

The situation in Kabardino-Balkaria is deteriorating

One person died and over 20 were injured in a bomb explosion on 1 May in Nalchik, the capital of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic in the Russian North Caucasus. This was a further symptom of the worsening of the situation over the last few weeks in the republic. The local authorities even considered cancelling the local commemoration of Victory Day. It cannot be ruled out that the republic, which until now had appeared relatively peaceful, will undergo destabilisation, similar to that which in recent years has engulfed Ingushetia and Dagestan. The attack took place in the stands of a racetrack; the bomb exploded over the VIP box. Among the injured were the republic's culture minister and the former head of the republic's interior ministry. The bombers' target may have been the republic's president, Arsen Kanokov, who however did not arrive at the racetrack.

In recent weeks, four officials of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic's institutions of force have died in attacks (these include Zuber Shukayev, the head of the local interior ministry's Investigation Department), as many as died in all of 2009. These attacks are most probably the work of fighters from the North Caucasian Islamic underground. Their activation should be linked to the liquidation during a special operation on 24 March this year of Anzor Astemirov, a Kabardian considered by the government to be one of the main inspirations behind the Islamists' attack on Nalchik in October 2005. In the Kabardino-Balkar Republic, Islamic fighters have much back-up and resources, and there are many indications that they could destabilise the situation in the republic. This would mean the extension of the North Caucasian 'zone of instability', which currently covers Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia.

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