special focus on those aspects which, in the author's opinion, may directly or indirectly influence the security of the Games or play an important role in developments in the region in the coming years. The paper discusses: the activities of the Caucasus Emirate (potentially the greatest threat to the security of the Games), the dynamics of developments in the individual republics, and the impact of Georgia and Azerbaijan on the region. The activities of the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, undoubtedly the most influential politician in the North Caucasus, with ambitions to control the neighbouring republics, are also discussed in detail. The two final chapters are devoted to cultural and civilizational changes in the region and the strategies that Moscow has been adopting in dealing with them. The paper ends with a conclusion and an attempt at a forecast.



## I. THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The North Caucasus is defined in various ways in the literature, with some definitions proposing a broader understanding of the region, and others narrowing down its scope. For the purposes of the present paper, a rather broad definition of the region has been adopted, which includes the Caucasus foreland (Ciscaucasia). It comprises ten administrative units (subjects) of the Russian Federation, including seven republics (from west to east these are: Adygea, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya and Dagestan), two *krais* (Krasnodar and Stavropol) and one *oblast* (Rostov Oblast, with the capital in Rostov-on-Don).<sup>1</sup> It spans an area of more than 350,000 km<sup>2</sup> (around 2% of Russia's territory), and has a population of nearly 20 million people (around 13.6% of Russia's total population).

The lands of the North Caucasus are located in two federal districts:<sup>2</sup> the North Caucasus Federal District, which includes six of the republics (without Adygea) and Stavropol Krai, and the Southern Federal District, with Adygea, Krasnodar Krai (where Sochi is situated) and Rostov Oblast, as well as three other subjects of the Russian Federation. The North Caucasus Federal District was separated from the Southern Federal District in 2010. One of the reasons for this was to symbolically separate the Olympic town of Sochi from the most volatile republics of the North-East Caucasus.<sup>3</sup>

These divisions in the region along administrative-territorial lines reflect its high ethnic and linguistic diversity. In Ciscaucasia (Rostov Oblast and the two *krais*) Slavs (mostly Russians but also Ukrainians, often of Cossack origin) are the dominant ethnic group, while the North-West Caucasus is mainly populated by the Caucasian peoples from the Circassian group (Adyghes, Cherkess, Kabardin), and the North East Caucasus by peoples from the Vainakh<sup>4</sup>-Dagestani group (Ingush, Chechens and Avars, Dargwa, Lezgians, Laks, Tabasarans

<sup>1</sup> In the narrower meaning, the region only includes the republics (sometimes even without Adygea), while the broadest definition includes Kalmykia, and in some cases even the Volgograd and Astrakhan Oblasts.

<sup>2</sup> Created in 2000, the federal districts are not a tier of the administrative-territorial division of the country but more closely resemble military or economic districts. Each federal district is a grouping of several to more than ten federation subjects, governed by a presidential plenipotentiary representative.

<sup>3</sup> This move will be discussed in more detail in the chapter on Moscow's strategies towards the region.

<sup>4</sup> Vainakhs is a name denoting the Ingush and the Chechens.

and others). Turkic nations including Balkars and Karachays as well as Nogais and Kumyks are also present. The Ossetians, who are an Iranian people, belong to the Indo-Europeans, like the Slavs.

With the exception of Ciscaucasia, the North Caucasus was incorporated into Russia only in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several decades later than the lands of today's Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. This was due to strong resistance from the highlanders. The conquest of the eastern part of the region was completed in 1859 with the capture of Imam Shamil. In the following decades the Russians limited themselves to controlling transport routes there and combating insurgencies. They did not interfere with the internal affairs of the local communities in Dagestan, Chechnya or Ingushetia, nor did they draft the highlanders into the army or spread Orthodox Christianity, which contributed to the petrification of the traditional social order and allowed Islam to maintain its dominant role. The conquest of the North-West Caucasus ended in 1864, the year which marked the end of the entire Caucasian Wars period.<sup>5</sup> A large proportion of the surviving natives (especially the Circassians) then had to flee to the territory of the Ottoman Empire. The emigrants started the Circassian diaspora, which today is scattered all around the world, and the abandoned lands were populated by Slavic peoples, as a result of which their ethnic make-up and religious relations changed over time. The effects of the policy pursued at that time towards the two parts of the region are still visible today, for example in the proportion of Russians in the total population of the different republics (the further east, the smaller the proportion) or in the level of religious practice (diminishing from east to west).

Following the fall of the short-lived Mountainous Republic (1917–1919) established in the North Caucasus as the power of the central government in Russia waned (monarchy overthrown, the civil war in Russia), the Bolsheviks created a number of ethnic-territorial units in the region which, on the one hand, offered the native ethnic groups of the North Caucasus a form of statehood, but on the other, created artificial divisions which undermined their sense of pan-Caucasian unity, which was strong among the highlanders, despite numerous differences between the various groups (*divide et impera*, or divide and rule).

<sup>5</sup> The victory parade was held on 12 May 1864 in Krasnaya Polyana near Sochi, where some of the sporting events will take place during the Games. Some of the Circassian communities abroad consider this to be a desecration of a cemetery of the highlanders who died fighting in that area, especially since the Olympic year also marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the conquest of the North Caucasus.

The breaking up of the Circassian ethnos (proper name: Adyghe) into three groups is a case in point: it was intended to lead over time to the formation of three small nations in the place of one as a result of deepening ethnographic and linguistic differences. Three territorial units, i.e. Adyghea, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria, were established in the Circassian lands, and in addition the Circassians had to share two of them with the Caucasian Turks, a people that was also split between two different units (a single Karachay-Balkarian language exists to this day). The shape of the administrative borders (and the resulting claims about what belongs to whom) became one of the main conflict-generating factors in the North Caucasus after the break-up of the USSR.<sup>6</sup>

Since the beginning of the 1990s, the North Caucasus has been the most unstable region of the Russian Federation (and along with the South Caucasus – of the entire post-Soviet area). Conflicts in the area initially concerned ethnic and political issues (e.g. the Ingush-Ossetian war over the so-called “Prigorodny District” in the autumn of 1992, or Chechen separatism, which became one of the main reasons for Russia’s military intervention, and the first Chechen War of 1994–1996.<sup>7</sup> After radical Salafi Islam emerged in the region in the mid-1990s and gained importance at the turn of the decade, it gradually became the source of centrifugal tendencies, for which it provided an ideological rationale. During the second Chechen War (1999–2009, regular armed operations to 2000), the Chechen fight for national independence evolved into a Caucasian Jihad, which manifested itself in the replacement of the structures of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria by the Caucasus Emirate, which

<sup>6</sup> The situation was further complicated by the fact that in the 1920s–1950s the administrative divisions of the North Caucasus were reorganised on several occasions, *inter alia* in connection with the deportations of the four nations – the Chechens, the Ingush, the Balkars and the Karachays – to Central Asia during World War II and their return to the Caucasus after Stalin’s death (after the deportation, the administrative units corresponding to those nations were dismantled, and subsequently restored, but with slightly different borders). After the collapse of the USSR the two original autonomous districts (Adyghea in Krasnodar Krai and Karachay-Cherkessia in Stavropol Krai) became republics, and Chechen-Ingushetia was split into two parts. In the aftermath of the break-up of the USSR some nations found themselves living in two separate states: the Ossetians in Russia and Georgia, the Lezgians and the Avars in Russia and Azerbaijan.

<sup>7</sup> The North Caucasus was also involved in the conflicts that took place in the first half of the 1990s in Georgia. The leadership and the people of North Ossetia backed the Ossetian side in the Georgian-South-Ossetian war (1991–1992), volunteers from the Circassian republics took part in the Georgian-Abkhazian war (1992–1993; the Circassians are ethnically close to the Abkhazians), and in 1992, the ousted Georgian president Zviad Gamsakhurdia was offered safe haven in Grozny.

is still in operation.<sup>8</sup> At the same time the role of traditional Islam (regarded as ‘impure’ by the radicals because it includes elements of local religious customs) also grew, along with the re-emergence of traditional social institutions such as vendetta, councils of elders, clan divisions<sup>9</sup> and a revival of national cultures. In the civilizational dimension, those processes have been driving the North Caucasus ever further away from Russia, leading to a growing sense of mutual alienation, among other phenomena.

<sup>8</sup> This process will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

<sup>9</sup> The role of traditional clan structures is diminishing only in Chechnya - the reasons for this will be discussed below.

## II. THE CIVIL WAR

### 1. Parties to the conflict and their aims

The armed conflict, which has been ongoing in the Caucasus for twenty years without respite, finally morphed into a full-fledged civil war in early 2011.<sup>10</sup> The fact that the conflict is indeed a civil war manifests itself both in the scale of violence, claiming more than a dozen lives a week on average as a result of different kinds of clashes and attacks, and in the ideological motivations of the two sides. One party to the conflict is the militant underground, i.e. a decentralised terror organisation operating under the umbrella name of the Caucasus Emirate, whose aim is to separate the region from Russia and to create an Islamic confessional state governed by sharia law and having close links with the countries of the Arabian Peninsula and the Middle East. In statements published as video records on the Emirate's website the organisation's leader Dokku Umarov often emphasises that the North Caucasus is part of the *Ummah*, i.e. the community of all Muslims, and that the operations performed by the Caucasus militants are part of global jihad.<sup>11</sup> The Emirate claims to have its roots in the 19<sup>th</sup> century theocracy of Imam Shamil<sup>12</sup> and follows the Salafi version of Islam while disrespecting traditional Islam. This does not of course mean that all Caucasian Salafis are militants and terrorists – many of them have nothing to do with the Emirate.<sup>13</sup> According to the Emirate's ideologues,

<sup>10</sup> Wojciech Górecki, 'Creeping' civil war in the North Caucasus, *OSW Commentary*, No 50, 15.03.2011. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2011-03-15/creeping-civil-war-north-caucasus>

<sup>11</sup> For example, in a statement on 7 February 2011, Umarov mentioned the break-up of Sudan, which, he argued, took place under pressure from Israel and the United States seeking to take over control of the country's energy resources. This might be a way for Umarov to woo potential sponsors from the Arab world – a declaration that the Caucasus militants are interested in developments in Sudan may contain a hidden suggestion that the Arab world should not forget about the Caucasus. Umarov's statements are also a means to discuss current tactical issues relevant for the militant underground and to transmit general guidelines for the militants.

<sup>12</sup> Imam Shamil was a leader from the period of the Caucasian Wars who combined secular and spiritual power and who by today's definitions was a fundamentalist: he replaced customary law norms, the so-called *adats*, with the Sharia and sought to eradicate those traditions which he considered to be pagan.

<sup>13</sup> The dichotomy between traditional and non-traditional Islam (within Sunni Islam) is a simplification. On the one hand, 'traditional' Islam is not homogeneous, and on the other, 'non-traditional' Islam also has a history in the Caucasus. Salafism is currently banned in Chechnya, but is openly practised in Dagestan (see the next chapter for more information). Some researchers believe that Salafism should be regarded as an equally legitimate current of Islam in Russia (on the same footing as the Sufism, the Hanafi school, the Shafi'i school, etc.). See:

armed struggle must go hand in hand with educational ‘work at the foundations’ – the local communities need to grow to accept the changes, and for this reason the noticeable Islamisation of the region (e.g. the emergence of Salafi nursery schools or *halal* restaurants) is sure to play into the hands of the militant underground in the longer term.

The declared, formal enemy of the Caucasus Emirate is Moscow, i.e. the Russian federal government. In reality, however, it is the governments of the different Caucasian subjects of the Russian Federation and the security forces backing them (the so-called *siloviki*<sup>14</sup>) that are the enemy on the other side of the Caucasus civil conflict. In the ideological dimension, a broadly understood ‘West’ is also the Emirate’s enemy.

The official leaderships of the North Caucasus republics want the region to be secular and to remain within the Russian Federation for pragmatic reasons while maintaining a considerable degree of independence from the central government in Moscow. They accept the dominant role of Islam, especially traditional Islam, in social life, provided that religious leaders remain loyal to the state (this acceptance is the widest in Chechnya and Dagestan). The civil war and the presence of underground militant groups poses a threat to them on the one hand, but on the other it provides them with a bargaining chip in dealings with the central federal government. The local elites blackmail Moscow in order to preserve their positions by creating the impression that they alone are able to guarantee stability and secularity in the given area, while the *siloviki* often exaggerate the security threats in order to demonstrate how necessary they are and to justify their financial claims. The funding for the Caucasus provided from the central budget is treated locally as a due payment for loyalty (*de facto* extortion money) and a sign of Moscow’s weakness.<sup>15</sup> 2013 saw some signals that Moscow may attempt to change this situation.<sup>16</sup> However, the Rus-

Бадма Бюрчиев, Алексей Малашенко: ваххабизм надо оставить в покое, *Big Caucasus*, 7.01.2013. <http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/07-01-2013/82007-malashenko-o/>

<sup>14</sup> From Russian – the functionaries of all the security forces, and the security services in general (Ministry of Defence, Interior Ministry, Federal Security Service, Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, structures of the Prosecutor’s Office, etc.).

<sup>15</sup> According to a Russian expert interviewed in April 2010. The expert also said that “if not for this money, the local elites would consider themselves freed of any obligation to remain loyal to the central government”. See the chapter on the situation in the individual republics for more information on the local governments.

<sup>16</sup> The arrest of the long-time mayor of Makhachkala Said Amirov, and the harsh criticism of the profligacy of Caucasian politicians may be interpreted in this way. See following chapters for more information.

sian leadership is unlikely to take any significant steps in this direction before or immediately after the Sochi Olympics.

## 2. The Caucasus Emirate

### 2.1. Origins

The Caucasus Emirate originated in Chechnya. The conditions which enabled its formation began to emerge in the period between the First and the Second Chechen Wars, i.e. in the years 1996–1999 when the republic had no formal status (under the agreement which ended the war, signed on 31 August 1996 in the Dagestani town of Khasav-Yurt, its status was to be determined within the next five years). The quasi-independent Chechnya (the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria) was in a permanent severe economic, social, political and ideological crisis caused by the damage inflicted by war, by Moscow's policy (a *de facto* blockade of the republic, suspended financing), and by the brutal turf war waged by the former field commanders who held private armies and controlled large swathes of the republic (this considerably restricted the real power and room for manoeuvre of Aslan Maskhadov, elected as the president of Chechnya on 27 January 1997).<sup>17</sup>

Disillusioned by 'democracy', which they associated with war and violence (Boris Yeltsin, the then president of Russia who was responsible for starting the war, liked to present himself as a democrat), and 'independence', perceived in the context of pauperisation, the lack of prospects and rising crime, including kidnappings for ransom, more and more Chechens began to cherish the idea of building a 'just' Islamic republic in Chechnya. The idea was popular in particular among the adherents of the fundamentalist Salafi Islam, which was relatively new in the Caucasus and was sometimes referred to as 'pure', 'new' or 'Arabic', to distinguish it from the traditional Sufi Islam, whose role was also rising. The propagation of Salafi Islam was aided by the presence in Chechnya of foreign mujahideen,<sup>18</sup> including the Saudi-born commander Ibn al-Khattab who stayed in the republic after the war and founded a training camp for militants, funded by the global jihadist centres. Following his example, some of the influential Chechen commanders, including Shamil Basayev, adopted Salafism.

<sup>17</sup> Many commanders operated at the intersection of politics, business and mafia. Some of them were members of the Chechen parliament and had registered businesses, but the largest proportion of the income of this group came from illegal activities (smuggling, arms trafficking, kidnapping). Serving in the private armies of former commanders was at that time one of very few career opportunities available to Chechen men at that time.

<sup>18</sup> In Islamic culture, a mujahideen is a militant motivated by religion.

Aslan Maskhadov himself indirectly contributed to the strengthening of Salafism. The president was an advocate of a secular Chechnya, but having failed to subordinate the former commanders or to force al-Khattab and the other foreign mujahideen to leave, he decided to create a broad coalition involving the Salafis (including Basayev, whom he appointed as the prime minister) and to introduce elements of sharia into local legislation (e.g. public executions, formal recognition of sharia courts).

Contrary to his declared intentions (reconciliation and national unity), Maskhadov's decisions only entrenched the marginalisation of the secularists and highlighted the divisions between the Islamic traditionalists (known as *tarikatis*) and the Salafis. Those processes gained momentum after the second Chechen war broke out in the autumn of 1999.<sup>19</sup> The leading Chechen commanders and the militants' websites began to increasingly emphasise the religious aspect of the conflict as a war against the enemies of Islam, at the expense of the national liberation aspect (the war for independence).<sup>20</sup> This choice was ideological, but also pragmatic – it was intended to encourage more fighters to join the armed struggle and was addressed to people from the neighbouring Caucasus nations, who would not be interested in fighting for a free Chechnya as the region feared potential Chechen domination, but who might be willing to support the jihad. It was also addressed to Muslims from beyond the region,<sup>21</sup> in line with the concept to take the war beyond Chechnya, developed by Shamil Basayev. It was also important that the move towards jihad could open access to funding from fundamentalist circles in the Arab states (the money was to be transferred by the Arab mujahideen, initially mainly by al-Khattab).

Another development that aided the formation of an armed Islamic underground ideologically motivated by radical Islam consisted in the Kremlin's

<sup>19</sup> The Kremlin started the second Chechen war under the slogans of the fight against terrorism (while the aim of the first war had been to restore 'constitutional order', i.e. to eliminate Chechen separatism): its outbreak in late September and early October 1999 had been preceded by a raid into Dagestan undertaken by Basayev and al-Khattab (in August, under the pretext of aiding an anti-Russian insurgency that was allegedly being prepared there), and a series of attacks against residential buildings in Moscow, Buynaksk and Volgodonsk (September 1999, the circumstance of the attacks have still not been fully clarified).

<sup>20</sup> The death of Aslan Maskhadov on 8 March 2005 was a symbolic breakthrough.

<sup>21</sup> According to the Russian authorities, representatives of at least 52 states, identified on the basis of documents found on them, were fighting on the militants' side in the second Chechen war. МВД РФ: среди чеченских боевиков были наемники из 52 стран, *Newsru.com*, 22.10.2008. <http://www.newsru.com/russia/22oct2008/baranov.html>



decision to formally hand over power in Chechnya to ‘pro-Russian’ Chechen politicians.<sup>22</sup> The aim of that process, which commentators referred to as ‘Chechenisation’, was to combat the militants more effectively and to create the impression that there is no Russian-Chechen war, only an internal Chechen conflict between the legitimate leadership of the republic and the rebels.<sup>23</sup> Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov, who fought on the rebel side in the first Chechen war, became the first Chechen leader to be appointed by Moscow, and when he died in an attack in 2004, his son Ramzan took over.<sup>24</sup> Over time, the Kadyrovs managed to gain considerable independence, concentrating real power in the republic in their hands.

The Kadyrovs adhere to traditional Islam and they considered the Salafis to be their main enemy. This has enabled them to convince a considerable proportion of the militants, those who were motivated by national rather than religious sentiments, to lay down their arms and join the armed formations controlled by the Chechen leader (which formally are regular units of the Russian Interior Ministry<sup>25</sup>). This has been possible due to a series of amnesties agreed with Moscow. By the second half of the 2000s, there were practically no independence fighters left among the militants – those who did not join the Kadyrovs’ units were killed, emigrated, or became jihadists themselves.

On 31 October 2007 Dokku Umarov, the president of the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (who succeeded Khalim Sadulayev, the commander of the Chechen underground following Aslan Maskhadov’s death), stepped down from office, dismantled the existing structures and replaced them with the Caucasus Emirate (Imarat). He appointed himself as the emir (amir), assumed the Arabic name of Abu Usman and has been leading the Caucasian jihad since then.

<sup>22</sup> As numerous cases demonstrate, being ‘pro-Russian’ is often only a tactic for Chechen politicians. For example, referring to the current Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov as pro-Russian would be a simplification obscuring a much more complex reality (see the box on *Ramzan Kadyrov’s ambitions* for more information).

<sup>23</sup> By spring 2000 the federal forces had gained control of the entire territory of the republic (towns and transport routes), but they could not ultimately defeat the militants, and holding to their positions required the constant presence of the army and generated considerable financial costs. In this situation inviting loyal Chechen forces, with their better knowledge of the terrain and the local social relations, to take part in the military operations offered a chance to more effectively eliminate the militants.

<sup>24</sup> Formally Ramzan Kadyrov took the post of president of Chechnya in 2007, shortly after reaching his thirtieth birthday, which is legally required for this position.

<sup>25</sup> In addition, the Russian Ministry of Defence formed two spetsnaz GRU battalions made up of ethnic Chechens; the Kadyrovs had no control over these for a longer time.

## 2.2. Structures

The Caucasus Emirate is a virtual Islamic ‘state’ whose area largely overlaps with the North Caucasus Federal District. It is divided into five provinces (vilayats) whose borders generally correspond to the administrative borders of the republics): Dagestan, Nokhchiycho (Chechnya), Galgayche (Ingushetia), Kabarda-Balkaria-Karachay, and the Nogay Steppe (southern part of Stavropol Krai)<sup>26</sup>. The vilayats consist of so-called “fronts” (northern, north-western, south-eastern, etc.). The vilayats and the fronts are governed by local emirs (amirs). The Emirate uses its own geographic names, e.g. Grozny is Dzhokhar, Makhachkala is Shamilkala, Kizilyurt is Rabbanikala, etc.

Despite this centralised structure, the Emirate is in fact a federation of militant groups enjoying considerable independence, connected by a shared idea and by the fact that they all formally recognise the supremacy of Dokku Umarov, who is the only person authorised to nominate lower-level emirs. The Emirate is a kind of umbrella or trademark, attractive and recognisable enough for radicals from other parts of Russia to identify with.<sup>27</sup> The fact that the militants are dispersed, and that it is therefore difficult to co-ordinate the activities of different groups on the one hand makes it impossible for the Emirate to organise a larger-scale operation, such as an attempt at taking control of a town (like the attack on Nalchik in October 2005, during the second Chechen war), but on the other hand makes it difficult for the authorities to combat the insurgency.

The exact number of the militants is impossible to ascertain. Based on expert estimates and statements by representatives of the Russian federal and local authorities and security services, one may assume that the entire region

<sup>26</sup> Since 11 May 2009, the vilayat Galgayche also includes North Ossetia, which had previously been a separate vilayat (Iriston). The “united vilayat of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay” (KBK) spans the area of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. The decision to create ‘national’ vilayats took into account the strong ethnic identification of the militants (despite the Emirate’s assumption of unity and the equality of all Muslims), and especially the strong attachment to national traditions among the civilian population, which was expected to provide backup and support to the militant groups. In the summer of 2010, a conflict arose against this background between Umarov and militants from the group led by Khuseyn Gakayev. While not rejecting the ideal of the Emirate, Gakayev at the same time recognised the right of the Caucasus nations to self-determination (this was particularly important for young Chechens, who accounted for the majority of the militants). The conflict was resolved after several months, and Gakayev and his followers repeated their oath of loyalty to Umarov. However, a similar division in the future cannot be ruled out.

<sup>27</sup> Radicals from Tatarstan and the entire Volga Region often refer to their area as the ‘Idel-Ural vilayat’.

contains between several hundred (close to one thousand<sup>28</sup>) and several thousand militants. Some of them are stationed in bases in the mountains, and some in rented houses and flats from which they set out for their terror operations. The back-up and support, i.e. the people in charge of propaganda (including the websites), finance and broadly understood logistics, are certainly greater in number, but it is even more difficult to estimate how many of them there are. The number of people actively sympathising with the Emirate, i.e. those ready to put a militant up for a night, lend a car or warn against the police, is the most difficult to determine, especially since a sense of loyalty to fellow clan members or neighbours, which is very strong in the Caucasus, may also come into play in such cases. Researchers agree that since the beginning of Emirate's existence, the number of militants has remained stable, which means that every year between four and seven hundred new fighters have been joining the militant groups (corresponding to the number of militants the Emirate has lost annually in recent years, including those killed and those detained). The average age of the militants has been constantly coming down, and the average duration of their active service (from the time they join a militant unit until they are killed or detained) has been getting shorter: it is currently estimated at around 18 months.<sup>29</sup>

The Caucasus Emirate is financed from several sources. Since the beginning of the previous decade it has most probably relied mainly on extortion money paid by businessmen from the region and beyond, while the significance of foreign funding from the Arab states, transferred by mujahideen with contacts in al-Qaeda and other jihadi centres, has been steadily falling. The reasons for this include, firstly, the fact that the number of foreign fighters has been diminishing: with the Arab Spring, and especially the outbreak of civil war in Syria, the Caucasus ceased to be attractive for such people as a place where they could fight against the 'enemies of Islam'. Secondly, the role of the mujahideen in the Emirate has been gradually diminishing. After al-Khattab died in 2002, he was replaced by the Arab mujahideen leaders Abu al-Walid and

<sup>28</sup> The Dagestani president Ramazan Abdulatipov has estimated their number in his republic at "150-250, not more than 500" in a statement during a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, 16-19 September 2013.

<sup>29</sup> The average age of militants is currently estimated at 21-23 years (while three years ago it was at least 25 years). Typically, men join the armed units between the age of 18 and 20. See e.g.: *Екатерина Абрамова, Евкуров: За 20 лет Ингушетия сделала огромный рывок, но работы еще много*, *Mir24*, 11.03.2013. <http://mir24.tv/news/politics/6648308>; *Петр Акопов, Человек, который давал выход*, *Взгляд*, 27.08.2013. <http://vz.ru/politics/2013/8/27/647421.html>

Abu Khavs respectively, as the perceived al-Qaeda representatives in the Caucasus.<sup>30</sup> They did not make it to the top leadership of the armed underground, though while the Jordanian Muhannad, who commanded the Arab group in the years 2006-2011 fell out with Dokku Umarov, whom he had initially been closely associated with, possibly over financial issues.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3. Evolving tactics

The Emirate's principal method of operation consists in attacks on various persons or facilities. As the militant forces are considerably smaller than the government forces, the militants avoid open fighting; it does nonetheless take place occasionally. The largest clashes after 2004 took place on 13-17 February 2012 in the mountains on the administrative border between Chechnya and Dagestan; it is possible that as many as several dozen people died as a result.<sup>32</sup> Over the six years of its existence, the Emirate changed its tactics on several occasions. Its history can be divided into four periods.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> There were also Turkish nationals (Turks and Kurds) and Uyghurs from China among the mujahideen fighters. At its largest during the first months of the second Chechen war, this group could reach numbers of more than 500 mujahideen, currently there are probably several dozen of them at most.

<sup>31</sup> In the summer of 2010 Muhannad backed the break-away group within the Emirate. Since his death on 21 April 2011, the foreign mujahideen probably no longer have a separate commander.

<sup>32</sup> The Chechen Interior Ministry reported 17 casualties and 24 injured, but it was unclear if these figures referred only to its own forces or all the security forces that took part in the fighting. The same source reported that 7 militants were killed. The first skirmish took place in the region of Nozhay-Yurt in Chechnya where a unit of the Chechen Interior Ministry forces attacked and surrounded a militant group commanded by Makharbi Timiraliyev. The insurgents managed to escape from and made it to Dagestan. There, two groups of Dagestani militants joined them - at that point the insurgent forces numbered a total of around 60-100 men. They were confronted by the troops of the Russian Interior Ministry which used artillery and air attack, among other measures (the Chechen police also took part in the operation until its completion). Wojciech Górecki, Clashes at the border of Chechnya and Dagestan, *Eastweek* OSW, 22.02.2012. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2012-02-22/clashes-border-chechnya-and-dagestan>

<sup>33</sup> The division into periods is based on the dates of individual video-statements made by Dokku Umarov (dates of online publication, which are not the same as dates of recording; the changes of tactic usually became visibly effective several weeks after the publication of each statement). This approach to dividing the Emirate's history into periods stems from the assumption that the Emirate is an autonomous entity; while the media has speculated about the Emirate's links to the Russian secret services there is no evidence that the potential existence of such links (which in themselves are beyond the scope of this paper) has any influence on the tactics and the modus operandi of the armed underground.

### 2.3.1. Guerrilla war (31 October 2007 – 25 April 2009)

During the first year or so of its existence, the Emirate continued the guerrilla warfare which had previously been waged by the unrecognised Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The end of that period coincided with the formal ending of the second Chechen war – on 15 April 2009 the so-called “anti-terror operation regime” (Russian: КТО, контртеррористическая операция) was lifted in Chechnya, having been in place for nearly ten years. When the formation of the Emirate was announced, the fact that Sochi had been selected to organise the 2014 Winter Olympics was already known (the decision had been taken in July 2007).

### 2.3.2. Dramatic attacks (25 April 2009 – 2 February 2012)

In a statement of 25 April 2009 Dokku Umarov said, “If we are not allowed to kill [Russian] citizens, the so-called civilians, who provide the army and the FSB with their taxes and their silence, who support this army with their approving silence, if such people are to be regarded as civilians, then I don’t know according to what criteria this assessment is made”.<sup>34</sup> The statement was received as a call to massive attacks throughout Russia, or at least as approval for such attacks, especially given that at the same time Umarov reactivated the so-called “Riyad-us-Saliheen” brigade (Gardens of the Righteous in Arabic), i.e. a sabotage-terror group specialising in suicide attacks.<sup>35</sup> It appears that the decision to carry out attacks that would claim large numbers of casualties (especially among civilians), including outside the Caucasus, was intended to demonstrate the Emirate’s power and potential to the Russian authorities and the public in Russia and in the North Caucasus republics, and also to the global jihadi centres.

The Emirate carried out its most notorious and most tragic attacks in the years 2009–2011.<sup>36</sup> They included the attempt at assassinating the president of Ingushetia, Yunus-Bek Yevkurov (on 22 June 2009, Yevkurov survived but two

<sup>34</sup> Имарат Кавказ на пути от Йемена к Алжиру (часть 1), *Prague Watchdog*, 6.06.2009. <http://www.watchdog.cz/?show=000000-000024-000004-000004&lang=2>

<sup>35</sup> The brigade was formed back in 2001 by Shamil Basayev. After its reactivation Said Buryatsky, the Emirate’s main ideologue, became its commander (Alexandr Tikhomirov—died on 2 March 2010), followed by Emir Khamzat (Aslan Byutukayev—he accompanied Umarov in the video-statement published online on February 2011).

<sup>36</sup> The Emirate routinely claims responsibility for all attacks in the North Caucasus and other parts of Russia and in most cases it is actually responsible. However, the accident at the Sayano-Shushenskaya hydroelectric power station on 17 August 2009, in which 75 people died and for which the Emirate also claimed responsibility, was not caused by a terror attack according to the findings of the investigation. Claims of responsibility for attacks are usually not made by the Emirate as a whole, but by individual units such as the Riyad-us-Saliheen brigade or the vilayats, which further proves that the Emirate is not a centralised organisation.

people who were accompanying him died), the attack on the Nevsky Express train (27 November 2009, 28 casualties), the double attack on the Moscow underground (29 March 2010, 41 casualties), the sabotage at the Baksan hydroelectric power station in Kabardino-Balkaria (21 July 2010, 2 casualties), the attack against a local market in Vladikavkaz, North Ossetia (9 September 2010, 19 casualties), the attack on Domodedovo airport in Moscow (24 January 2011, 37 casualties), a series of attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria (18-25 February 2011, at least 6 casualties; in addition, a cable car on Elbrus was blown up in the attack). On 8 February 2010 the Russian Supreme Court ruled that the Caucasus Emirate was a terrorist organisation, and on 26 May 2011 the US Department of State issued a similar ruling.

The Emirate has demonstrated its ability to destabilise the situation in areas close to the Olympic facilities (the attacks in Kabardino-Balkaria), which means it could threaten the security of the Games.<sup>37</sup> However, while the attacks in Moscow have shown that the Caucasus terrorists are prepared to attack any target, disregarding all humanitarian considerations, they have also exposed the Emirate's limitations. They showed that the militants were able to prepare and carry out no more than one large attack in Central Russia per year, which was not enough to intimidate the Russian public. Many people in the Caucasus, even among those negatively disposed towards the Russian state, have turned against the Emirate because of the large numbers of civilian casualties claimed by its attacks. As was mentioned above, in the period in question the militants could no longer count on major support from militant centres in the Arab states irrespective of what they did, because of the situation in the Emirate itself and developments in the Middle East.

### **2.3.3. Targeted strikes (2 February 2012 – 3 July 2013)**

In his statement of 2 February 2012 Umarov ordered the militants to refrain from attacks on civilian targets, explaining that the Russian public had ceased to support the Kremlin's policy (in December 2011 Moscow and other cities witnessed massive protests against ballot rigging during the parliamentary elections). Instead, he called on the militants to deliver "precise and isolated" blows to the security forces and those in power.<sup>38</sup> This new tactic was apparently adopted mainly because the previous one had turned out to be ineffective: the

<sup>37</sup> In connection with this, some Russian experts have suggested that the Russian government would have to pay Umarov to refrain from attacks before and during the Games.

<sup>38</sup> Умаров приказал боевикам на Кавказе избегать атак на мирные цели, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 3.02.2012. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/200452/>

large strikes, especially beyond the Caucasus, not only reinforced the militants' image as terrorists, but were undoubtedly financially costly and logistically complicated (involving a higher risk of discovery), and they failed to produce the effects the Emirate expected. It is also possible that Umarov took this decision after ultimately realising that the armed underground's real and main enemy was not the federal authorities so much as the secular regimes in power in the individual republics of the region. It is also worth noting that the last attack with civilian casualties that was carried out beyond the Caucasus took place on 24 January 2011, i.e. more than a year before the 'moratorium' was announced.<sup>39</sup>

In the period in question the Emirate limited its activities to the area of the North Caucasus, focusing on the fight against the local security forces (and in this way, the conflict ultimately morphed into a local civil war).<sup>40</sup> The victims of the attacks were mainly officers of the Interior Ministry, the FSB and other *siloviki*, as well as public officials of various levels (including judges and prosecutors), Muslim clerics loyal to the authorities, and journalists whom the armed underground deemed harmful or dangerous.<sup>41</sup> Among the civilian casualties, a relatively large group is comprised of people dealing with broadly understood magic (fortune-tellers, healers), while the remaining ones were usually bystanders.<sup>42</sup> The most frequently attacked facilities included police stations and headquarters, military barracks, local offices, and shops and restaurants selling alcohol.<sup>43</sup> These were targeted for 'educational' purposes according to statements published on the Emirate's websites (the same justification was given for the 'elimination' of the centres of magical practice as not conforming with Islam). In the mountain areas, regular armed clashes were taking place at the same time.

<sup>39</sup> The Riyad-us-Saliheen brigade has also claimed responsibility for the shooting of Colonel Yuri Budanov in Moscow on 10 June 2011. Budanov kidnapped and killed an eighteen-year old girl during the second Chechen war.

<sup>40</sup> The Emirate has firmly distanced itself from the Tsarnayev brothers who were behind the attack on the Boston marathon on 15 April 2013 – it stated it is not at war with the United States.

<sup>41</sup> Unlike in the case of the *siloviki*, in attacks against officials, clerics and journalists the victims were usually specific people identified by the armed underground, rather than random representatives of a target group.

<sup>42</sup> The largest numbers of casualties died in so-called "double attacks" whereby a second explosive device would be set off some time after the first one, when the police and other services and, often, the first onlookers had arrived at the scene. The attack on 19 August 2012 in the Malgobek region of Ingushetia where a suicide bomber blew himself up at the funeral of a policeman killed the day before, was a special case of this tactic. Apart from the bomber, seven people died, most of them police officers.

<sup>43</sup> Usually those which refuse to pay extortion money to the Emirate; in most cases the attacks were preceded by warnings (with the exception of Chechnya, alcohol is widely available in the region).

The new tactic helped to mitigate the aversion to the Emirate among the local populations and increased the attractiveness of the model of Islam promoted by the militants.

#### **2.3.4. “The end justifies the means”? (3 July 2013 – )**

In a statement published on 3 July 2013 Dokku Umarov recalled the ‘moratorium’ on attacks in Russia ‘proper’, explaining that that gesture had been perceived by Moscow as a sign of weakness. He also called on the militants to use all means available to disrupt the Games in Sochi.<sup>44</sup> At the same time he emphasised that the war waged by the Emirate was part of global jihad (which was probably intended to serve as a reminder or call on foreign centres to support the Caucasus militants), and said that in addition to the North Caucasus, jihadists in Russia were also active in the republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan in the Volga region.

At the time of writing (December 2013), this new change in the Emirate’s tactics has not been put into practice, except through a slight increase in the percentage of civilians in the total number of casualties (while the total number of casualties has decreased). The Emirate is still fighting the broadly understood ‘authorities’ in an area limited to the North Caucasus, targeting mainly the *siloviki*. The most notorious operation in the period in question consisted in the assassination of Ingushetia’s Security Council chief Ahmed Kotiyev on the road between Malgobek and Nazran on 27 August 2013, in which Kotiyev’s driver also died. In another attack on 16 September, a suicide bomber blew himself up in front of the police headquarters in Sernovodsk in Chechnya, killing four police officers.

Against this background, the attack on a city bus in Volgograd on 21 October 2013 looks to be more the exception than a new rule.<sup>45</sup> It cannot be ruled out that an Emirate cell was behind the bombing although the Emirate has not claimed responsibility. According to the Russian authorities, the attack was carried out by Naida Asiyalova, a thirty-one-year-old female suicide bomber from Dagestan, but it is highly unlikely that a single attack three-and-a-half months before the Games, carried out in a town around 800 kilometres away

<sup>44</sup> Умаров призвал вооруженное подполье к срыву Олимпиады в Сочи, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 3.07.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/226558/>

The militant leader has called the Games ‘satanic’ as they are being organised “on the bones of our ancestors”. See the Conclusions for an assessment of the likelihood of attacks on Olympic targets.

<sup>45</sup> Wojciech Górecki, Attack on a bus in Volgograd, *Eastweek OSW*, 23.10.2013. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-10-23/attack-a-bus-volgograd>



from Sochi could destabilise Russia in the slightest degree or discourage Olympians and sports fans from travelling to Sochi. However, the situation could change if several more attacks of a similar nature were to be carried out in towns closer to the Olympic facilities.

Regardless of the fact that no attacks have taken place yet in Sochi or in the entire Krasnodar Krai, the Emirate's terror activities continue to pose the greatest threat to the security of the Games and the stability of the region in general.

### 3. Federal and local security forces

The operations against the Emirate are conducted mainly by the Internal Troops of Russia, including units controlled by the federal Interior Ministry as well as those subordinated to the Interior Ministries of the individual North Caucasus republics. The FSB is also involved, again with units controlled by the FSB Headquarters in Moscow and units operating under the local FSB delegations. This complicated system of subordination relations and existing conflicts of interest (officers of the local Interior Ministries are usually members of the local titular nations, with some exceptions at the highest level of ministry leadership) has been undermining the effectiveness of this structure.<sup>46</sup> The numbers of soldiers from the Internal Troops involved in the region have been growing constantly. In late 2009 and early 2010, 23,000 soldiers served in the region,<sup>47</sup> while in late 2012 “nearly half of the total number of 182,000” of Russia's Internal Troops<sup>48</sup> were engaged in the region, including around 10,000 in the *spetsnaz*.<sup>49</sup> Units of the FSB border troops in the North Caucasus district numbered 165,000 in 2012 (including 19,400 civilian workers), grouped into 17 detachments.<sup>50</sup>

Units of the Russian Ministry of Defence (which has no representation on the republican level) have not been regularly involved in operations against the militants since 2002 (they would occasionally get involved as late on as 2006; in addition, the army would lend heavy equipment such as tanks to the Interior

<sup>46</sup> Wojciech Górecki, ‘Creeping’ civil war..., *op. cit.*

<sup>47</sup> Out of 78,000, which was the total number of all soldiers from the Internal Troops in Russia at that time. Владимир Мухин, *Бессилие антитеррора, Независимая Газета*, 31.03.2010. [http://www.ng.ru/politics/2010-03-31/1\\_antiterror.html](http://www.ng.ru/politics/2010-03-31/1_antiterror.html)

<sup>48</sup> A year earlier, the Russian Internal Troops had 170,000 soldiers. Анатолий Цыганок, *Безопасность на Большом Кавказе, Icisecurity.ru*, 10.12.2012. [http://www.icisecurity.ru/references/aktual\\_publications/kavkaz\\_bezopastost\\_12/](http://www.icisecurity.ru/references/aktual_publications/kavkaz_bezopastost_12/)

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

Ministry for the purposes of single operations, mainly in Dagestan). In the spring of 2012 the media reported that large numbers of troops had been moved from Chechnya to Dagestan. Those units, however, like other units of the army deployed in the North Caucasus, were not used in operations against the militants but remained in the locations where they were stationed. It was only in the spring of 2012, after a six-year respite, that army units became involved on a limited scale in local anti-terror operations, following a decision from the National Anti-terror Committee (NAK).<sup>51</sup> The total presence of Russian Ministry of Defence troops in the region is estimated at 110,000 soldiers.<sup>52</sup> At this stage the Ministry of Defence units cannot be regarded as a party of the Caucasus conflict (unlike the Interior Ministry forces). This situation could change in the future, though.

The *siloviki* have been combatting the armed underground by carrying out “anti-terror operations” which can take different forms depending on the location (the ‘liquidation’ of militants in residential buildings in city districts, blockades of entire villages and systematic searches for people in hiding or arms depots in the case of mountain settlements, or attacks on Emirate hideaways in difficult-to-access forest ranges). The term ‘operation’ usually refers to the military action itself as well as the legal status which grants the *siloviki* involved additional powers, e.g. to freely enter private apartments. The “anti-terror operation regime” applies to a precisely defined area from the time it is announced by the FSB until it is lifted; usually it takes between several hours to several days.

#### 4. Consequences for the region

In recent years the average number of people killed in the Caucasus war has remained stable at a level of 700–750 people a year, while the number of those injured has been falling.<sup>53</sup> Dagestan accounts for more than half of all the cas-

<sup>51</sup> They turned out to be poorly prepared for fighting in the mountains and suffered losses in those operations. Источник: подразделения Минобороны спустя 6 лет привлекли к боевым действиям в Чечне, уже 4 жертвы, *Gazeta.ru*, 8.10.2012. [http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2012/10/08/n\\_2561873.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/social/news/2012/10/08/n_2561873.shtml)

<sup>52</sup> Анатолий Цыганок, *Безопасность...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>53</sup> Statistics quoted here and below on the numbers of casualties in the North Caucasus conflict come from the *Kavkaz-uzel.ru* website run by the Memorial association, which is the most authoritative source in this regard. In 2010, 754 people were killed and 956 wounded. In 2011, 750 were killed and 628 wounded. In 2012, 700 killed and 525 wounded. Between January and September 2013, 373 were killed and 345 wounded.

ualties, while Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia and Chechnya exchange the top places following Dagestan (with Ingushetia reporting the largest ratio of casualties to total population), followed by North Ossetia, Stavropol Krai and Karachay-Cherkessia (see Appendices 1 and 3). On 8 October 2013 Aleksandr Bortnikov, the NAK chairman and director of the FSB, said that 144 cases of terrorism had been reported in Russia, of which 120 took place in Dagestan.<sup>54</sup> According to the International Crisis Group, the Caucasus armed conflict is the most deadly and brutal in Europe.<sup>55</sup>

With the change in tactic by the Emirate – i.e. the decision not to attack civilian targets – the nature of the civil war changed noticeably; before early 2012 it was possible to speak (bearing in mind that such terms are naturally a matter of convention) of a ‘total’ war affecting the entire population of the North Caucasus, albeit in varying degrees, while after that point the conflict became an ‘isolated’ war limited in practice to the militants and the *siloviki*. This has also been reflected in the statistics, which show a considerable fall in the number of civilian casualties, from 180 killed and 489 injured in 2010 (accounting for more than 39% of total casualties) to 89 killed and 127 injured in 2012 (less than 18% of total casualties). The numbers of killed and injured *siloviki* have remained relatively stable (in 2012, 211 were killed and 389 injured, accounting for nearly 49% of total casualties), while the number of militant casualties has been increasing slightly (409 killed in 2012, accounting for 33% of total casualties, and 14 detained)<sup>56</sup>, see also Appendix 2.

As the nature of the conflict changed, it has become much less of a burden for civilians. The frequency of various checks has decreased and they have become

<sup>54</sup> ФСБ: в 2013 году в РФ зафиксировано 144 террористических проявления, из них 120 – в Дагестане, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 8.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231311/> Another high-ranking representative of the NAK, Evgeny Ilin, said in October 2013 that more than 98% of all terrorist crimes were committed in the North Caucasus federal district. На СКФО приходится 98% терактов в России – NAK, *Ekhokavkaza*, 14.10.2013. <http://www.ekhokavkaza.org/articleprintview/25136341.html>

<sup>55</sup> The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (III), Governance, Elections, Rule of Law. *Europe Report*, No.226, September 2013. <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/north-caucasus/226-north-caucasus-the-challenges-of-integration-iii-governance-elections-rule-of-law.aspx>.

<sup>56</sup> Figures of *Kavkaz-uzel.ru*. No data is available on the number of injured militants, some of them were probably detained, and others evacuated by fellow militants and not included in the statistics. It should be remembered that casualties are classified as militants under communiqués of the security forces, in some cases confirmed by the Emirate. However, in some known cases it was claimed that a killed person was a member of the armed underground while in reality he was a passer-by who died as a result of a terror operation.

much less inconvenient (including checks at the borders of the republics, where currently a great majority of vehicles pass without being stopped, while earlier nearly all cars would be checked). With the exception of Dagestan, the imposition of the anti-terror operation regime in cities is only exceptionally still accompanied by street blockades using heavy equipment, and an atmosphere of fear and tension can be sensed less and less frequently in the region.

As mentioned above, it is very difficult to assess the level of support for the armed underground among the public in the Caucasus republics, even approximately. The aversion to the corrupt bureaucracy, widespread in the region, and the progressing de-Russification and de-modernisation of the North Caucasus could add credibility to the assumption that the militants enjoy the sympathy, or at least understanding, of sections of the Caucasus populations.<sup>57</sup> Until recently, the militants also benefited from the activities of the police, which massively breached the rights of Muslims by persecuting believers, e.g. bearded men, with arrests, beatings, or very brutal interrogations – after such experiences the victims would often join the radicals.<sup>58</sup> The current situation is still worrying,<sup>59</sup> but some improvement has been reported, mainly due the fact that ever fewer police officers have their origins beyond the North Caucasus (deployed in the region on official missions), and local police officers have to take note of public opinion at least to a minimum degree (out of consideration for the security of their families), and moreover, they are themselves practicing Muslims. In addition, as the wages in the police have increased, service has become more prestigious. In April 2012, a higher-ranking police officer in Kabardino-Balkaria could earn as much as 50,000 roubles monthly (around US\$ 1,500), i.e. three times the average salary in the republic, while a lower-rank police functionary earned 30,000 roubles (around US\$ 900). Those developments have been conducive to a polarisation of opinions and positions on the armed conflict.

<sup>57</sup> Those processes will be discussed in the chapter on cultural changes.

<sup>58</sup> Wojciech Górecki, 'Creeping' civil war..., *op. cit.*

<sup>59</sup> See the report of the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture, drafted on the basis of information collected during a study visit to Dagestan, Chechnya and North Ossetia in 2011, published in Strasbourg on 24 January 2013. <http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/rus/2013-01-inf-eng.htm>

According to an independent trade union of the police and prosecution authorities in Dagestan, it is necessary to pay a bribe of 3-500,000 roubles (around US\$ 9,200-15,400) to get a job as a low-ranking police functionary, the post of a higher-ranking officer costs around one million roubles (around US\$ 30,700), while the post of a minister – around 7 to 8 million dollars. Those paying such bribes expect to recoup the money within a short time span. Светлана Болотникова, Сколько стоит пост главы дагестанского МВД?, *Bigcaucasus.com*, 4.03.2013. [http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/04-03-2013/82650-mvd\\_dagestan-o/](http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/04-03-2013/82650-mvd_dagestan-o/)

### III. SITUATION IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS SUBJECTS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION

The North Caucasus republics and, to a lesser extent, the two *krais* and the Rostov Oblast, are governed by mafia-clan groups more or less disconnected from the societies. Corruption is a major problem everywhere and, according to some researchers, it will be a greater obstacle to the region's development in the longer term than terrorism and extremism, and is certainly more of a problem than ethnic tensions, which currently seldom lead to serious conflicts.<sup>60</sup> Even leaders regarded as honest and not corrupt, such as Yunus-bek Yevkurov of Ingushetia, are not able to effectively combat corruption in their countries, which they themselves admit.<sup>61</sup>

The republics all share a similar, very difficult economic and social situation. They occupy the lowest positions in rankings of the Russian Federation's subjects in terms of investment<sup>62</sup> or GDP per capita, and average monthly salaries per person can be as much as fifty per cent lower than the Russian average (with prices only 10-15% lower).<sup>63</sup> Unemployment rates are high, with the highest in Ingushetia at 47.68% and in Chechnya at 29.81% (the average in the remaining North Caucasus republics ranges between 8% and 12%, compared to the Russian average of 5.46%).<sup>64</sup> Overpopulation (due to high birth rates) and the scarcity of land are causing mass migration to other parts of Russia (especially to the big cities)<sup>65</sup> and abroad. According to the findings of a research project by the Levada Centre, the armed conflict is not the greatest cause of concern for people in the region – it is instead unemployment and poverty.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>60</sup> OSW interview with a Chechen political scientist, June 2013.

<sup>61</sup> Екатерина Абрамова, Евкуров: За 20 лет Ингушетия сделала огромный рывок, но работы еще много, *Mir24*, 11.03.2013. <http://mir24.tv/news/politics/6648308>

<sup>62</sup> According to Rosstat (Федеральная служба государственной статистики, the Federal Statistical Service), during the first quarter of 2013, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia did not receive a single dollar of foreign investment. [http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat\\_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc\\_1140086420641](http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1140086420641)

<sup>63</sup> Rosstat figures for the 1<sup>st</sup> half of 2013. *Ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Official figures for 2012: <http://xn---8sbcbbscql7bjipi7acoeweh.xn--p1ai/> Unofficial unemployment estimates are even higher, at around 60% for Ingushetia, around 40-50% for Chechnya and around 20% for the remaining republics.

<sup>65</sup> Which, in turn, generates conflict situations. This issue, as well as other aspects of the relations between the North Caucasus and the federal centre, will be discussed in the chapter on Moscow's strategies towards the region.

<sup>66</sup> Социологи: жители Северного Кавказа опасаются безработицы и последствий

However, remittances sent by the migrants to their families in the region, as well as revenues from the grey economy (putting to one side the above mentioned corruption) mitigate this difficult situation to a considerable degree.<sup>67</sup>

In 2013 the parliaments of Ingushetia and Dagestan decided that the heads of those Federation subjects would not be elected in general elections (while general elections of governors were restored in Russia after eight years during which leaders of Federation subjects were nominated,<sup>68</sup> with individual subjects of the Federation being offered an opt-out). On 8 September 2013, i.e. the day of local elections in Russia, the Ingush parliamentarians elected Yunusbek Yevkurov for a second term as the leader of Ingushetia, and the members of the Dagestani parliament elected Ramazan Abdulatipov, who had been the country's acting president since January 2013, as the president of the republic. The terms of the remaining North Caucasus leaders expire in the years 2015–2017, but the parliament of North Ossetia has already decided that there will be no general election in that republic, either (the term of the current leader of the republic, Taymuraz Mamsurov, ends in 2015<sup>69</sup>). The decisions not to hold general elections are clearly designed to protect the interests of the local political elites, concerned about potentially losing power in the event of a victory of someone from outside their circle (no Federation subjects outside the North Caucasus have chosen to use the opt-out yet).

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Since the beginning of this decade, **Dagestan** has been the most unstable republic in the region, accounting for more than half of the total number of people killed in the armed conflict. Moreover, this proportion has been growing:

социального расслоения больше, чем терроризма, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 28.01.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/219264/>

<sup>67</sup> Compared to cities in central Russia, cities in the region are more neglected – this refers in particular to infrastructure and public facilities, while private houses do not differ in terms of the quality and standard of furnishings from those in Russia, even in Moscow. Iwona Kaliszewska notes that “if we take a closer look at their everyday life, the statistics seem difficult to believe” (Everyday life in North Caucasus, [http://www.udsc.gov.pl/files/WIKP/info\\_pdf/Binder1\\_Kaukaz\\_ang.pdf](http://www.udsc.gov.pl/files/WIKP/info_pdf/Binder1_Kaukaz_ang.pdf)).

<sup>68</sup> The leaders of the Russian republics are called heads (глава in Russian). Only the leaders of Dagestan, Tatarstan and Bashkortostan have still retained the title of ‘presidents’, which was used commonly before the end of the last decade, but in future is going to be reserved only for the president of the Russian Federation. The leaders or *krais* and *oblasts* are called governors.

<sup>69</sup> Парламент Северной Осетии принял поправки об отмене прямых выборов главы региона, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 28.11.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/234254/>

in 2010, 378 people died there, out of a total of 754 killed in the entire region; in 2011 the figure was 413 (out of 750), in 2012 it was 405 (out of 700), and in the first seven months of 2013 it was 176 (out of 287).

In the first half of 2013, the average salary in Dagestan was 16,676 roubles a month (around US\$ 510), compared to the Russian average of 23,076 roubles (around US\$ 710). The population growth rate was 11.9% (17.5 births and 5.6 deaths per one thousand inhabitants), compared to the Russian average of -0.8%.<sup>70</sup> The unemployment rate in 2012 fell to 11.7% (before 2007 it had never been lower than 20%, in 2010 it decreased to 14.8% and in 2011 to 12.7%).<sup>71</sup> In 2011 the republic ranked 80<sup>th</sup> in Russia (out of the 83 subjects of the Federation) in terms of the number of cars per one thousand inhabitants and equal 81<sup>st</sup> place (in fact, last place with two other subjects) in terms of the number of computers per one hundred workers.<sup>72</sup>

Ethnically, the republic is highly diversified – it is populated by several dozens of nations and smaller ethnic groups, and fourteen languages are recognised as official. Apart from the armed Islamic underground, several criminal-business clans are operating there and are brutally jostling for supremacy. Other actors include the relatively weak republic government as well as national movement elites and groups centred on the major religious leaders. On the one hand this multiplicity of actors constantly generates conflicts over various issues, but on the other, paradoxically, it helps preserve the republic's integrity, since no single actor is strong enough to dominate the others, and a dynamic balance prevails among them.<sup>73</sup> As a peculiar 'side effect' of this fragmentation,

<sup>70</sup> These figures and data in the following sections on the other Federation subjects are quoted after Rosstat, *op. cit.*

<sup>71</sup> These and other unemployment figures quoted after <http://xn----8sbcbbscql7bjipi7acoe-weh.xn--p1ai/>

<sup>72</sup> Figures on this subject taken from: [http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12\\_14p/IssWWW.exe/Stg/do1/01-04.htm](http://www.gks.ru/bgd/regl/b12_14p/IssWWW.exe/Stg/do1/01-04.htm)

<sup>73</sup> In 1994, a State Council was formed in Dagestan; it was a college of fourteen members, which constituted a collective 'presidency' established in order to ensure stability for the republic in a situation of a weakening federal government following the break-up of the USSR. National constituencies were also created, which could nominate candidates of only one nationality – this was intended to ensure parity in the parliament while not precluding real election struggle (several candidates would be nominated from each constituency) and not discriminating against anyone (persons of different nationalities had their own constituencies). When Vladimir Putin came to power, the national constituencies were abolished, which led to many complications for the republic (it became necessary to make very detailed arrangements and tediously compile election lists in order to ensure ethnic parity in the parliament), and in 2006 Moscow nominated the first president of Dagestan. As a result

Dagestan also has a free press – a journalist who covers a subject inconvenient for one group will find protectors in another. In this, Dagestan is exceptional not only in the region, but also in Russia as a whole. The forecast of a break-up of the republic and a ‘war of all against all’, which experts have been reiterating since at least the mid-1990s, have failed to materialise, although instability has been growing over the last several years.

One of the axes of the internal Dagestani conflict concerns the rivalry between those professing traditional Islam (in Dagestan, as in Chechnya, this current of Islam comprises mainly Sufi brotherhoods), and the adherents of Salafism, who are sufficiently strong in the republic for the authorities to be obliged to tolerate them.<sup>74</sup> The Salafis control a number of mosques and some sectors of trade. The situation in the republic worsened in late August 2012, when Sheikh Said Afandi (Atsayev), the most influential leader of traditionalist Muslims, was assassinated. Afandi, who exerted a major influence on political life, as many ministers, parliamentarians and members of the official religious authorities had been his disciples, advocated dialogue with the Salafis, which was contested by some of the traditionalists,<sup>75</sup> and by the most radical Salafis behind the armed Islamic underground. His assassination appears to have been intended to incite the disruption of this dialogue; dialogue nonetheless continued in the following months as the traditionalists refrained from retaliatory actions and the Salafis distanced themselves from the attack.<sup>76</sup> The Salafis are already more numerous than the traditionalists, and are usually more deeply religious. Many experts share the opinion that their superiority will be growing, and would be growing even faster if not for the support offered by the state structures to their ideological rivals.

of those changes, the local government lost authority and became increasingly alienated. (Statement by a Russian sociologist, November 2012).

<sup>74</sup> The Salafis became stronger in many places, especially in the mountains, as early as the 1990s (the villages of Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi and Kadar even proclaimed themselves an “independent Islamic territory” and lived according to sharia). Currently it is usually forbidden to, for instance, sell alcohol in the mountain villages (by decision of a majority of inhabitants). Dagestan is the only place in Russia where a second generation of Salafis has already reached adulthood.

<sup>75</sup> Members of the central religious authorities have questioned the point of such dialogue (statements by members of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of European Russia in a meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, 16–19 September 2013), but in Dagestan, the secular and religious authorities (the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan) believe it to be necessary.

<sup>76</sup> The weakness of the Dagestani government is visible in the fact that the then president of Dagestan called on people to create self-defence militias in the entire Dagestan when the country faced the threat of riots in the wake of the assassination of Said Afandi (the last time such militias had been created was in 1999, on the eve of the Second Chechen War).



In **Chechnya**, the number of victims of the armed conflict has been decreasing systematically since 2010 (having risen at the turn of the decade, in the final phase of the Second Chechen War and immediately after its end). In 2010, 127 died and 123 were injured, in 2011, 95 died and 106 were injured, and in 2012, 82 died and 92 were injured. During the first seven months of 2013, 30 people were killed and 46 were injured.

In the first half of 2013, the average monthly salary amounted to 15,096 roubles (around US\$ 460), and the population growth rate was as high as 19% (24.1 births and 5.1 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The current unemployment rate of nearly 30% is the lowest since 2006, when unemployment statistics first started to be compiled for the republic (the official unemployment rate in that year was 67.7%; it had fallen to 43.3% by 2010 and to 37.3% in 2011). In terms of the number of cars per one thousand inhabitants, Chechnya was in last-but-one position in Russia in 2011 (ahead of the Chukotka Autonomous District).

Unlike Dagestan, Chechnya is a mono-ethnic republic – the Chechens account for more than 95% of the population (compared to 66% in 1989). Traditional Islam is the dominant religion, while Salafism is banned. The policies of the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov are conducive to the strengthening of the position of religion – Kadyrov has been introducing elements of sharia into the local legislation, which has led to questions about the compliance of such rules with the constitution of the Russian Federation.<sup>77</sup> In practice, three legal systems operate in the republic: Russian law based on Roman law, sharia law, and customary law (the *adats*). They refer to different spheres of life (public, family, relations among neighbours, etc.), and where they overlap, the choice of the legal system to be applied depends on the context and the specificity of the given social group.<sup>78</sup> In mid-2013, a concept of the Chechen national ideology was developed on Kadyrov's request. It is based on a dynamic balance among three elements, none of which should dominate: 1) Chechnya as part of Russia, 2) Chechnya as the country of the Chechens, and 3) Chechnya as an Islamic republic.<sup>79</sup>

<sup>77</sup> According to a Chechen political scientist, Chechnya makes the most of the legal options offered by the federative system of Russia, but it does not exceed its limitations (OSW interview with a Chechen political scientist..., *op. cit.*). For more information, see the box on the ambitions of Ramzan Kadyrov.

<sup>78</sup> Iwona Kaliszewska, *Everyday life...*, *op. cit.*

<sup>79</sup> OSW interview with a Chechen political scientist..., *op. cit.* The researcher explained that in

Chechnya is relatively stable, especially compared to the neighbouring republics of Dagestan and Ingushetia, and its government have also managed to considerably reduce common crime. However, this has been achieved at the expense of eliminating the opposition, and of repressions against a number of groups, including human rights activists and the families of militants.<sup>80</sup> Ramzan Kadyrov's autocratic rule, in turn, has been made possible due to the changes that transformed Chechen society as a result of the two wars. First of all, the role of clans diminished – their leaders no longer enjoy such great authority since the former commanders took over spiritual leadership after the first war and, at present, it is Kadyrov himself who has concentrated all the instruments of power including money, support of the clergy and good relations with Moscow, in his hands. In this situation the clans are no longer able to fulfil their basic function (self-defence and comprehensive protection of the clan members), which opens the way to the formation of a modern nation. Those dissatisfied with the current economic and social situation, i.e. the unemployment, low salaries, lack of prospects, and also with the political situation) leave for Russia or abroad. Emigration intensified in 2013 – during the first six months nearly 10,000 Russian citizens, a decisive majority of them Chechens, claimed asylum in Germany alone (which is 86.5% more than in the corresponding period of 2012).<sup>81</sup>

### **Ramzan Kadyrov's ambitions**

In the medium term, and especially the long term, the ambitions of the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov may pose no less a threat to the stability of the region and the territorial integrity of Russia than the activities of the Caucasus Emirate. Due to his effective and uncompromising policy, Kadyrov has managed to gain much greater power than the separatist presidents Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov enjoyed and, paradoxically, has become much more independent of Moscow than they were. Having established full control of Chechnya, Kadyrov now seeks to gain control of

the USSR, the first element was dominant, i.e. the Kremlin decided on everything. Dzhokhar Dudayev emphasised the second element, i.e. the national and ethnic element while underestimating Islam and seeking to break all ties with Russia. This ethnic separatism led to the outbreak of the First Chechen War according to the researcher. Under Aslan Maskhadov's rule, the third element, i.e. Islam, dominated the entirety of public life in Chechnya, which contributed to the outbreak of the Second Chechen War. Ramzan Kadyrov has been implementing this ideology in practice for some time already.

<sup>80</sup> For more information, see: Ramzan Kadyrov's ambitions.

<sup>81</sup> В Германии зафиксирован массовый приток беженцев-чеченцев из России, *Newsru.com*, 17.07.2013. [http://newsru.com/world/17jul2013/cheger\\_print.html](http://newsru.com/world/17jul2013/cheger_print.html). The discussion on the causes of the rapid increase in the number of asylum applications is beyond the scope of this paper.

Ingushetia and at least a part of Dagestan, and ultimately, perhaps, even the entire North-East Caucasus.

Kadyrov has been able to reach his current position due to the policy of *Chechenisation*.<sup>82</sup> Initially, his independence was limited by influential groups in Chechnya, which also advocated co-operation with Moscow. Over time, though, he managed to subordinate or eliminate them. The breakthrough came with the disbanding, in November 2008, of two Spetsnaz GRU battalions (“West” and “East”), which had been part of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Motor Rifle Division of the Russian Armed Forces.<sup>83</sup> The two units, manned by ethnic Chechens, had been created five years earlier and their commanders, Said-Magomed Kakiyev and Sulim Yamadayev, had good links in the Russian Ministry of Defence (while Kadyrov at that time was believed to be a *protégé* of the Interior Ministry and the FSB). The two battalions were disbanded as a result of actions taken by Kadyrov, who accused their commanders and soldiers of a number of offences, and even sent an arrest warrant for Yamadayev.<sup>84</sup> By 2011, Kadyrov had no major opponents left in the republic (many people had left Chechnya), and it became impossible to openly or publicly criticise him or the security forces and the administration of justice. According to human rights activists, the republic has witnessed and is still witnessing cases of people being intimidated or terrorised using such methods as extrajudicial killings, hostage taking, kidnapping, torture, or detention in private prisons.<sup>85</sup> Organisations and persons whose mission

<sup>82</sup> *Chechenisation* is discussed in more detail in the section on the origins of the Caucasus Emirate.

<sup>83</sup> Rozformowanie batalionów „Wschód” i „Zachód” w Czeczenii, *Tydzień na Wschodzie*, OSW, 19.11.2008.

<sup>84</sup> Originating from the town of Gudermes, the Yamadayev family was the main force opposing Kadyrov in Chechnya in the second half of the 2000s (apart from the militants). It ceased to play a significant role following the assassinations of its two most prominent members, i.e. Ruslan, a former deputy to the Russian State Duma (killed on 24 September 2008 in Moscow) and his brother, Sulim (killed on 28 March 2009 in Dubai). The third brother, Isa, blamed the Chechen leader for their deaths, as well as for failed assassination attempts directed at himself, but then backed down on the accusations and on 23 August 2010 became reconciled with Kadyrov – this was an indication that the latter had in practice established a monopoly on the system of power in Chechnya (the fourth Yamadayev brother, Dzhabraïl, had died back in 2003, and the fifth and the sixth, i.e. Badrudin and Musa, are alive, but they do not take an active part in public life). Kadyrov’s possible involvement in the assassinations of the Yamadayevs, and of six other prominent opponents who died in attacks in Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and in the West in late 2008 and early 2009, has not been proven.

<sup>85</sup> See e.g. Российские правозащитники получили международный приз за работу в Чечне, *Lenta.ru*, 9.10.2013. <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/10/09/watchdog/>

is to document such cases are unable carry out their work<sup>86</sup> – Natalya Estemirova, an activist from the Memorial association was kidnapped and murdered on 15 July 2009 and has become a symbol of the victims.

Kadyrov's authoritarian rule rests on the armed formations he controls, especially the "North" and "South" battalions, which are formally part of the 46<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the Internal Troops of the Russian Interior Ministry,<sup>87</sup> and the units of the guard of the Head of Republic, known as *Kadyrovtsy*). The Chechen leader has been legitimising his power by representing himself as a Chechen patriot and a pious Muslim, and highlighting such notions as national pride, loyalty to the faith of the ancestors, or the sacredness and inviolability of the family.<sup>88</sup> An important element in the formation of this new Chechen identity (which it was possible to start building due to the weakening of the role of clans mentioned above) concerns the cult of Akhmad Kadyrov as the founding father of the new republic, which resembles the cult of Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan, albeit on a smaller scale. Portraits of Akhmad Kadyrov, who was both a politician and a Muslim clergyman, are displayed on entrance gates to towns and villages, next to portraits of Putin and, less frequently, of Ramzan Kadyrov himself. The "North" battalion, the Akhmad Arena stadium in Grozny and the "Heart of Chechnya" mosque in Grozny are among the facilities in Chechnya that bear the name of Akhmad Kadyrov, and the Chechen capital hosts an Akhmad Kadyrov Museum. The researcher Sergei Markedonov has referred to the programme being implemented by Ramzan Kadyrov as "new nationalism".<sup>89</sup>

<sup>86</sup> This has been mentioned for instance in the most recent annual report of Human Rights Watch (World Report 2013): <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2013/country-chapters/russia?page=2>

<sup>87</sup> Since 2010, new soldiers for battalions come from the draft – Chechen recruits have not served in military units outside Chechnya since 1992. Власти Чечни приняли решение о проведении осеннего призыва с 1 октября, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 29.09.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/230805/>

<sup>88</sup> In doing this, Kadyrov does not refer back to the legacy of Imam Shamil (an Avar by nationality), as the Caucasus Emirate does. Instead, he invokes the legacy of Kunta Haji, a Chechen Sufi sheikh who advocated resisting tsarist Russia using peaceful methods. It is notable that Kadyrov's catalogue of values resembles the informal "conservative-Orthodox project" which has been undergoing implementation in Russia since the beginning of Vladimir Putin's third term (see the Russian president's address to the Valdai Discussion Club on 19 September 2013: <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/19243>).

<sup>89</sup> Sergey Markedonov, A Patchwork Puzzle, *The American Interest*, 13.05.2013. <http://www.the-american-interest.com/article.cfm?piece=1425>

Kadyrov has introduced some elements of the sharia to the Chechen legislation and legal practice, including restrictions on the sale of alcohol (which can be bought legally only between 8.00 and 10.00 a.m. in a few, selected stores) and the obligation for female officials, television anchors and students to wear headscarves. There are two religious academies in Chechnya, including the Kunta Haji Russian Islamic University in Grozny and the Akhmad Kadyrov Islamic Institute in Kurchaloy), 20 madrasas (high schools), as well as four hafiz schools, i.e. schools for Quran reciters (in October 2013 the construction of a fifth was launched).<sup>90</sup> There are 700 working mosques in Chechnya. Built in 2008, the “Heart of Chechnya” mosque mentioned above is the largest in Russia—it can accommodate 10,000 worshippers, and its minarets are 62 metres high. In 2013 Kadyrov put forward the mosque for a nation-wide competition of natural or architectural symbols of Russia. By mobilising people in Chechnya and possibly also the neighbouring republics (the voting was performed via e-mail or text message) the mosque was in the top position for a long time and ultimately made it to the top ten.<sup>91</sup>

Due to activity of this type, the Chechen leader enjoys genuine popularity among sections of the Chechen public despite his heavy-handed rule (according to Alexei Malashenko, Kadyrov has a stable level of support of around 50% of Chechens<sup>92</sup>). He can certainly be credited for having rebuilt the capital and the entire republic – today it is difficult to find any traces of

<sup>90</sup> В Чечне начато строительство пятой школы хафизов, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 8.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231283/>

<sup>91</sup> The official website of the competition is: <http://10russia.ru/>  
Chechen officials were tasked with sending e-mails and text messages for a specified number of hours daily. When the mosque fell into the second position in the final phase of the competition's second round, Kadyrov accused the telecom operators of fraud (alleging they had been blocking text messages coming from the Caucasus), said he would withdraw the “Heart of Chechnya” from the competition, and threatened to refer the case to the prosecution authorities (Илья Попов, Россия 10 лишилась „Сердца Чечни”, *Московский Комсомолец*, 31.08.2013). The competition organisers caved in and the mosque finally finished in equal first place with the winning Kolomna Kremlin. The case may have had a business background: after the jury's first decision, the stores of the all-Russian telecom operators were demolished in Chechnya and Kadyrov announced that he would not pick up calls from their subscribers, to the benefit of the local provider, Vainakh Telecom.

<sup>92</sup> OSW interview with Professor Alexei Malashenko, June 2011. It should be expected that when the generation which does not remembers the war, i.e. those born after 2007, reaches adulthood, the rate of acceptance of heavy-handed rule will start to decline noticeably (OSW interview with a Chechen political scientist..., *op. cit.*; Муса Мусаев, От вайнахской стабилизации к дагестанской неопределенности, *Kavpolit.com*, 6.08.2013. <http://kavpolit.com/ot-vajnaхskoj-stabilizacii-k-dagestanskoj-neopredelennosti/>).

war damage in Grozny, and investments (in industrial plants, gas pipelines, road infrastructure) are also reaching smaller towns. After nearly twenty years of unrest and war, Kadyrov's efforts to provide people with opportunities to relax and entertain themselves at various festivals and anniversaries, to which he invites world-famous film stars, sportspeople and singers, also add to his popularity (in addition to being a means of propaganda).<sup>93</sup> The investments and festivities are largely financed from grants from the central budget of Russia; it is difficult to estimate the sum which is being distributed through the Akhmad Kadyrov Foundation, which demonstrates the efficacy of the Chechen leader's policy (in Chechnya some people believe that this proves that Moscow has admitted defeat in the war, since it is normally the loser who pays reparations to the winner).

Kadyrov has been using the funds provided by Moscow and his exceptional (if informal) status not only to rebuild Chechnya, but also to further expand his independence and reinforce his position. The international flights from Grozny airport, which enable the export and import of commodities practically beyond any control by the Russian customs services, are one of the means to this end. Another is Kadyrov's own historical policy, one of the manifestations of which consisted in the unveiling, on 15 September 2013 (on the locally celebrated Chechen Woman's Day) of a monument to the Caucasus girls who died in the years 1817-1864. Located in the village of Khangish-Yurt, the monument commemorates an event in 1819 when local girls captured by Russian soldiers threw themselves into the Terek River, taking their captors with them. Commenting on the monument, Alexei Zhuravlyov, a Russian deputy to the Duma, said that it was an anti-Russian gesture by the Chechen leadership.<sup>94</sup> In another, anarchistic and very worrying sign of Chechnya's independence, Kadyrov's personal bodyguard and functionaries of the Chechen Interior Ministry can freely move around Russia bearing arms and conducting various operations without notifying the local security forces, and enjoy *de facto* impunity.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> The actor Steven Seagal, the violinist Vanessa Mae and the legends of Brazilian football: Cafu, Bebeto, Dunga, Romario and Zico are among the celebrities who have visited Grozny. When Gérard Depardieu was granted Russian citizenship, Kadyrov offered the French actor an apartment in one of the high-rise building in the Grozny-City compound.

<sup>94</sup> Депутат Госдумы требует проверить законность установки в Чечне памятника девушкам, погибшим во время Кавказской войны, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 21.09.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/230424/>. On 3 December 2013 Zhuravlyov was physically assaulted at the Duma by a Chechen deputy Adam Delimkhanov, a close associate of Ramzan Kadyrov.

<sup>95</sup> *Novaya Gazeta* reported on a case of a group of such functionaries who were detained in

The Chechen leader declares loyalty to Russia, of which Vladimir Putin is the personification in his view (the main alley in Grozny is split into two sections, one named after Akhmad Kadyrov, the other after Putin), but at the same time he makes sure he demonstrates that in Chechnya, he is the master of the house. During President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Grozny Kadyrov picked up his phone and talked in Chechen for several minutes, to the dismay of the Russian president and his entourage.<sup>96</sup> Such behaviour is admired by some Chechens, impressed by the fact that their leader has no sense of inferiority regarding Russia.

Moscow initially tolerated Kadyrov's methods, regarding the human rights violations as a necessary cost of the fight against terrorism (in the years 2004-2008 Kadyrov indeed managed to contain the militants' operations into smaller areas and to suppress their activities in Chechnya), and the displays of attachment to national traditions and Islam as a necessary gesture to the moderate separatists and advocates of sharia law. Today, tolerating all this is no longer a choice, but rather a necessity for Russia. The two sides have found themselves in stalemate—formally dependent on the Kremlin, Kadyrov has become practically impossible to remove because Chechnya's stability rests on his shoulders. He nevertheless enjoys full power in the republic while also depending on money from Moscow.

Ramzan Kadyrov likes to speak on behalf of the entire region of the North Caucasus. In 2012 the Chechen government financed a Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) for 140-person groups from the neighbouring North Caucasus republics.<sup>97</sup> In August 2013, two demonstrations were held in Grozny to protest against the discrimination against people of the North Caucasus origin in central Russia.<sup>98</sup> Kadyrov has repeatedly called for the reunification of Chechnya and Ingushetia, suggesting that he would see himself as the leader of the new republic. When the Ingush leader Yunus-bek Yevkurov was in hospital in Moscow in summer 2009, recovering from injuries sustained

Moscow on charges of kidnapping and severely beating a man. They were allegedly released at the request of the FSB after it received an order "from the very top" to leave Kadyrov's people alone until the Sochi Olympics. Сергей Канев, Москва-Юрт, *Новая Газета*, 25.03.2013. <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/57374.html>

<sup>96</sup> After hanging up, he said it was his mother calling. A video of this incident is available online.

<sup>97</sup> Паломники из Дагестана и Чечни готовятся к хаджу, *Newsru.com*, 25.09.2013. <http://newsru.com/religy/25sep2013/hajj.html>

<sup>98</sup> В Грозном намечен пикет против дискриминации уроженцев Северного Кавказа в регионах России, *Kavkaz-Uzel*, 21.08.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/228855/>



in an assassination attempt, armed units of the Chechen Interior Ministry carried out operations against the armed underground in Ingushetia, explaining that in the circumstances they had to take responsibility for both republics. The raid of the Chechen police into Arshty in Ingushetia in April 2013<sup>99</sup> was probably intended to test how the Kremlin and the Ingush leadership would respond to a potential forceful variant of reunification. The absence of a firm reaction from Moscow, which probably feared an escalation in the run-up to the Sochi Olympics, will encourage the Chechen leadership to make new attempts in the direction outlined by the law, adopted by the Chechen parliament in late January 2013 and signed by Kadyrov, which expands Chechnya's borders to include a number of towns belonging to Ingushetia.<sup>100</sup> Ramzan Kadyrov has also mentioned on several occasions that Chechnya needs access to the sea, which should be interpreted as territorial claims being made against Dagestan. Unless Moscow curbs his ambitions, he will presumably escalate his claims.

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The absolute casualty numbers in the armed conflict in **Ingushetia** are comparable to the figures for Chechnya (134 killed and 192 injured in 2010, 70 killed and 38 injured in 2011, 84 killed and 83 injured in 2012; and 25 killed and 44 injured between January and July 2013), but bearing in mind that its population is three times smaller, Ingushetia should be regarded as the most severely affected by the consequences of the armed conflict.

In the first half of 2013, the average monthly salary in the republic was as low as 11,728 roubles (around US\$ 360, the lowest figure in Russia). The population was growing at a rate of 16.6% (20.3 births and 3.7 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). In 2012 the unemployment rate of 47.7%, the highest in Russia, had decreased slightly compared to the three preceding years (48.2%, 49.7% and 53.2%, respectively). Ingushetia ranks in one of the lowest positions in Russia in terms of access to various consumer goods.

<sup>99</sup> See the section on the situation in Ingushetia for more information on this operation.

<sup>100</sup> Сергей Маркедонов, Кадыров и Евкуров: спор соседей в контексте „пограничных” проблем, *Caucasustimes.com*, 13.08.2012. <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=21063>; Евкуров: Сунженский район Ингушетии – неотъемлемая часть территории республики, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 13.03.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/221325/>



Unlike in Chechnya, the clan structures in Ingushetia persist and continue to provide the basic form of social organisation. For this reason the clan leaders, usually very wealthy people, enjoy much greater authority than the leader of the republic, who is not in a position to provide financial assistance to someone requiring it (while such assistance is available from the clan leaders, and in Chechnya directly from Kadyrov). According to one survey, Yevkurov's approval ratings were as low as 1.3% in the summer of 2013,<sup>101</sup> but the approval ratings of potential candidates to replace him were not much higher. The only exception was Ruslan Aushev, the first president of Ingushetia (1993-2002) who has withdrawn from active political life after leaving office, but is still involved in various popular social initiatives. To his credit, Yevkurov has managed to reconcile the 86 feuding families of Ingushetia, which were obligated to a bloody vendetta under the country's customary law.<sup>102</sup> Unlike in Chechnya, opposition is operating without impediment in Ingushetia and it consists of various organisations and social movements which are able to convene congresses, hold meetings, etc.

Tense relations with the neighbouring republics of Chechnya and North Ossetia are a major problem for Ingushetia. The most serious incident recently took place on 18 April 2013 when around 300 Chechen police officers entered the border village of Arshty inhabited mostly by Chechens.<sup>103</sup> The roots of the clash between the two ethnically close republics date back to the years 1944-1957 when the Soviet authorities first disbanded the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Republic and deported the Chechens and the Ingush to Central Asia, and then, following the return of the two nations to the Caucasus, restored the country but with different borders.<sup>104</sup> For example the Prigorodny District near

<sup>101</sup> Блиц-опрос "ДОШ": при прямых выборах глав Дагестана и Ингушетии люди голосовали бы против всех кандидатов, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 2.09.2013. <https://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/229389/>.

According to the same source (the *Dosh* quarterly published in Moscow and in Grozny), Yevkurov's approval ratings were 8.7% in 2011 and 4.8% in 2012.

<sup>102</sup> Евкуров поблагодарил представителей трех ингушских семей, простивших своих "кровников", *Kavkaz-uzel*, 15.03.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/221446/>.

<sup>103</sup> Politicians, including the Russian State Duma deputy Adam Delimkhanov, accompanied the police officers. The raid was carried out under the pretext of searching for Dokku Umarov, but according to the Russian authorities the real purpose was to hold a rally in Arshty to demand that the village be incorporated into Chechnya. The incident, which had probably been instigated by Ramzan Kadyrov, met with no serious reaction on the part of the federal government. Wojciech Górecki, Chechen-Ingush border dispute, *Eastweek OSW*, 24.04.2013. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-04-24/chechen-ingush-border-dispute>

<sup>104</sup> See footnote 6.

Vladikavkaz, which was mostly inhabited by the Ingush, remained with North Ossetia (after the break-up of the Soviet Union this led to the Ingush-Ossetian war). The village of Arshty found itself in the new republic Ingushetia (the smallest Federation subject in terms of territory) after the 1992 split of Chechen-Ingushetia, but the border between the two republics was not precisely delineated. An escalation of the Chechen-Ingush conflict could entail major disruption for the entire region, with a new outbreak of the Ingush-Ossetian conflict and spill-over effects in the neighbouring areas of the North Caucasus.

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The situation in **North Ossetia** is relatively stable. Still in 2010, 24 people were killed and 171 wounded in the republic (most of this number were victims of the attack on a local market in Vladikavkaz), but in 2011 only four deaths were reported (with 10 people wounded), and in 2012, 7 people died and 7 were wounded. During the first seven months of 2013, no-one was killed or wounded in the republic.

North Ossetia's economic performance is slightly better than that of its neighbours. The republic had the highest average monthly salary in the entire federal district in the first half 2013, although at 16,833 roubles a month, i.e. around US\$ 520, it corresponded to less than 73% of the average monthly salary for Russia. North Ossetia's population growth rate is 3.7% (14.8 births and 11.1 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate was 7.9% in 2012 and, like in the neighbouring republics, has been declining in recent years (from 9.7% in 2010 and 8.2% in 2011).

Due to its location on important transit routes (North Ossetia has the only roads connecting Russia with the unrecognised South Ossetia<sup>105</sup> and with Georgia 'proper', and onwards to Armenia), the republic has been struggling with the problem of smuggling and various kinds of cross-border crime, in addition to the corruption typical of other parts of the North Caucasus (which in North Ossetia's case is mainly related to the operation of the alcoholic beverages industry). Due to the fact that South Ossetia is not a member of the Customs Union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and has set many of its tariffs at lower levels than the Customs Union, it is common practice to register companies, cars, etc. in its territory, and to transfer funds via Tskhinvali. In the spring of

<sup>105</sup> South Ossetia (along with Abkhazia) has been recognised as an independent state by Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru and Tuvalu.

2012, the Russian president Dmitry Medvedev appointed the North Ossetian leader his representative for South Ossetia (the post is independent of the Russian ambassador to Tskhinvali and the representative's main task is to control the budget subsidies transferred to South Ossetia).

North Ossetia is the only republic in the North Caucasus in which Christians are a majority (alongside Adygea, which continues to be mainly populated by Russians). The number of Muslims in the republic has been growing for several years, though. According to estimates, Muslims currently account for 15% of the population,<sup>106</sup> and a separate Spiritual Board of Muslims of North-Ossetia-Alania operates in the republic.

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**Kabardino-Balkaria** has been the scene of intensive activity by the Caucasus Emirate, which is reflected in the number of terrorist attacks and acts of violence. The armed conflict claimed 79 lives in 2010, and 82 people were wounded in that year. In 2011, 129 people were killed and 44 wounded, and in 2012, 107 were killed and 49 wounded. Between January and July 2013, 46 were killed and 9 were injured.

In the first half of 2013 the average monthly salary in Kabardino-Balkaria was 12,711 roubles (around US\$ 390), making it one of the poorest republics of the region (alongside Ingushetia and Karachay-Cherkessia). The population growth rate was 5.7% (14.8 births and 9.1 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate reached 8.9% in 2012, having decreased from 12.7% in 2010 and 10.6% in 2011).

The history of Salafism in Kabardino-Balkaria dates back to the early 1990s when a group of young Muslims, graduates of religious schools in the Arab states, founded the Islamic Centre. It has been conceived as an alternative to the local Spiritual Board of Muslims, which represented traditional Islam, strongly influenced by local beliefs and customs in this part of the Caucasus. The group, which was initially committed to operating within the bounds of the law, became radicalised over time and went underground (in part because of the state's repressive policies after the outbreak of the Second Chechen

<sup>106</sup> No exact figures are available; the above number has been derived from estimates quoted by various researchers including Mikhail Roshchin, Artur Tsutsiyev and Ruslan Bzarov.

War). This process culminated in the militants' attack on Nalchik on 13 October 2005.<sup>107</sup>

The conflict between the titular nations of Kabardino-Balkaria also dates back to the early 1990s. Initially, its nature was ethnic-political (the ambition of the Balkar communities was to have their own republic), but it is currently economic—the Kabardin businesses, which are dominant in Kabardino-Balkaria, have been trying to push the Balkars away from the highland areas which are attractive for tourism. The conflict has not evolved into an open confrontation as yet, but it could potentially become a destabilising factor for the republic, especially since the family and the inner circle of the former republic's leader, Arsen Kanokov (a Kabardin) constitute the most influential business group in Kabardino-Balkaria, and Kanokov himself is one of the richest people in Russia.

Since the civil war broke out in Syria in the spring of 2011, activists of various Circassian organisations from the republics of the North-West Caucasus (and Abkhazia) have been making efforts to repatriate as many of the Circassians living there as possible.<sup>108</sup> The governments of Kabardino-Balkaria and Adygea have been supporting their actions, hoping to boost their own popularity in this way and to increase the proportion of Circassians in the total populations of these subjects of the Russian Federation.<sup>109</sup> The Russian central authorities, on the other hand, have been less welcoming since they fear a stepping up of Circassian protests against the Olympics in Sochi<sup>110</sup> and are concerned about a possible escalation of the Kabardin-Balkar conflict. Hence, the repatriates only receive short-term visas with which they cannot settle in the Russian Federation, they do not get residency registrations, etc. So far, around 700 Circassians from Syria have resettled to Kabardino-Balkaria, and around 600

<sup>107</sup> Wojciech Górecki, *Przemiany islamu na Kaukazie Północno-Zachodnim w okresie poradzieckim. Adygeja, Karaczajo-Czerkiesja, Kabardyno-Bałkaria i Osetia Północna*. in: *Okręt Koszykowa*. ed. Jacek Borkowicz, Jacek Cichocki, Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Warsaw 2007, p. 217–241.

<sup>108</sup> The first wave of repatriations took place after the break-up of the Soviet Union with several hundred people returning to the Caucasus from countries which used to be part of the Ottoman Empire.

<sup>109</sup> The authorities of Abkhazia are also supporting the repatriations, as the country is depopulating (the Abkhazians are emigrating to Russia).

<sup>110</sup> For more information, see the section on Georgia and Azerbaijan.

to Adygea.<sup>111</sup> The repatriates are typically young people who often establish a small business upon arrival. They do not usually speak Russian.

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The republics of **Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea** have been affected by the Caucasus armed conflict to a relatively small degree. In the former, 29 people died and 16 were injured in attacks and terrorist acts in the years 2010-2012, and in the first seven months of 2013, 4 people were killed and 2 were injured. In Adygea, no casualties have been reported in the last four years.

The average monthly salary in Karachay-Cherkessia was 12,637 roubles (less than US\$ 390) in the first half of 2013. The population growth rate was 3.6% (13.3 births and 9.7 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). Unemployment decreased slightly in 2012 to 8.9% (from 10.35% in 2010 and 9.8% in 2011).

Like Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia is often the scene of various frictions between its titular nations (Karachays, i.e. Caucasus Turks, constitute a majority in the republic), but presently the clashes are usually relatively mild. A serious crisis took place in the past, on the occasion of the 1999 presidential election, in which the Karachay candidate, General Vladimir Semyonov, defeated the Cherkess, Stanislav Derev. Derev did not accept defeat and his supporters occupied the main square in the republic's capital for several weeks. Karachay-Cherkessia is also home to some closely-knit communities of Abazins, a people related to the Abkhazians (and traditionally close to the Cherkess), and of Turkic Nogais, who side with the Karachays.

In Adygea, the average monthly salary was 16,670 roubles (over US\$ 510) in the first half of 2013. The population growth rate was negative (-1.4%, with 11.7 births and 13.1 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate in 2012 was 8.1%, compared to 9.3% in 2010 and 8.4% in 2011.

As with the subjects of the Russian Federation which it neighbours, and especially Kabardino-Balkaria, for the last two or three years, Adygea has been the scene of increasingly frequent conflicts between members of the Circassian nations and the Armenians, who continue to grow in number (Armenians in the North Caucasus report higher population growth rates than the Kabardins

<sup>111</sup> В Адыгее более 90 детей сирийских черкесов пошли в школу, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 6.09.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/229626/>

or the Adyghes, and much higher than the Russians). So far most of these conflicts have been limited to everyday life situations, although cases of frays and lethal beatings have also been reported.<sup>112</sup>

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In **Stavropol Krai** 37 people were killed and 88 wounded in the armed conflict in the period between 2010 and 2012, and 6 people died and 2 were injured between January and July 2013. In the first half of 2013 the average monthly income was 16,802 roubles (nearly US\$ 520). The population growth rate was slightly negative at -0.1% (11.9 births and 12 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate in 2012 was clearly lower than in the republics, and slightly lower than the Russian average at 5.4% (6.9% in 2010, and 6% in 2011).

**Krasnodar Krai** (where Sochi is located) has witnessed no attacks or terror acts to date. The average monthly income of 19,821 roubles (nearly US\$ 610) in the first half of 2013 was considerably higher than in the other North Caucasus subjects of the Russian Federation. Like the neighbouring areas, Krasnodar Krai reports a negative population growth rate at -1.1% (12.1 births and 13.2 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate in 2012 was 5.6% (6.7% in 2010 and 5.9% in 2011).

No attacks or terror acts have taken place in the **Rostov Oblast**, either. In the first half of 2013 the average monthly income amounted to 18,628 roubles (more than US\$ 570). The population growth rate was negative at -3.3% (10.9 births and 14.2 deaths per one thousand inhabitants). The unemployment rate in 2012 was 6% (compared to 7.7% in 2010 and 7.4% in 2011).

In the two *krais* and in the Rostov Oblast, the relations between the local Slavic population and migrants from the mountainous republics settling there have been a mounting social problem, and potentially the most serious source of conflicts. The newcomers have been arriving in Ciscaucasia on a larger scale for the last several years, and have been *de facto* slowly colonising the area and pushing out the Slavic population. Over time, this may result in a permanent change of the ethnic composition of the two *krais* and, to a lesser extent, of the

<sup>112</sup> According to a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria, for the time being the Circassians and Armenians have a shared objective, which is to marginalise the local Russians. Their strategic interests are, however, divergent, e.g. both groups seek to control the same sectors of business. (OSW interview with a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria, April 2012).

Rostov Oblast<sup>113</sup> (the eastern part of Stavropol Krai has been receiving mainly Dagestanis and Chechens, and the region of Pyatigorsk and the Caucasus Mineralnye Vody – mainly Kabardins, while Krasnodar Krai has been the destination mainly for newcomers from Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygea). The migrants usually come to work or study. They are eager to work in agriculture, taking over bankrupt *kolkhozy* and *sovkhozy* (which is related to a shortage of agricultural land in the republics), and are also active in small business. It is estimated that around 50% of students in Pyatigorsk (the capital of the North Caucasus Federal District) are not ethnic Russians.<sup>114</sup> In the spring and summer of 2013, a number of incidents of an ethnic nature took place in Ciscaucasia. These usually unfolded along similar lines: a single criminal or economic event would morph into a wider, ethnically motivated clash.<sup>115</sup> It is to be expected that incidents of this kind will become more frequent and more brutal. It is also possible that the Slavic communities will form vigilante groups (either spontaneously, or within the existing Cossack formations, as the Krasnodar Krai Cossacks are already closely co-operating with the local security forces under special agreements<sup>116</sup>).

<sup>113</sup> For example, 300 to 400 Slavic families permanently leave the Levokumsky District in Stavropol Krai every year (the district's total population is 40,000). In the spring of 2013, migrants from the Caucasus republics already accounted for 25% of the population, and controlled 70% of the local businesses and land. In some places in Stavropol Krai the newcomers already account for as much as 50% of the population, although in the entire Ciscaucasia, changes in the ethnic composition are still relatively small. Игорь Кармазин, Ставрополье превращается в Косово: конфликты русских и мигрантов, *Московский комсомолец*, 12.04.2013. <http://www.mk.ru/social/article/2013/04/11/839978-stavropole-prevrashaetsya-v-kosovo-konfliktyi-russkih-i-migrantov.html>

<sup>114</sup> OSW interview with a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria..., *op. cit.*

<sup>115</sup> A well-known case concerns the rape of a Russian woman on 12 August 2013 by North Caucasus migrants in Rostov-on-Don. In response, the inhabitants of Rostov organised a rally, calling for the influx of migrants to be curbed and the rights of the local population to be respected, and for an end to corruption among the security service and administration, which allegedly tolerate abuse by the newcomers. Similar rallies took place in the *stanitsa* of Veshenskaya (on 12 August) and the *stanitsa* of Bazkovskaya (on 13 August). Katarzyna Jarzyńska, Wojciech Górecki, Ethnic tension escalates in Ciscaucasia, *Eastweek OSW*, 28.08.2013. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-08-28/ethnic-tension-escalate-ciscaucasia>

<sup>116</sup> Since 1 September 2012, 1,000 Cossacks in Krasnodar Krai (including 150 in Krasnodar itself) have been patrolling towns and villages alongside the police. В Краснодарском крае казаки приступят к совместному с полицией патрулированию населенных пунктов *Kavkaz-uzel*, 1.09.2012. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/211993/> Since July 2013, another 300 Cossacks from Krasnodar Krai have been taking part in operations against illegal migrants along with the Federal Migration Service officers. Власти Краснодарского края решили привлечь казаков к рейдам против незаконных мигрантов, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 25.07.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/227602/>

Alexander Tkachev, a close associate of President Putin, who was approved for another five-year term in March 2012, has been the governor of Krasnodar Krai since January 2001. He is one of the people in charge of the Olympic preparations,<sup>117</sup> and also serves as Putin's representative for Abkhazia (a post independent of the Russian ambassador in Sukhumi). Tkachev's strong position seems impossible to dent; neither the inefficacy of the crisis management system, revealed during the flooding in July 2012, nor the links of the local security forces to the criminal world, which public opinion learnt of in connection with the mass murder in the *stanitsa* (rural locality) of Kushevskaya in 2010, had an effect.<sup>118</sup> The governor is also known for his harsh, almost xenophobic statements about migrants from the North Caucasus republics, which further exacerbates the local Slavic-Caucasian relations.

<sup>117</sup> The question of the Olympic preparations will be discussed in the section on Moscow's strategies towards the region.

<sup>118</sup> Jadwiga Rogoża, Flooding in the Kuban: a natural disaster overshadowed by politics, *East-week OSW*, 11.07.2012. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2012-07-11/flooding-kuban-a-natural-disaster-overshadowed-politics>



## IV. THE ROLE OF AZERBAIJAN AND GEORGIA

Azerbaijan and Georgia have been having an influence on the situation in the North Caucasus, albeit to a limited extent. During the First Chechen War the two countries remained neutral, although Azerbaijan unofficially co-operated with the separatists as a way to put pressure on Moscow. Georgia refrained from such contacts because, firstly, the Chechen militants had backed the Abkhazians during the Georgian-Abkhazian war in 1992-1993 (as did the entire North Caucasus) and, secondly, because Tbilisi hoped that Moscow would help it regain control of the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and did not want to damage its then good relations with Russia.

During Chechnya's quasi-independence (1996-1999), Baku and Tbilisi developed intensive contacts with Grozny as their own relations with Moscow deteriorated. In view of Russia's fiasco in the war and the USA's heightened interest in the Caucasus, Georgia and Azerbaijan started looking for new formulas of collective security in the region, one of the results of which was the utopian project of establishing a "Caucasus OSCE" that would include Georgia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya and Dagestan and which would be aimed at excluding Russia from the regional peace processes and would thus further undermine Moscow's position in the region.

After the Second Chechen War broke out, Azerbaijan and Georgia offered safe haven to refugees from the conflict region, including Aslan Maskhadov's family and aides. The son of the Chechen president (and the widow of Dzhokhar Dudayev) found refuge in Baku, and Vakha Arsanov, the deputy president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, was offered an apartment in Tbilisi in which he opened an informal embassy of Chechnya with the knowledge and consent of the Georgian government. Georgia did not even try to close the mountain passes which armed Chechen militants were reaching the Pankisi Gorge through, i.e. a mountain area in Georgia inhabited by the Kist Chechens, to rest and treat injuries. It is known that Ruslan (Khamzat) Gelayev, one of the most prominent field commanders, established a base in Pankisi. Tbilisi repeatedly rejected Russia's demands to hand over the militants and to allow Russian troops to control the Chechen section of the Russian-Georgian border on the Georgian side. This provoked strong criticism from Moscow<sup>119</sup> and led, in sev-

<sup>119</sup> Moscow repeatedly accused Georgia in particular of aiding terrorists. In late 2001 the Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said that Osama bin Laden was probably hiding in the Pankisi Gorge.

eral cases, to Georgian villages in the mountains being bombed (allegedly by accident) by the Russian air force.

As the war dragged on and its character changed, the two capitals, and Baku in particular, started to gradually withdraw their support for the militants (in 2003–2004 Azerbaijan began to unofficially hand over some of the refugees to Moscow and force others to leave using administrative methods). Currently Baku's focus is on supporting the Azerbaijani national minority in southern Dagestan (for example, an Azerbaijani theatre operates in Derbent) and on efforts to neutralise Russian influence on the Dagestani diasporas on the other side of the border (Baku fears that Moscow might fan separatist sentiments and radical Islamic ideas among the Lezgians and Avars living in Azerbaijan). In 2013, at the initiative of Baku, one of the streets in Derbent was named after Heydar Aliyev (father of the current president of Azerbaijan, who preceded him as the head of state). Moreover, President Ilham Aliyev maintains close contacts with the Dagestani leader Ramazan Abdulatipov.<sup>120</sup>

Georgia never decided to co-operate with Moscow by handing over refugees. After the Rose Revolution (late 2003 and 2004), it undertook a series of measures aimed at reviving traditional social, economic and cultural contacts with the North Caucasus countries (meaning direct contacts not intermediated by Russian federal agencies) and at building the image of Georgia among the local authorities, but especially among the public, as a modern, attractive and friendly state. This policy was further stepped up and intensified after Moscow recognised Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the aftermath of the 2008 war and as diplomatic relations between the countries were broken off. Georgia's aim was to foster the formation of a kind of buffer between itself and central Russia in the North Caucasus. In a significant gesture Georgia lifted the visa obligation for Russian citizens living in the North Caucasus republics, in order to facilitate contacts and to make Georgia's offer for the region (which included attractive grant programmes for students) more accessible.<sup>121</sup> Russia criticised the move, labelling it provocative (it responded in a similar way to Georgia's unilateral lifting of visas for all holders of Russian passports on 29 February 2012).

<sup>120</sup> OSW interviews with members of the Dagestani diaspora in Moscow in the years 2012–2013.

<sup>121</sup> The abolition of visas for the North Caucasus (on 11 October 2010) could also be regarded as Georgia's late response to a similar gesture made by Russia to Abkhazia and South Ossetia – Moscow exempted the inhabitants of the separatist republics from the obligation to obtain visas already when the visa regime was established between the two states on 5 December 2000.

Tbilisi's special focus has been on two interrelated issues – the Sochi Olympics and the so-called “Circassian problem”. On 25 November 2010 the Georgian parliament appointed a special commission to investigate whether Russia was using the occupied territory of Abkhazia in order to prepare for the Olympics<sup>122</sup> (which would be against the provisions of the Olympic Charter). The commission was also tasked with carrying out an awareness-raising campaign in the global media against the Olympic Games, which would highlight, among other issues, the environmental threats and the historical context, i.e. the fact that the Games will take place on a site where native inhabitants of these lands were exterminated<sup>123</sup>). The Circassian problem, i.e. the restoration of the memory of the Circassians' tragedy and reflection about possible ways of compensating it, was the subject of a number of international seminars and conferences organised by the Ilia State University in Tbilisi and the US-based Jamestown Foundation under the patronage of the Georgian government (with the participation of those Circassian groups in the West which opposed the Games). Ultimately, on 20 May 2011 the Georgian parliament adopted a resolution recognising the massacre of the Circassians in the 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian Empire as genocide, and Mikheil Saakashvili's government decided to boycott the Games. The Georgian point of view was promoted by the PIK satellite television channel (PIK is the abbreviation of the Russian for First Caucasus Info Channel, Первый Информационный Кавказский), which broadcast in Russian and was also available in southern Russia, Turkey and Iran. Moscow saw Tbilisi's support for the demands of the radical Circassian communities, its debasing of the Olympics – a project in which president Putin's personal prestige was involved – and finally, the creation of the PIK television channel, as hostile actions and a form of interference in the internal affairs of Russia.

After the parliamentary elections on 1 October 2012, when the Georgian Dream opposition coalition led by Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili took over real power in Georgia, the country's activities addressed to the North Caucasus lost much of their momentum. The PIK television station was closed down and the decision to boycott the Games reversed in two moves which became symbols of

<sup>122</sup> Georgia has considered Abkhazia and South Ossetia occupied territory since the 2008 war and since Moscow concluded agreements with the two para-states under which Russian military bases were established in both of them. Gaining full control of Abkhazia and eliminating all potential threats that might endanger the Sochi Olympics from that direction (e.g. Georgian sabotage) was one of Moscow's aims in that war.

<sup>123</sup> See footnote 5.

the change of course.<sup>124</sup> In this situation the emergence of some pro-Georgian groups in the region, made up of university graduates and other beneficiaries of the Georgian programmes, may be the most durable achievement of Tbilisi's efforts in the North Caucasus in the period 2008-2012.

For security reasons, the border between Russia and Abkhazia will probably be closed during the Olympic Games, at least partly (for cars). Moscow fears that it could become a gateway for potential terrorists (in the mountains, the border runs only a few kilometres away from the Olympic grounds<sup>125</sup>). Moscow has limited confidence in Abkhazia, which is a *de facto* Russian protectorate but, unlike South Ossetia, has been trying to preserve a margin of independence. This lack of trust was visible, for instance, when the Russian minister of Defence, Sergei Shoigu visited the Russian military units stationed in the republic on 14 May 2013 and decided not to hold even a courtesy meeting with the para-state's leadership.<sup>126</sup> Moscow became even more wary of Abkhazia after an unknown gunman shot down the First Secretary of the Russian embassy in Sukhumi, Dmitry Vishernev, on 9 September 2013 (several days later, his wife also died in hospital from injuries sustained in the attack). Moscow may take advantage of this case as a pretext to implement additional security measures (deploying additional units of special forces in Abkhazia before the Games, stepped-up checks, also on the Abkhazian side, etc.).

<sup>124</sup> The argument was that most likely nobody would join the boycott and Georgia would find itself isolated in the international arena. The decision has been contested by a number of groups including Saakashvili's United National Movement and the Left Alliance, which continue to call for a boycott of the Olympics.

<sup>125</sup> Since March 2011, Russia and Abkhazia have been in conflict over the village of Aibga which straddles the border river of Psou, very close Krasnaya Polyana where some of the competitions are to take place (according to Georgia and nearly all other countries in the world, the river marks the Russian-Georgian border).

<sup>126</sup> Ольга Алленова, Послевоенная пятилетка-2, *Коммерсантъ Власть*, 26.08.2013.

## V. CULTURAL AND CIVILISATIONAL CHANGES

The question of the cultural and civilisational changes that have been taking place in the North Caucasus in recent years has already been signalled on many occasions in this paper, but it is so significant, especially for the future of the region, that it merits a separate discussion. The most important and seemingly irreversible process concerns the progressing **Islamisation**, wherein a growing proportion of people are embracing a Muslim identity as one of the most important elements, if not the single most important element, of their self-identification.<sup>127</sup> This manifests itself not only in regular religious practice, but also in living according to the guidance of Islam, voting for politicians who identify themselves as Muslims, etc. As with the other processes, Islamisation impacts different parts of the region in different ways and with varying levels of intensity (in addition to having different directions, as it can be either 'Salafist' or 'traditionalist'). However it is very difficult to make accurate comparisons since no detailed studies spanning the entire region are available at this time. One should however note the term "ethnic Muslims", which is present in research literature and denotes all members of the nations traditionally professing Islam. The term is imprecise (e.g. the Kabardin population from the Mozdok area believe themselves to have been Christians "since time immemorial"; besides the term excludes atheists), but is nonetheless useful, as even those who identify themselves as non-believers usually obey such religious practices as circumcision or religious marriage ceremonies. In the 1990s, the percentage of believers among the native nations of the North-East Caucasus ranged from 81 to 97% (compared to 64% among Russians), and the current phase of Islamisation can be interpreted as the natural continuation of a historical process first interrupted by the October revolution and the Bolsheviks' rise to power, and then suppressed by the outbreak of ethnic conflicts in the decade that followed the break-up of the Soviet Union (around the years 1990–2000).<sup>128</sup>

In Kabardino-Balkaria, one of the symptoms of Islamisation consists in the decreasing number of officially registered marriages (instead of formalising their unions at registry offices, young people are increasingly being married by mullahs, sometimes even without their parents' knowledge; such marriages are not included in the statistics). The proportion of women (especially

<sup>127</sup> According to estimates from 2009, even 10% of young people from the region declared they were of "Muslim nationality". Statement by a Russian expert..., *op. cit.*

<sup>128</sup> Алексей Малашенко, *Исламские ориентиры Северного Кавказа*, Москва 2001, s. 6, 62.

young women) who wear headscarves or even hijabs has also increased considerably.<sup>129</sup> The research of Zaid Abdulagatov, conducted in the years 1996-2010, shows the dynamics of Islamisation among young people in Dagestan.<sup>130</sup> The percentage of believers in this group increased to 95% in the period in question. 77.6% of them can be characterised as “fundamentalists” who believe that Islam should be as it was in the times of the Prophet (compared to 53.9% in 2000), and 9.6% may be termed “modernists” who believe Islam should adapt to the changing world. 58.1% of respondents in the former group (and 26.9% in the latter) believe that the norms of sharia are superior to secular law. 30% of all young believers would be prepared to protest openly in the event of a conflict between secular and sharia law (compared to 25.6% of young people studying at religious schools, which can be explained by the fact that religious school students are almost exclusively traditionalists, typically more loyal to state institutions than the Salafis, even those Salafis who distance themselves from terrorism and the Caucasus Emirate). The process of **shariatisation**, i.e. the tendency to resolve a growing range of issues and daily problems by reference to the rules of sharia law, exists in Dagestan as well as Chechnya and Ingushetia (as was mentioned above, some elements of sharia have been incorporated into official legislation in Chechnya).

**De-modernisation** consists in the revival of traditional social institutions such as customary law, vendetta, or councils of elders (which existed before the arrival of Russians in the Caucasus and were preserved in residual form in the Soviet period). It also entails reinforcement of the traditional division of roles in the family and sex segregation (e.g. at weddings where men and women celebrate separately), as well as a growing proportion of girls who do not go to school.<sup>131</sup> This process is progressing faster in villages (especially in the mountain areas) and in the republics of North-East Caucasus.

With the exception of the Slavic Ciscaucasia, the entire region is also experiencing **de-Russification**, which involves the Russian language being pushed out by the Caucasus languages, and the level of Russian language competence is

<sup>129</sup> OSW interview with a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria..., *op. cit.*

<sup>130</sup> Зайд Абдулагатов, О влиянии религиозного фактора на экстремистское поведение дагестанской молодежи, *Социс*, Issue 1/2012, p. 106–113 (article available online at: [http://www.isras.ru/files/File/Socis/2012\\_1/Abdulagatov.pdf](http://www.isras.ru/files/File/Socis/2012_1/Abdulagatov.pdf)).

<sup>131</sup> The transformations of the Caucasus customs and habits, which could even be termed a “conservative revolution”, are described in the books of the young author Alisa Ganiyeva (born in 1985); see e.g. her collection of short stories: Алиса Ганиева, *Салам тебе, Далгат!*, Москва 2010.

decreasing. That process is related, *inter alia*, to the changes in the ethnic composition of the region's population, i.e. emigration of the Russian-speaking Slavic people. It is still relatively inconspicuous in large cities. In rural areas and especially in ethnically homogeneous villages, however, the Russian language is often heard only on television. Reports from Dagestan or Ingushetia sometimes include descriptions of villages where no-one or next to no-one speaks Russian – the men who speak the language are in central Russia where they work, while the women who raise children only understand it at best.<sup>132</sup> In one illustrative case, Nur-Pashi Kulayev, a Chechen born in 1980 who was tried for involvement in the siege of the school in Beslan on 1 September 2004, asked the court for an interpreter as he did not understand everything in Russian and could not accurately express himself in the language (the request was declined).<sup>133</sup>

The proportion of ethnic Russians in the total population is declining in all the North Caucasus subjects of the Russian Federation with the exception of Krasnodar Krai. In the republics, the absolute numbers of Russians are also falling as a result of Russians reporting lower birth rates than the Caucasus nations and emigrating from the region. The most dramatic decrease has been observed in Chechnya: back in 1989 Russians accounted for 24.81% of the population of the Chechen parts of Chechen-Ingushetia (269,130 people),<sup>134</sup> but by 2010 this proportion had fallen to just 1.92% (24,382 people). Ingushetia is the subject second most affected by the process – its ethnic Russian population has decreased from 24,641 people, or 13.25%, in 1989 to 3,215 people, or 0.78%, in 2010. 29,587 people permanently emigrated from Kabardino-Balkaria in the years 2006–2011, including 17,688 Russians, 4,887 Kabardins and 1,381 Balkars.<sup>135</sup> Between 1989 and 2010 the percentage of Russians in that republic decreased from 31.95% to 22.46% (240,750 people and 193,155 people, respectively). See also Appendix 4.

The view that Russia should be used as a means to an end and made to give as much as possible is the dominant view among the ruling elites of the North Caucasus republics and has been gaining popularity among the intelligentsia in the region (especially among people up to the age of fifty). This attitude

<sup>132</sup> See e.g. Iwona Kaliszewska, Maciej Falkowski, *Matrioszka w hidzabie*, Warsaw 2010.

<sup>133</sup> Oliver Bullough, *Let our fame be great, Journeys Among the Defiant People of the Caucasus*, Allen Lane, 2010, p. 385.

<sup>134</sup> In 1989, Russians accounted for 23.12% (293,771 people) of the entire population of Chechen-Ingushetia.

<sup>135</sup> OSW interview with a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria..., *op. cit.*

has been described as follows by a researcher from Kabardino-Balkaria: “It is a widespread belief that ‘time is on our side’, that is, the North Caucasus will separate from Russia sooner or later, either formally or informally, therefore one should demand as much money, investment and places at universities as possible from Moscow, so that the region can develop. The aim should also be to man as many positions as possible in the Russian structures of power, and from there to support one’s relatives and one’s country. The people who think this way are united in the opinion that Russia is a coloniser and has done the Caucasus more harm than good, but at this stage there is no point in fighting it because it is too strong. Some of those people, the younger generation, also believe that the Caucasus could manage without Moscow already now, while the older generation disagrees”.<sup>136</sup> In this context it is worth quoting the aphorism attributed to Rasul Gamzatov (1923–2003), a distinguished Dagestani poet writing in Avar and in Russian, that “Dagestan did not join Russia voluntarily and will not voluntarily leave it”.

The number of people in the North Caucasus who do not consider Russia to be their homeland has been growing in recent years,<sup>137</sup> while Russians have increasingly been viewing the North Caucasus as a kind of “foreign body” within their state. Research carried out in 2013 by VCIOM<sup>138</sup> at the request of the Valdai Club shows that the percentage of people who believe Crimea to be Russian territory (56%) is greater than the percentage of those who think the same about Dagestan (41%) and Chechnya (39%). The opposite opinion (i.e. that the areas in question are not Russia) has been expressed by 39%, 54% and 57%, respectively. Only 7% believe that a Chechen, a Dagestani or an Ingush can be called a Russian (русский), even if the person in question has been living in central Russia for many years (while 44% would use the term “Russian” for an Ukrainian or a Belarusian in the same circumstances, and 10% for an Armenian, a Georgian or an Azerbaijani).<sup>139</sup>

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> Islam Tekushev wrote: “During the 15-year long confrontation, the North Caucasus has become a hostile near-abroad for a majority of Russians. [...] Meanwhile, for the inhabitants of the North Caucasus, Russia has become a hostile territory where Caucasus national dances (lezginka) are treated almost as demonstrations of aggression or superiority”. (Ислам Текушев, Теракт. А в ответ тишина..., *Caucasustimes.com*, 26.01.2011. <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=20735>).

<sup>138</sup> Всероссийский центр изучения общественного мнения (Russian Public Opinion Research Centre).

<sup>139</sup> Современная российская идентичность: измерения, вызовы, ответы, Москва, сентябрь 2013.



Around 2010, reflections on the possibility of Russia giving up of the North Caucasus and the consequences of such a move, which had been absent from public debate since the mid-1990s, started to re-appear in the press and expert commentaries.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>140</sup> For example: Сергей Маркедонов, Уйти нельзя, *Gazeta.ru*, 21.12.2010. [http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2010/12/21\\_a\\_3472821.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/comments/2010/12/21_a_3472821.shtml)  
The question of the attitude of Russians towards a separation of the region from the Federation is discussed in the final chapter.

## VI. THE NORTH CAUCASUS IN MOSCOW'S POLICIES

### 1. Strategies towards the region

Moscow has not developed any cohesive strategy for the region over the more than twenty years following the break-up of the Soviet Union. **During Boris Yeltsin's rule (1991-1999) its policies were reactive:** any measures that were taken were in response to events in the region (starting the First Chechen War to combat separatists was an example of this reactive approach). **During Vladimir Putin's two terms as president (2000-2008) Russia implemented the force-based model of managing the region,** which required massive financial outlays and a constant heavy military presence (after the outbreak of the Second Chechen War, Chechen affairs were *de facto* handed over to the Ministry of Defence and, subsequently, to the Federal Security Service). The high cost of this strategy and the absence of any visible results, i.e. the fact that Moscow failed to establish full control of the region, led the Kremlin to adopt a slightly more flexible policy (the above-mentioned policy of *Chechenisation*, implemented since mid-2002). **Dmitry Medvedev (2008-2012) tried to rebuild stability in the North Caucasus using economic means,** by initiating various investments in the region and launching financial transfers. The appointment of Alexander Khloponin, an economist recognised for his managerial skills, as the presidential representative in the newly created North Caucasus Federal District became a symbol of this change.<sup>141</sup> However, corruption impeded the implementation of the 'economic' model of managing the North Caucasus – a considerable portion of the funds transferred to the region was embezzled. Moreover, many of the investments were aimed at developing tourism while the demand for tourist services in the region was negligible due to the threat of terror attacks. **Launched at the onset of Putin's third presidential term in 2012, the current policy is a combination of the Medvedev approach, i.e. a continuation of the existing financial programmes supplemented by new ones that are launched, and ad hoc measures aimed at ensuring security for the Olympic Games** (to be discussed later in this chapter), while at the same time Moscow tends to refrain from intervening in the region if intervention could escalate tensions—the absence of any reaction to Ramzan Kadyrov's aggressive moves against the neighbouring republics is a case in point.

<sup>141</sup> Wojciech Górecki, Managers instead of general-governors? Moscow's new tactics in the North Caucasus, OSW Commentary, Issue 36, 3.03.2010.

Underlying all those strategies is the conviction, also shared by Russian public opinion, that the North Caucasus is a region that differs considerably from the rest of Russia and requires non-standard treatment. It seems, however, that Moscow is still yet to take the strategic decision on whether to integrate the North Caucasus (understood here as the mountain republics, excluding the *krais* and the *oblast*) with the Russian economic, social and legal space, or whether to isolate it and accept the existence of an informal “internal abroad” within the country (at the level of official declarations, separation of the region is not an option)<sup>142</sup>.

The absence of a comprehensive vision for the region, a unifying idea or a positive proposal (i.e. the things which have paradoxically been offered, in reverse, by the Caucasus Emirate), is visible even in the projects initiated during Dmitry Medvedev’s rule. The tourism and winter sports development programme may serve as an example: firstly, it is addressed only to a few selected locations, and secondly, given the levels of the corruption and criminalisation of the economy, finding serious investors is very difficult and the potential profits are not going to improve the lives of the local people anyway. In this sense, Moscow is continuing the policy of the Soviet Union, aimed at reinforcing the divisions existing in the North Caucasus, especially ethnic divisions.<sup>143</sup> Moscow also approaches the North Caucasus with distrust or even fear, which is visible in the fact that military draft is very limited in the region: only single soldiers from Dagestan or Ingushetia make it to the Russian army, and the Ministry of Defence admits that it is unable to effectively control conscripts from the Caucasus who tend to informally subordinate the units in which they serve.<sup>144</sup> Meanwhile conscripts from Chechnya do their military service exclusively in the territory of the republic. In this situation Moscow’s tactic of avoiding friction and unconditionally subsidising the local budgets is becoming its strategy.

<sup>142</sup> The term “internal abroad” has been popularised by the German researcher Uwe Halbach (Uwe Halbach, *Russia’s Internal Abroad. The North Caucasus as an Emergency Zone at the Edge of Europe*, SWP Research Paper 2010/RP 05, November 2010. [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research\\_papers/2010\\_RP\\_05\\_hlb\\_ks.pdf](http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2010_RP_05_hlb_ks.pdf)).

<sup>143</sup> One researcher even mentions a “dictatorship of parities”, i.e. the conviction that all the Caucasus nations should have proportional representation in the local government. Statement by a Russian expert..., *op. cit.* One example of the strengthening of particularisms at the expense of the idea of one, shared Caucasus consists in the deepening hostility among the fans of different football clubs, which leads to clashes and riots during Games (a mass fight broke out between the fans of Angusht Nazran and Alania Vladikavkaz after a game in Ingushetia on 23 October 2013; the region’s strongest football teams include Anzhi Makhachkala and Terek Grozny).

<sup>144</sup> Сергей Маркедонов: отказ от призыва в армию уроженцев Кавказа говорит о недееспособности государства, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 8.04.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/222549/>.

Moscow seldom interferes in the internal affairs of the North Caucasus republics, leaving their leaderships a margin of freedom that is relatively large by Russian standards. The Kremlin mainly expects the local leaders to ensure stability in their respective Federation subjects. In this context, predictability of the political and social situation, keeping the administration and public institutions under control, and ensuring uninterrupted electricity, gas and water supplies to households are more important for Moscow than the effectiveness of the fight against terrorism. It is the federal agencies which are primarily responsible for this, anyway. It also appears that at the level of the republics Moscow is more likely to accept authoritarian methods than an ostensibly conciliatory approach involving, for instance, peace initiatives independent of the Kremlin or attempts at building coalitions of local political forces. Moscow may consider such initiatives to be signs of disloyalty. One illustration of this point is served by the fact that the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov enjoys much greater independence than the other leaders in the region, to the extent that one could even say that he is holding Moscow hostage.

The said margin of freedom enjoyed by the top officials in the Caucasus is also visible in the fact that Moscow has seldom resorted to dismissing a ruling head of a Caucasus republic (other than in Stavropol Krai): the Ingush leader Murat Zyazikov was dismissed in the autumn of 2008 in the aftermath of months-long protests calling for his resignation. Boris Ebzeyev, the leader of Karachay-Cherkessia, stepped down in February 2011 (formally, he resigned voluntarily; according to press reports the Kremlin had accused him of incompetence in economic affairs). In late January 2013 Vladimir Putin accepted the resignation of the president of Dagestan Magomedislam Magomedov (which presumably had also been agreed in advance with Magomedov). It seems that in this last case the reasons concerned Magomedov's independent initiatives such as the activities of the Adaptation Commission, which enabled a rapid "reintegration" of militants who had surrendered their arms, and his involvement in inter-Islamic dialogue. The Kremlin is opposed to any talks with the militants and at best reluctant to accept talks with the Salafis, and so may have regarded those initiatives as a dangerous precedent. Magomedov was replaced by Ramazan Abdulatipov, an activist and researcher well known in Russia, who nonetheless has no political backing locally. This suggests that Moscow's intention behind this nomination was to establish direct control of Dagestan one year ahead of the Olympics<sup>145</sup> (the subsequent arrest of the mayor of Makhachkala,

<sup>145</sup> Abdulatipov has been a deputy, a federal minister for ethnic policy, and Russian ambassador to Dushanbe; he has authored a number of research papers about ethnic relations in the

the capital of Dagestan, probably served the same purpose – this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter). The last case was the dismissal of Arsen Kanokov, the leader of Kabardino-Balkaria, in December 2013. It should be noted that all the dismissed politicians have been subsequently appointed to high-ranking federal offices, proving that the Kremlin was certain of their loyalty and rewarded them for it in this way (e.g. Kanokov became a representative of his republic to the Russian Federation Council).<sup>146</sup>

The financing of the North Caucasus is a particularly controversial issue, both for the Russian political class and the public. Since 2008, the region has been receiving very large, albeit difficult to estimate, sums of money under various target programmes, in addition to normal budget subsidies (the budgets of the North Caucasus republics report high deficits<sup>147</sup>). The funding is not subject to transparent settlement procedures, which creates the impression that the North Caucasus is a parasite feeding on the Russian state.<sup>148</sup> This impression is further strengthened by press reports about luxurious goods possessed by leaders in the Caucasus, especially Ramzan Kadyrov, and the pompous lifestyles of the growing Caucasus diasporas in Moscow and other Russian cities. It is against this background that the slogan calling for an “end to the feeding of the Caucasus” (Хватит кормить Кавказ!) emerged. It has been promoted by one of the leaders of the Russian protest movement, the anti-corruption blogger Alexei Navalny, and has been embraced by large swathes of Russian public opinion – as many as 51% of respondents in the September 2013 VCIOM survey quoted above supported it (42% were against, and 7% expressed no opinion).<sup>149</sup>

Caucasus and in Russia. Wojciech Górecki, The Kremlin increases its control over Dagestan, *Eastweek OSW*, 30.01.2013. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-01-30/kremlin-increases-its-control-over-dagestan>

<sup>146</sup> The principle of loyalty works both ways. The Kremlin shows loyalty to the regional leaders by refraining from official contacts with the alternative elites in their respective republics (such as non-governmental organisation, Salafi religious communities, etc.).

<sup>147</sup> For example, direct subsidies from the federal budget account for around 90% of the budget of Ingushetia. The aim of the development strategy currently being implemented in the republic is to reduce this figure to 80%, but this seems hardly to be realistic (Екатерина Абрамова, Евкуров: За 20 лет..., *op. cit.*).

<sup>148</sup> The report “Кто кого кормит?” (“Who’s feeding whom?”) published by the *Lenta.ru* portal noted that the financial relations between the North Caucasus republics and the federal government were one of the prime examples of the lack of transparency in Russia’s budget policy (<http://lenta.ru/articles/2012/12/14/enough/>).

<sup>149</sup> Современная российская идентичность..., *op. cit.* According to the Levada Centre, as many as 71% of respondents agreed with the slogan in October 2013 (including 35% who “firmly supported” it, and 36% who “rather supported” it). See: <http://www.levada.ru/05-11-2013/rossiyane-o-migratsii-i-mezhnatsionalnoi-napryazhennosti>

The outrage, which morphs into aversion to migrants from the Caucasus and leads to ethnic clashes,<sup>150</sup> is motivated not only by the alleged embezzlement of subsidies in the region, but also by the “bossing around” common among migrants from the Caucasus in central Russia.<sup>151</sup> Some of the funding allocated to the North Caucasus presumably never reaches the region at all, some is intercepted by the clans in power in the republics, and some is spent on investments of little use which fail to stimulate the local economies. The president of Dagestan, Ramazan Abdulatipov has been quoted as saying words which are certainly equally true about the other republics—that in recent years “Dagestan was fed, but not healed” and did not develop.<sup>152</sup>

At the end of the five-year “South of Russia” programme in August 2013, a meeting was convened in Pyatigorsk (the capital of the North Caucasus Federal District) to discuss what results had been achieved. In the course of the meeting, the Russian minister for regional development Igor Slunayev said that even though 43.6 billion roubles (around US\$ 1.34 billion) had been spent on various measures to improve the social and economic situation in the region, the list of outstanding problems was still the same as in 2008. He also said that the more money that was spent on financing the republics, the less market-oriented their economies became. Similar observations were expressed in Pyatigorsk by the finance minister Anton Siluanov who said that the level of subsidies for the budgets of the North Caucasus republics was growing several times faster than the financing for the other subjects of the Russian Federation. Siluanov further revealed that while the average number of state officials per one thousand inhabitants in Russia was 1.8, in Chechnya it was 3.5 and in Ingushetia, 4.6. He also criticised the North Caucasus leaderships for keeping excessively large car fleets<sup>153</sup>

<sup>150</sup> For example, an incident of this kind took place on 13 October 2013 in the Biryulyovo Zapadnoye district of Moscow. The local community staged violent protests after a young Russian was killed by a person with a “non-Slavic” appearance (the authorities revealed only a day later that the suspect was an immigrant from Azerbaijan). The protests morphed into attacks against stores employing migrants and clashes with the security services in which between ten and 20 people were injured. Katarzyna Jarzyńska, *Ethnic riots in Moscow*, *Eastweek OSW*, 16.10.2013. <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-10-16/ethnic-riots-moscow>

<sup>151</sup> Public celebrations of Muslim holidays (perceived as a demonstration of power), loud weddings with celebratory gunfire, night-time rides across cities in motorcades of luxurious cars adorned with flags from the Caucasus republics, etc. Isolated events of this kind are seen as representative of the general attitude of the, allegedly highly assertive, Caucasus diasporas.

<sup>152</sup> Abdulatipov said it on 15 August 2013 during a meeting with president Putin. <http://www.rbcdaily.ru/politics/562949988516522>

<sup>153</sup> Петр Нетреба, Дмитрий Бутрин, Премьер-министру показали горы проблем, *Коммерсантъ*, 20.08.2013. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2259319>; Силуанов: Регионы Северного

(usually made up of luxurious armoured limousines). Despite all those reservations, less than a month later the Russian Security Council approved a document entitled “Principal directions of state policy in the North Caucasus Federal District”. 40 billion roubles (around US\$ 1.23 billion) was initially earmarked for the implementation of its provisions – the money will be distributed under a new, three-year long edition of the “The South of Russia” programme. President Putin said on that occasion that the priority of the policy towards the region should be to further increase the pace of the social and economic development of the North Caucasus since difficult living conditions there provided “nourishment for extremists”.<sup>154</sup> This declaration can be interpreted as an indication that the Russian leadership is going to keep the course of its Caucasus strategy unchanged at least until the end of Putin’s current presidential term, leading to a petrification not only of Moscow’s relations with the region, but also of the internal political and social situation in the North Caucasus republics.

## 2. Operation Sochi 2014

By establishing the North Caucasus Federal District comprising seven Federation subjects which were previously part of the Southern Federal District (President Dmitry Medvedev’s decision to this effect was published on 19 January 2010), the Russian authorities sought to symbolically highlight that Sochi was not the Caucasus – Krasnodar Krai, where Sochi is located, remained within the original Southern Federal District. The decision was a psychological and propaganda exercise, which in a way stigmatised the North Caucasus republics (with the exception of Adygea), since the new Federal District was the only one to be created based on ethnic and religious criteria.<sup>155</sup> Stavropol Krai was included into the new District along with the Islamic republics associated

Кавказа могли бы сэкономить на автомобилях для чиновников, *prime.ru*, 19.08.2013. <http://prime.ru/Politics/20130819/765663024.html>

<sup>154</sup> Муса Мурадов, Северному Кавказу укажут новое направление, *Коммерсантъ*, 10.09.2013. <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2275567>

In December 2011, while he was still prime minister, Vladimir Putin said that cutting investments in the North Caucasus would lead to serious disturbances, which might even result in the breakout of war as reduced subsidies would result in greater emigration from the North Caucasus to large Russian cities and the ensuing problems. He added that, should migration be curbed, young people in the region would join the armed underground and back the idea to separate the Caucasus from Russia (Лучше поздно, чем никогда, *Expertclub.ge*, 23.12.2011. [http://rus.expertclub.ge/portal/cnid\\_\\_10661/alias\\_\\_Expertclub/lang\\_\\_ru/tabid\\_\\_2546/default.aspx](http://rus.expertclub.ge/portal/cnid__10661/alias__Expertclub/lang__ru/tabid__2546/default.aspx)). The local elite’s take on the question of subsidies is discussed in the section on the civil war.

<sup>155</sup> С созданием нового федерального округа Северный Кавказ приобретает особый статус в России, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 20.01.2010. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/164427>

with terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism in order to avoid the impression that the new district was a 'reservation' of Caucasus highlanders (this was also the reason why the new district was not formed consisting exclusively of the most unstable republics of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia – firstly, there are hardly any ethnic Russians in those republics and, secondly, such a decision would lead to disputes about where the capital of such a district should be located). However, the new federal district has failed to streamline the administration of the North Caucasus, one of the reasons for this being the conflict between the president's plenipotentiary representative Alexander Khloponin and Ramzan Kadyrov.<sup>156</sup>

In order to enforce loyalty among the North Caucasus leaderships in the run-up to Olympics and during the Games, Moscow decided to carry out a series of show arrests of high-ranking officials in Dagestan in the summer of 2013. The most widely known case was seen on 1 June with the arrest of Said Amirov, the long-time mayor of Makhachkala (since 1998) and the leader of the Dagestani branch of the United Russia party, who had been regarded as the second most influential politician in the region after Kadyrov. Amirov was accused of having contracted a murder, and after several months of investigation, also of terrorism and arms trafficking.<sup>157</sup> He was arrested in a dramatic operation that involved his fortress-like house being stormed by a special-forces unit sent from Moscow and him subsequently being evacuated by helicopter. The Dagestani Interior Ministry had not been notified of the operation. Those facts suggest that it was a deliberate demonstration of Moscow's power and determination. It was apparently supposed to send a message to elite groups in the Caucasus that no-one is untouchable. The campaign was an *ad hoc* measure aimed at ensuring peace before the Olympics, rather than improving internal relations in Dagestan in the longer term; besides Amirov, no other clan leaders were arrested, and those who remain at large will presumably start a turf war after the Olympics (the other detained officials were either Amirov's associates

<sup>156</sup> Wojciech Górecki, Managers instead of general-governors?..., *op. cit.*; Wojciech Górecki, "Creeping' civil war ..., *op. cit.* Russian media have also suggested that Khloponin had embraced the clan way of doing politics in the Caucasus, which manifested itself *inter alia* in the fact that he appointed his son-in-law Nikita Shashkin as deputy acting director general of the North Caucasus Resorts company (ОАО „Курорты Северного Кавказа“) (Максим Гликин, Светлана Бочарова, Максим Товкайло, Развитие Кавказа стало семейным делом, *Vedomosti.ru*, 15.05.2013. [http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/12025491/kavkazskij\\_klan\\_hloponina](http://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/12025491/kavkazskij_klan_hloponina)

<sup>157</sup> Саиду Амирову предъявлено обвинение в подготовке теракта, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 28.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/232422/>



or people who played no major role in the informal relations in Dagestan, and their detention was probably intended solely to avoid the impression that the enforcement authorities operated selectively).

The measures taken by Moscow directly aimed at ensuring the security of the Olympics resemble the planning of a special operation. During the Games, a *de facto* state of emergency will be in force in Sochi and in the surrounding area. Under President Putin's decree which entered into force on 23 August 2013, one month before the start of the Games, i.e. as of 7 January 2014, any meetings unrelated to the Olympics, including rallies and demonstrations, will be banned. The restrictions will remain in force to 21 March (i.e. the fifth day after the end of the Paralympics which are traditionally held after the Olympics). While it remains in force, the city will be divided into access-controlled zones (which it will be possible to enter only after undergoing a police check) and closed zones (with access only for the contestants, service personnel and sports fans). Cars with registration plates from other regions will not be let into Sochi without special passes.<sup>158</sup> The area surrounding the Olympic grounds will, practically speaking, be cordoned off. Soldiers from the Sochi Operational Group created in August 2012 (military spetsnaz, more than 10,000 troops and officers) will be patrolling the mountain areas, pathways, gorges and passes in the stretch of land from Abkhazia to the border between Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria (around 200 kilometres from the Olympic city). No tourists will be allowed into resorts such as Arkhyz and Teberda, or even the Prielbrusye area, which Emirate militants could theoretically operate from.<sup>159</sup> The border with Georgia is to receive additional protection from units of the 58<sup>th</sup> Army. In Sochi itself, 42,000 police officers will be deployed during the Games in addition to 24,500 other functionaries of the Interior Ministry and 10,000 soldiers of the Internal Troops,<sup>160</sup> as well as Cossack detachments.<sup>161</sup>

<sup>158</sup> На время проведения Олимпиады в Сочи будут запрещены митинги, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 24.08.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/228995/>; Лев Левинсон: в Сочи на время Олимпиады вводится режим чрезвычайного положения, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 24.08.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/229015/>

<sup>159</sup> The Sochi Operational Group includes two *spetsnaz* brigades of the Southern Military District: the 22<sup>nd</sup> Brigade and the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Алексей Михайлов, Защита Олимпиады в Сочи подключился армейский спецназ, *Izvestia.ru*, 26.02.2013. <http://izvestia.ru/news/543324>

<sup>160</sup> Колокольцев: МВД направит на Олимпиаду в Сочи дополнительные силы, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 30.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/232575/>

<sup>161</sup> Казаки встретят гостей Сочи на вокзалах, *Vse-o-sochi.ru*, <http://vse-o-sochi.ru/news/city/1032-kazaki-vstretyat-gostey-sochi-na-vokzalah.html>

On 10 September 2013, a special commission tasked with finding and removing illegal immigrants from Sochi began operation (many illegal migrants had worked on the construction of the Olympic facilities). Only those holding Sochi residency registrations will be allowed to stay in the city during the Games (in addition to technical personnel, the Olympians and the fans);<sup>162</sup> by 22 October functionaries of the Federal Migration Service had identified 1,800 addresses of apartments occupied by immigrants.<sup>163</sup>

The ceremony during which representatives of Vancouver, the host of the previous Winter Olympics, handed over the Olympic symbols to the city authorities of Sochi, was a perhaps insignificant but nonetheless telling example of how Moscow cares only about the propaganda and public relations success of the Olympics, and does so at any price,<sup>164</sup> in line with the maxim that the end justifies the means, even if that involves violations of the rights of local people and disregard for the historical context. During the stage performances accompanying the ceremony, the “native inhabitants” of the host city were represented by a Cossack choir, while the Cossacks had actually been the vanguard of the Russian troops that conquered the Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. No reference was made to the folk culture of the Circassians, the real native inhabitants of the Sochi area, either on that occasion or when the Olympic mascots and merchandising were being designed, despite pleas from representatives of the Circassian communities loyal to Russia which refrained from calling for a boycott of the Games.<sup>165</sup>

<sup>162</sup> В Сочи с 10 сентября начинает работу комиссия по обнаружению нелегальных мигрантов, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 2.09.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/229406/>; Human Rights Watch призвала МОК обратить внимание на задержания мигрантов в Сочи, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 3.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231057/>

<sup>163</sup> Ткачев: ФМС Кубани выявила в Сочи 1800 «резиновых квартир», в каждой числятся более 10 человек, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 23.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/232155/>

<sup>164</sup> For information about the cost of the Olympics, see e.g. Waclaw Radziwinowicz, Igrzyska oligarchijske, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 28.10.2013.

<sup>165</sup> Символика Олимпиады в Сочи должна отражать культуру черкесов, уверены представители адыгских организаций, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 8.04.2010. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/167516/>

## VII. CONCLUSIONS AND TENTATIVE FORECAST: RUSSIA WITHOUT THE CAUCASUS?

Russia conquered the North Caucasus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to more effectively administer the territories of today's Georgia, Azerbaijan and Armenia, which had been incorporated into the Russian empire several decades before. Then, as now, control of the region seems to be a prerequisite of Russia preserving its influence on the South Caucasus (and Moscow is indeed determined to maintain its influence there, as demonstrated by its adoption of a more active policy towards Azerbaijan and Armenia in the spring and summer of 2013, ahead of the Eastern Partnership summit in Vilnius<sup>166</sup>). The potential loss of the North Caucasus would seriously impede Russia's contacts with its ally Armenia (the only country in the South Caucasus with a Russian military base, and the only one to have joined the Moscow-controlled Collective Security Treaty Organisation). It would also hinder contacts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the breakaway republics that Russia has recognised, and with Iran. Moreover, energy transit routes important for Moscow are also located in the North Caucasus, including the Baku–Novorossiysk oil pipeline and the gas pipeline to Armenia, as well as roads and railways. The region also hosts important airports (the local hub in Mineralnye Vody), the sea ports of Novorossiysk and Makhachkala, spas and resorts (Yessentuki, Kislovodsk, Pyatigorsk, Anapa, Sochi), and the only winter sports resorts in the European part of Russia (the Sochi and Prielbrusye areas).

In view of all this, control of the North Caucasus transport and transit infrastructures and the borders with Azerbaijan and Georgia (including the Abkhazian and South Ossetian sections) is crucial for Moscow. From this perspective, stability in the region (which cannot be ensured in the longer term without full integration of the region with the rest of the country) is not an end in itself but rather a means to facilitate the control Moscow needs, or in fact to make it possible at all. By analogy, permanent instability in the North Caucasus would threaten the security of the whole of Russia to the extent that it would hinder this control, or spread beyond the region, as it does in the event of Emirate terror attacks in central Russia or ethnic clashes and conflicts involving migrants

<sup>166</sup> Aleksandra Jarosiewicz, Moscow is haggling with Baku ahead of the presidential election, *Eastweek OSW*, 28.08.2013, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-08-28/moscow-haggling-baku-ahead-presidential-election>; Szymon Ananicz, Armenia turns away from the EU, *Eastweek OSW*, 4.09.2013, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2013-09-04/armenia-turns-away-eu>

from the Caucasus in Moscow and other cities. A potential attack during the Sochi Olympics would be an extreme case, a blow to the prestige of Russia and of President Putin personally. If not for the real threat of instability being 'exported' beyond the North Caucasus, a state of civil war could even be provisionally beneficial to Moscow (assuming the conflict remains contained in the region and isolated, in the sense of being a confrontation between the militants and the *siloviki*, with no attacks on civilian targets), as the Emirate is the only real opposition to Ramzan Kadyrov left in the region. Elimination of the armed underground would further strengthen Kadyrov's position against Moscow because he would then no longer have significant opponents and would not need the support of the federal security forces, as is currently the case in the event of larger clashes with the militants (for example in February 2012; normally, however, the federal troops seldom have to leave their barracks). With the militants out of the picture, the financing that Chechnya receives from the central budget would be automatically reduced (a large portion of the funding is earmarked for the fight against terrorism, which does not necessarily mean it is spent as intended). In a situation of this kind it would be easy to imagine a scenario in which Kadyrov becomes the leader of a new instalment of the national liberation movement and exploits the advantages which Dudayev and Maskhadov did not have, such as the absence of internal opponents, the ethnic homogeneity of the republic, considerable financial resources and the potential support of at least part of the Muslim Ummah.

The growing sense of alienation experienced by ethnic Russians in relation to the North Caucasus and its inhabitants and vice versa may be likened to the situation in the final decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the region's informal status was that of an internal Russian colony. In the Soviet period the region was the poorest and the most under-invested part of the country,<sup>167</sup> and after 1991 the difficulties it experienced were exacerbated as a result of the two Chechen Wars and the various smaller conflicts. The sympathy that sections of the Russian intelligentsia felt for Chechnya's independence aspirations in the early 1990s and during the First Chechen War has been largely eroded by the

<sup>167</sup> In the Soviet period, so-called hidden unemployment existed in the North Caucasus, which affected the native inhabitants in particular. There are some indications suggesting that in the 1960s to 1980s the Soviet authorities deliberately stymied the region's development in order to stimulate emigration to central Russia, the Urals and Siberia and in this way to curb the demographic advantage of the Caucasus nations - which were not to be trusted - over the Slavic population, and to minimise the risk of upheavals and rebellions (in Stalin's time, deportations played the same role). Moscow's fears were not unfounded, as the last unit of the Chechen anti-Communist guerrilla led by Khasukha Magomadov was defeated only in 1976.

attacks attributed to the Chechens carried out on residential buildings and the raid into Dagestan staged by Basayev and al-Khattab in the summer of 1999. After the siege of the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow by the commando of Movsar Barayev in October 2002 and the attack of terrorists with links to Shamil Basayev on a school in Beslan in September 2004, the Caucasus started to be associated solely with terrorism and religious fanaticism. Currently one can even speak of *Caucasophobia* in Russia, with the rapidly growing, assertive Caucasus diasporas in Russian cities as the main objects of distaste for the region (while at the same time nationalist groups are also growing in strength in Russia, which exacerbates the ethnic tensions<sup>168</sup>).

As a consequence of the North Caucasus being perceived in this way, a growing number of Russians support the idea of separating the problematic region from their country. The Levada Centre has been studying this tendency since 1996, polling its respondents on their attitude towards the potential secession of Chechnya. In June 2013 12% of the respondents replied that Chechnya had already *de facto* seceded and 24% stated that they would support it, while 27% said they would not be particularly concerned about it. 13% said they would be against it, 10% believed such a scenario should be prevented even at the expense of war, and 14% had no opinion. In May 2011, the percentages had been 11%, 23%, 28%, 12%, 13% and 14%, respectively, and in April 2009 – 10%, 14%, 21%, 19%, 22% and 15%<sup>169</sup>. The separation scenario, however, is not among the options considered by the Russian leadership, at least officially. In his address to the Valdai Club in September 2013 Vladimir Putin said that the integrity of Russia was one of the “red lines” which “no-one is allowed to cross”,<sup>170</sup> but the very fact that the issue was discussed illustrates the unique and very specific place of the North Caucasus in the Russian state.

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The Olympic Games in Sochi are a very important point of reference for all the actors in the North Caucasus. The **Caucasus Emirate** will presumably seek to

<sup>168</sup> In late October 2013 Lev Gudkov, director of the Levada Centre, said he believed Russia was on the verge of carrying out pogroms. Глава „Левада-Центра”: Россия находится в предпogромном состоянии – вопрос лишь, где рванет, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 25.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/232217/>

<sup>169</sup> Отделение Чечни и Северный Кавказ, *Levada.ru*, 1.07.2013. <http://www.levada.ru/01-07-2013/otdelenie-chechni-i-severnoy-kavkaz>

<sup>170</sup> Statement by the President of Russia..., *op. cit.*

use them as an opportunity to demonstrate its potential and ability to destabilise the situation (despite the unprecedented security measures undertaken by Moscow). In view of Dokku Umarov's statement of 3 July 2013, in which he called on militants to disrupt the Olympics, it cannot be ruled out that attacks will be carried out or attempted before or during the Games (especially as the militants have not shown any activity beyond their republics since early 2011, which might suggest that they have been 'gathering strength' ahead of the Olympics). Attacks could occur both in Sochi or the surrounding area, and in other places, and the closer to the Olympic city, the smaller their scale would need to be; in Sochi or in Krasnaya Polyana even a small terror attack without casualties would guarantee worldwide publicity and panic among participants at the Olympics, while in Rostov-on-Don or Moscow a similar effect could only be achieved with a dramatic attack with hundreds of victims (the attack on a bus in Volgograd in October 2013 does not seem to follow the logic of Umarov's statement). But it is also possible that the Emirate no longer has the real power and destructive potential it certainly had in 2009–2011; and the speculations about Moscow's influence on the armed underground are impossible to verify.

It should be expected that once the Olympics are over, the Emirate will resume the tactics it employed from 2011 to 2013, i.e. combining attacks on representatives of the security forces and state bodies in the Caucasus with 'work at the foundations', i.e. promoting its ideas among children and young people, taking over control of mosques through friendly mullahs, and combating 'pagan' customs and secular lifestyles (in mid-October 2013, the prosecution authorities closed down a kindergarten in Makhachkala that was operating without licence under the name "Fatimka" and was probably run by Salafis<sup>171</sup>).

The Chechen leader **Ramzan Kadyrov** will most likely take no action ahead of the Olympics, but it is to be expected that once the Games are over, he will resume his attempts at extending his influence at least as far as to Ingushetia. It would only be possible to stop him if Moscow made a concerted effort at intervention. This would nonetheless be difficult to imagine in the present circumstances (eliminating Kadyrov would entail a brutal war over who should succeed him, and possibly even a new Russian-Chechen war).

In the run-up to the Olympics, **Moscow (the federal government of Russia)** will focus on ensuring the security of the Games, and subsequently will

<sup>171</sup> В Махачкале прокуратура закрыла детский сад, работавший без лицензии, *Kavkaz-uzel*, 13.10.2013. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231601/>

probably continue to implement the “Medvedev-Putin” strategy of transferring large sums of money to the region and making scattered investments in the economies of the Caucasus republics, as the adoption of the new three-year “South of Russia” programme appears to suggest. An approach of this kind will not solve the problems faced by the Caucasus nor will it guarantee success in the fight against the militants. It will, however, make it easier for Moscow to pursue a “divide and rule” policy by reinforcing divisions within the region (the rivalry of the local clans over access to funds from the central budget). This strategy requires money, but force-based methods (the “first Putin” strategy as a potential alternative to the current approach) are also very costly as they involve keeping a large military presence in the region and will in addition provoke stronger resistance and generate more emigration from the region.

In a less probable scenario, Moscow may attempt to ultimately quash the rebellion after the Olympics and at the same time discipline Ramzan Kadyrov. The deployment of large numbers of troops in Dagestan in the spring of 2012, already mentioned in this paper, may suggest that this is indeed a possible scenario. However, this variant would involve the risk of extreme destabilisation in the region (one of the possibilities being that Kadyrov could turn against Russia in rebellion), and the potential success could turn out to be short-lived as a Salafi Islamic revolution could break out afterwards (and such a revolution is rather unlikely at this moment because many Salafis do not want to be associated with the militants, in the event of a confrontation with the Emirate, which the Caucasus Muslims could perceive as an attack on their religion, it could become a realistic possibility). Nevertheless, it is indeed possible that Moscow will try to curb Kadyrov’s lawlessness outside the Caucasus (especially the operations of his bodyguard in central Russia, undertaken without Moscow’s consent).

Irrespective of the variant which is implemented, Moscow may further isolate the region from the rest of the country by tightening the rules on residency registrations in order to make it more difficult for people from the Caucasus to move to the other Federation subjects. This could be done e.g. by stepping up checks at the external borders of the North Caucasus Federal District.

**The regional elites** in the North Caucasus will seek to preserve the existing symbiosis – which is a *de facto* parasitic relationship – between themselves and the federal centre, because they find such an arrangement convenient—in return for loyalty and for “keeping order” within their republics, they receive not

only guaranteed financial benefits from Moscow, but also security. It should be expected, however, that, following the Olympics, Moscow will become more determined in its efforts to curb the most glaring cases of abuse of power and corruption.

In the foreseeable future neither **Azerbaijan** nor **Georgia** will play a major role in the Caucasus. However, Abkhazia may play such a role on a small scale for the North West Caucasus as a centre integrating the Circassian national movements. Its status will be helpful in this – while it has been recognised by only a handful of states, its position, even as part of Georgia, is formally higher than that of the Circassian republics of the Russian Federation. Sukhumi can for instance organise larger-scale resettlement programmes for Circassians from the Middle East (who can freely travel to Russia once they have Abkhazian passports).

The international situation may also influence developments in the North Caucasus and relations between Moscow and the region. Should the crisis over Iran deteriorate or war break out again between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh, this would lead to Russia stepping up its presence, including a military presence, in the South Caucasus. In this case Moscow would be more likely to resort to forceful methods again or at least to deploy major police and military forces in the North Caucasus and take over certain tasks from the local security forces, such as: protecting the internal borders (between the republics), manning road checkpoints and controlling strategic infrastructure. Any crisis in Russian-Georgian relations may also lead to a militarisation of the region.

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On 25 October 2013 the Russian State Duma adopted draft amendments to the Criminal Code and the anti-terror laws (Vladimir Putin signed the document on 3 November). Under the new rules, not only the perpetrators of terror acts will be financially liable for their consequences, but also members of their families and broadly understood “close persons”, unless they can prove that their assets were not gained through terror activities. Despite that caveat, the essence of the amendment brings the Russian legislation closer to the practice found in the North Caucasus and especially in Chechnya wherein houses belonging to the families of militants are demolished in order to dissuade them from participating in the armed underground. The adoption of the amendment shows that instead of trying to incorporate the North Caucasus into the



Russian legal, economic and social space, Moscow itself is adopting some of the principles and rules prevailing in the Caucasus (in this case, elements of collective responsibility). This stems from the federal leadership's helplessness in the face of the problems posed by the region and is a way to shirk off some of the responsibility for the fight against the insurgency.

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**WOJCIECH GÓRECKI**

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## APPENDIX 1

### Victims of acts of terrorism and clashes with the armed underground in the North Caucasus in the years 2010-2012, broken down by republic

Victims of acts of terrorism and clashes with the armed underground in the North Caucasus in the years 2010-2012		2010	2011	2012
Dagestan	Killed	378	413	405
	Wounded	307	411	290
Chechnya	Killed	127	95	82
	Wounded	123	106	92
Ingushetia	Killed	134	70	84
	Wounded	192	38	83
North Ossetia	Killed	24	4	7
	Wounded	171	10	7
Kabardino-Balkaria	Killed	79	129	107
	Wounded	82	44	49
Karachay-Cherkessia	Killed	2	22	5
	Wounded	2	12	2
Stavropol Krai	Killed	10	17	10
	Wounded	79	7	2
<b>Total North Caucasus</b>	Killed	754	750	700
	Wounded	956	628	525
<b>Total (killed and wounded)</b>		<b>1,710</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>1,225</b>

**Source:** Author's own calculations based on data from the Kavkaz-uzel.ru website.

## APPENDIX 2

### Victims of acts of terrorism and clashes with the armed underground in the North Caucasus in the years 2010-2012, in broken down by category

Losses of siloviki, militants and civilians		2010	Total killed and wounded As % of total victims	2011	Total killed and wounded As % of total victims	2012	Total killed and wounded As % of total victims
Civilians	Killed	180	669 (39.12%)	177	342 (24.82%)	89	216 (17.63%)
	Wounded	489		165		127	
Functionaries of security forces (siloviki)	Killed	225	692 (40.47%)	190	652 (47.31%)	211	600 (48.98%)
	Wounded	467		462		389	
Militants	Killed	349	349 (20.41%)	384	384 (27.87%)	409	409 (33.39%)
	Wounded	254		370		14	

**Source:** Author's own calculations based on data from the Kavkaz-uzel.ru website.

## APPENDIX 3

### Victims of acts of terrorism and clashes with the armed underground in the North Caucasus in 2013

Victims of acts of terrorism and clashes with the armed underground in the North Caucasus in 2013		I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII	VIII	IX
Dagestan	Killed	10	31	26	22	38	26	23	no data	32
	Wounded	14	12	15	13	91	17	8	no data	26
Chechnya	Killed	14	0	6	3	1	2	4	no data	4
	Wounded	8	2	7	6	1	15	7	no data	8
Ingushetia	Killed	0	5	7	8	3	0	2	no data	2
	Wounded	0	13	1	14	8	6	2	no data	4
North Ossetia	Killed	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	no data	0
	Wounded	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	no data	0
Kabardino-Balkaria	Killed	12	1	7	1	3	9	13	no data	6
	Wounded	1	1	0	0	2	4	1	no data	0
Karachay-Cherkessia	Killed	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	no data	0
	Wounded	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	no data	0
Stavropol Krai	Killed	0	0	0	0	0	2	4	no data	0
	Wounded	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	no data	0
<b>Total North Caucasus</b>	Killed	39	37	47	34	45	39	46	42	44
	Wounded	23	28	25	33	102	43	19	34	38
<b>Total (killed and wounded)</b>		<b>62</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>82</b>

**Source:** Author's own calculations based on data from the Kavkaz-uzel.ru website.

Total in January - June 2013:

495 victims including 241 killed and 254 wounded.

Dagestan: 315 victims (nearly 64% of the total number) including 153 killed and 162 wounded.

Chechnya: 65 victims (more than 13%) including 26 killed and 39 wounded.

Ingushetia: 65 victims (more than 13%) including 23 killed and 42 wounded.

Kabardino-Balkaria: 41 victims (more than 8%) including 33 killed and 8 wounded (the country with the second largest number of those killed).

Karachay-Cherkessia: 6 victims (more than 1%) including 4 killed and 2 wounded.

Stavropol Krai: 3 victims (less than 1%) including 2 killed and 1 wounded.

## APPENDIX 4

### Ethnic Russians in selected republics of the North Caucasus in the years 1989-2010

Russian Federation Subjects	1989			2010		
	Total population	Number of Russians	% of Russians	Total population	Number of Russians	% of Russians
Dagestan	1,802,579	165,940	9.2%	2,910,249	104,020	3.57%
Chechnya*	1,084,433	269,130	24.82%	1,268,989	24,382	1.92%
Ingushetia**	185,996	24,641	13.25%	412,529	3,215	0.78%
North Ossetia	632,428	189,159	29.9%	712,980	147,090	20.63%
Kabardino-Balkaria	753,531	240,750	31.95%	859,939	193,155	22.46%

**Source:** Author's own calculations based on the 1989 Soviet census and the 2010 Russian census.

\* In 1989 - Chechen part of the then Chechen-Ingush ASSR

\*\* In 1989 - Ingush part of the then Chechen-Ingush ASSR

**Map. Administrative divisions of the Russian North Caucasus and Georgia**



Abbreviations: N. O. – North Ossetia; S. O. – South Ossetia; ING. – Ingushetia