

## The North Caucasus: Russia's Internal Abroad?

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## SUMMARY

- What makes the relations between the North Caucasus and Russia so specific is that although the region remains economically and politically a part of Russia, the internal situation there is increasingly regulated by the region's own local traditions.
- None of the plenipotentiary presidential representatives in the region have ever had full-fledged control over the local elites, and attempts to rely on agencies directly subordinate to the federal authorities have encountered resistance.
- The situation in Chechnya depends essentially on two people: Vladimir Putin and Ramzan Kadyrov, and the departure of either from the political stage would have unpredictable consequences for both Chechnya and Russia.
- The North Caucasus is drifting further apart from Russia in civilizational terms because of the gap between the civil identity vector and an Islamic one that is gathering strength.

The North Caucasus occupies a particular place in Russia, creating many problems for the country, solutions to which have not yet been found. However, Russia itself, or more precisely, the federal Center, is responsible for many of the region's troubles. Mutual grievances, whether fair or not, lead to mutual discontent. People in the North Caucasus blame the region's problems on Moscow's erroneous policies in the region, while people elsewhere in Russia perceive the region as wishing to live according to its own internal law, but at the expense of the rest of the country; they view it as an entity alien to Russia, a kind of an "internal abroad," and see its secession as the only way out. How justified are these views, and is there indeed a way out of this crisis?

**Before trying to analyze the serious situation that has developed,** the evidence support-

ing the view that the North Caucasus is definitely a part of the Russian Federation should be examined.

First, the region is a de jure part of the Russian Federation, and its external borders form part of Russia's state border.

Second, even if primarily on a formal level, Russian federal institutions are present, Russian laws are in effect, and elections take place at various levels there. The region is part of the country's political system, and the Russian constitution and federal legislation are formally in force there.

Not only are the North Caucasus republics' economies part of the Russian economy, all sharing a common currency, but they are also subsidized by the Russian federal budget (100 percent of the local budgets in Chechnya and Ingushetia, and 80 percent in Dagestan),



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making the region completely dependent on the federal government economically.

Third, the issue of the possible “exclusion” of the North Caucasus from Russia is not on the official political agenda.

Fourth, the vast majority of people in the region oppose the idea of seceding from Russia. Separatism is quite unpopular in the region.

Fifth, the North Caucasus's status as a part of Russia is completely undisputed by the international community.

Why then, despite all of this, do people speak of the region as the “internal abroad” (or “exclave”<sup>1</sup>), and how justified is the use of such a concept in this case? The elements making up the term have dynamics of their own. “Internal” indicates the region's undisputed status as part of Russia, but “abroad” calls this status into question. The emphasis can shift from one element to the other, and the term's interpretation depends on the subjective viewpoint of its user. The main question is: what is the dominant trend? Is the North Caucasus's sense of belonging to Russia growing stronger, or is it undergoing growing alienation from the rest of the country and society?

The very fact that politicians and experts have turned to this term “internal abroad” is a sign of the constant difficulties that the federal authorities have had in the North Caucasus for twenty years now, the problems in governing the region, its separateness, and its perception in Russian society as an alien and even hostile element. Around 60 percent of Russians support the region's secession from Russia. Surveys taken in December 2010 after the nationalist demonstrations in Moscow and dozens of other Russian cities (provoked by an ethnic Caucasian killing a fan of Spartak, the country's most popular football club) showed that more than 70 percent of respondents supported the secession of Russia's three North Caucasian republics – Chechnya, Dagestan, and Ingushetia.<sup>2</sup>

**In my view, the “internal abroad” problem emerged long before the Soviet collapse,** and even before the Soviet Union was formed. The phenomenon's emergence can be dated back to the nineteenth century, when the Caucasus and Central Asia were added to the Russian Empire. Though part of the empire's territory politically and economically, they

continued to function internally on the basis of their own socio-cultural and ethno-religious traditions. Classic examples of the “internal abroad” of that time was the Caucasus, as well as the khanates of Bukhara and Khiva, which were protectorates of the Russian Empire. Russia's “European enclaves” of Poland and Finland were also a sort of “internal abroad,” especially Finland, which had its own laws, something that Russia's revolutionary social democrats made use of by hiding there to escape the Russian police.

Turning the “internal abroad” into a full-fledged part of the country is a lengthy and contradictory process. This process was not complete when the 1917 Revolution came. This partly explains why, when the Russian Empire fell apart, it was so easy for regionalist and ethnocentric tendencies (with foreign help of course) to turn the “internal abroad” into simply “abroad.” After 1917, the Caucasus Mountain People's Republic, the Mountain Republic, and the People's Republics of Bukhara and Khiva were formed and existed briefly. The Baltic republics gained independence for a period, whereas Poland and Finland departed for good. From 1920 till 1922, the Far East Republic existed, which was like an artificial buffer between Japan and Soviet Russia. It was essentially a part of the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic, but it began to develop its own national interests. The Far East Republic shared some similarities with the present-day Russian Far East, which economically feels a strong pull towards China and Japan. For the most part, these new entities were soon reincorporated into the Soviet Union, where, as in pre-revolutionary times, they were allowed to follow local traditions and ways of life (this could be compared to a kind of civil society in a sense), acquiring once again the informal status of “internal abroad.”

The Baltic republics, which maintained their European identity despite sovietization efforts, can also be regarded (after 1940) as an “internal abroad,” and in fact they were perceived as a sort of “Soviet abroad.”

Right up until the 1970s, the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union were on the rise, carried out real modernization, asserted common social values, and conducted a successful education policy. The alienation of the prov-

inces was gradually overcome, and these regions became part of the economic and political processes underway in the country. The authorities demanded loyalty from their populations, but at the same time let them follow their own customs in private life. Vsevolod Chaplin, a senior official of the Russian Orthodox Church and one of its main ideologues, said that "... The Russian Empire always followed three principles. Everyone lived in a single state, but people could follow their own faith and traditions, while taking four wives, having sharia courts, and living according to the clan system if they wished."<sup>3</sup> During the Soviet period, one could be a card-carrying member of the Communist Party but secretly still be a Muslim. A balance began to emerge between local and "distant" customs and rules (among Muslims, for example, people would hold two funerals: an official one, and one according to the religious rites.) Sometimes the authorities attempted to put "alien" elements to work for themselves, such as in the 1920s, when the so-called "red sharia" movement emerged in the North Caucasus, with its supporters trying to give the Bolshevik reforms a theological interpretation. As political analyst Nikolai Medvedev noted, in this region "tsarist, Soviet, and Russian laws always functioned in a particular way and were enforced as long as they did not fundamentally contradict local custom-based law (adat)."<sup>4</sup> At the same time, the supremacy of the country's national laws was not contested in any way. One could get around the laws, but it was not possible, as happens now, to openly ignore them.

The "foreignness" of the outlying regions seemed to be a passing thing. Their people had hopes for positive change and believed in the strength of Soviet power. During that period, ethnic minorities (who made up a majority in Central Asia and the Caucasus) developed a sense of pride in belonging to a great power. The Chechen separatist-liberation movement that lasted until almost 1941 was more the exception than the rule.

However, doubts about the strength of Soviet power emerged during World War II, when, hoping for Germany's assistance to get rid of the Bolsheviks and build their own national states, hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians and people from the Caucasus and Central Asia went over to the Nazi side.

The paradox, however, is that it was not only ethnic minorities who felt a sense of foreignness under the Soviet regime, at least politically, but millions of ethnic Russians as well. Throughout the war years, 1.3-1.5 million Soviet citizens of various ethnic origin served in the German armed services and police, most of them voluntarily.<sup>5</sup> Apart from that, a lot of people simply showed loyalty towards the occupation forces.

**The situation changed fundamentally after the Soviet Union's disintegration in 1991.** The republics of Central Asia and the South Caucasus, which were supposedly bound to the Soviet Union "for the ages," but which at the same time could be perceived as internal abroad, suddenly became foreign countries. A new term was invented for these countries – the "near abroad," which could be seen as the next step from the "internal abroad." This sent a signal

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to separatists to try first to secure a special status for their republics within Russia, and then allow them to transition to an actual foreign country albeit in Russia's "near abroad." It is noteworthy that these days, the term "near abroad" is losing its meaning, and the countries it covers are gradually turning into the full-fledged "abroad."

In Russia, this ushered in the era known as "the parade of sovereignties," when the elites in the former autonomous republics sought to get as much power from the federal authorities as they possibly could, adopted their own constitutions, formed parliaments, and created other attributes of statehood, such as national emblems, flags, and so on. In 1994, war began with the secessionist self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which by then had turned into an independent quasi-state. The war continued off and on until 2003, and along with the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in 1992, the Georgian-Abkhazian war in 1992-1993, Shamil Basayev's forces'

invasion of Dagestan in 1999, and the emergence of a radical Islamic political movement, reflected the instability that had developed in the region and was making it extremely difficult for the federal Center to govern.

The situation in the North Caucasus today could be described overall as “stable instability.” The degree of instability differs from one part of the region to another, of course. The instability is greater toward the east – Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Chechnya – than in the west of the Caucasus. However, the instability in the east is spreading to the neighboring republics, especially Kabardino-Balkaria. Several factors are fuelling this instability. First, there is the presence of a religious-political opposition. Extremist groups showed a great upsurge in activity in 2010, and the number of terrorist attacks went up by 100 percent. According to Deputy Prosecutor General Ivan Sydoruk, the number of attacks against law enforcement and military personnel rose by 11 percent and reached a total

is eighteen.<sup>7</sup> It is the second and even third generation of Islamists that is now taking part in armed attacks. A latent civil war with its own laws is underway in the region. All of this turns the North Caucasus into a special “zone” that is fundamentally different from the rest of Russia.

Another factor contributing to instability is the local population’s distrust of the federal authorities and of their willingness or ability to bring any real improvement to the region. There is also constant irritation with the security services, whose personnel frequently violate laws, torture suspects, demand ransom from their relatives, and take members of their families hostage.

The third cause lies in the weak and ineffective Russian legislation that, to a large extent, is just a formality in the North Caucasus.

In their attempts to secure the local elites’ loyalty, the federal authorities pump huge amounts of money into the North Caucasus. Aside from the tens of billions of rubles in federal budget transfers, Moscow is also financing a development program through 2020 for the region, in which federal funds account for 2.7 trillion rubles (with another 2.8 trillion rubles coming from private investors).<sup>8</sup> The federal authorities are unable to keep complete control over the use of these allocated funds, and it is impossible to say just how much of the money is misappropriated and ends up in local officials’ pockets. Some estimates put the figure at 30 percent or more. In 2010, Olga Timofeyeva, a member of the Stavropol City Duma, addressing Vladimir Putin at a United Russia regional party conference in Pyatigorsk, declared that half of the money sent for developing the North Caucasus “will be stolen again.” Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov made an “elegant” quip that suggests just how little control there is over the funds in the North Caucasus. When asked “Where does Chechnya’s money come from?” he replied, “Allah gives it. I don’t know; it comes from somewhere.”<sup>10</sup>

The federal authorities build their relations with the local elites not through institutions, but based on personal preferences and affinities. This ties North Caucasus officials, including the heads of Russia’s republics in the Caucasus, to specific Moscow politicians, but at the same time it implies irresponsible “improvisation” and unlawful acts, for which they bear no li-

of 529 incidents. More than three hundred insurgents were killed in 2010, including sixteen leaders of armed underground groups. A total of 298 insurgents and their accomplices were detained, and 58 terrorist attacks were foiled. According to the head of the main department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the North Caucasus Federal District, Sergei Chenchik, the *siloviki* carried out 61 counterterrorist operations in 2010, which killed 351 insurgents, including 32 armed underground leaders, and 453 people were detained on suspicion of involvement with the militants.<sup>6</sup>

Alexander Khloponin, the presidential plenipotentiary envoy in the North Caucasus, said in September 2011 that 1,000 insurgents were operating in the region (in reality the figure is considerably higher). “They get killed... but they recruit new people to their ranks,” he said, noting that “the average age of the insurgents

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ability. The relations between Ramzan Kadyrov and Prime Minister Putin are a vivid example. The departure of either from the political stage would have unpredictable consequences for both Chechnya and Russia (it was Kadyrov who said that Putin should be made president of Russia for life). This is why, despite its external appearance of stability, the situation in Chechnya remains fragile, because it essentially depends on just two people. One can imagine the delight with which Grozny received the news that United Russia decided at its party congress to propose Putin for a new term as president.

Curiously, this situation looks a lot like the model of relations between Russia and Chechnya (Nokh-chi) proposed at the start of the 2000s by Khozh-Akhmed Nukhayev, who was the first vice prime minister of Ichkeria from 1996 till 1997: "The president of the Russian Federation should sign the agreement on peace and partnership with Nokh-chi not as the head of state, but as an entrusted leader of the peoples making up Russia's multi-ethnic community and acting on their behalf, and he should seal the sincerity of his words by swearing an oath on the Bible, while the leader of the Chechen nation shall seal the sincerity of his word on behalf of Nokh-chi by swearing an oath on the Koran. And the single God shall be witness to this treaty."<sup>11</sup> This reflects an a priori consensus on unity and Chechnya's eternal inclusion in Russia, on the one hand, and the premise of very broad autonomy and an almost independent Chechen state, on the other.

There was talk at one time in the Russian establishment about the possibility (and even necessity) of partially restoring the Soviet system of governing the "national regions," when their heads (at that time the first secretary of the republic or oblast party committee) were accompanied by ethnically Russian second secretaries, whose job was to monitor and oversee the local administration. These functions have been taken over to some extent by the plenipotentiary presidential envoy in the North Caucasus Federal District, set up in 2009, and, earlier, by the special presidential envoys in the Southern Federal District. However, none of these envoys have ever been really able to control the local elites. Moscow's emissaries can only observe events. Resistance from the local upper *nomenklatura*, for exam-

ple, prevented Dmitry Kozak, the presidential envoy in the Southern Federal District from 2004 to 2007, from bringing financial inflows from Moscow under control.<sup>12</sup> Kozak did attempt to address this situation, but in the end he was forced to leave his post.

Attempts to act through agencies and organizations directly subordinate to the federal authorities run up against the local authorities' resistance. Ramzan Kadyrov's decision to expel from Chechnya the Operational Search Bureau of the Interior Ministry in 2007 was a classic example. The authorities in Dagestan refused to approve the appointment of Vladimir Rad-

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chenko as head of the Federal Tax Service's local branch in 2009, and in 2010, President of Ingushetia Yunus-bek Yevkurov did not agree to reappoint Mikhail Zadornov as head of the republic's Supreme Court. Each of these events may have its own background and explanations, but together they reflect Moscow's inability to push through its own appointees.

Current presidential envoy Alexander Khloponin also has insufficient leverage at his disposal. He has been given a primarily managerial role without any real political authority and can only relay the views of the country's leadership.

The North Caucasus has in large part lost respect for the federal government. One of the main reasons for this is the total corruption that pervades the entire system, knitting the interests of Moscow and local politicians and officials into a closely woven tangle. Both sides are partners in various corruption deals and kickback schemes. This erodes the psychological distance that existed between the Center (the bosses) and the outlying regions (the subordinates).

The force structures run from Moscow remain outside the local politicians' control, but the federal *siloviki* do not meddle in the North

Caucasus elites' internal affairs, and the latter, in turn, cannot influence the security officials, who focus on fighting the radical opposition.

Most of the heads of the North Caucasus republics were educated, got their initial professional and political experience, and built their businesses outside the region, and are therefore incorporated into Russia's general political and business class, which to some extent offsets Moscow's weakness in the region. Ingushetia's president, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, for example, graduated from the General Staff Academy and was deputy head of the Intelligence Directorate in the Volga-Urals Military District. Billionaire businessman Arsen Kanokov, president of Kabardino-Balkaria, graduated from the Plekhanov Institute of Trade and Economics and worked in Moscow for many years. Former President of Karachayevo-Cherkessia Boris Ebzeyev graduated from Saratov Legal Institute and was a former member of the Russian Supreme Court, and other politicians in the region – former Presidents of Ingushetia Generals Ruslan Aushev and Murat Zyazikov, the leader of the secessionist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, and General Dzhokhar Dudayev – also came from similar backgrounds. However, once in power at home they undergo metamorphosis, reintegrating into the traditional networks, reviving their ethnic and clan identities, and starting to play according to two sets of rules – federal and local – with the local rules taking ever more precedence. At a State Council Presidium meeting in February 2011, Dmitry Medvedev noted that in many republics people are hired based on ethnicity and stressed that this is “completely unacceptable.”<sup>13</sup> A similar situation can be observed in the other ethnic regions of the country, and indeed in the countries of Russia's near abroad, where the Russian minorities (sometimes quite numerous) have few, if any, representatives in government.

The federal government's helplessness is perceived in the North Caucasus as symptomatic of a weak Russia, a former great power that lost the competition with the West and feels unease and even fear in the face of the Islamic world. Moscow's obvious inability to suppress the Islamic opposition by force only emphasizes this impression of weakness in the eyes of the North Caucasus Muslims. Even the wars in Chech-

nya, which many in the region saw as a confrontation with the Muslim world, ended not in the federal forces' unconditional victory, but in political compromise, with pragmatic-minded separatists taking power, also reflecting Russia's limited options.

Relations between the North Caucasus and the federal authorities look a lot like client-patron relations built on the basis of agreements and personal commitments. At the same time, the presence of the security forces subordinate to Moscow carries overtones of a colonial administration. Government in the region thus appears as a far-from-perfect, unstable hybrid filled with internal contradictions.

**The North Caucasus is prey to a demodernization phenomenon** that is reaching into every sphere of life. This is not synonymous with complete economic collapse. The region has a functioning agriculture sector, developed commerce, a foodstuffs production industry, and a construction materials production sector, but all of these sectors are tied into the traditional social systems and customs and do not lead to any real change in social relations. The region's economy has virtually no modern sector, provides no opportunities to apply advanced technologies, and is not training human resources in modern skills and fields.

The region's secondary and higher education systems are in poor condition because of a general decline in teaching standards, among other problems.

The ethnic Russian population continues to leave. During the period from 1989 till 1999 alone, the number of Russians in the North Caucasus republics fell by 342,500. There are hardly any Russians at all still living in Chechnya and Ingushetia. The Russian population in Dagestan fell from 9.2 percent in 1989 to 4.7 percent in 2001. As ethnologist Valery Tishkov suggested, this only further complicates finding a solution to the problems of the North Caucasus: “It is difficult to imagine how one could go about reorienting the members of the local ethnic groups from their small market economic activities... which bring them ‘real cash’ every day, into manufacturing industries in their republics.”<sup>14</sup>

Knowledge of the Russian language is declining too, and this further increases the region's cultural isolation.

Society is becoming more archaic. In their general frustration and lack of confidence in the federal Center's ability to reverse the crisis situation, people turn to traditional Islamic ethno-cultural values. Rules and standards rooted in the Caucasus's adat and sharia traditions dominate people's minds, reshaping their individual behavior and socialization processes.

Adat – the set of rules born out of custom – and sharia differ considerably. Adat does not impose such strict prohibitions as sharia, does not extend its reach to major issues, such as government and state organization, and does not meddle in economics and politics, but concentrates on morals and ethics. On the other hand, Islam, the most secular of all the monotheistic religions, proposes solutions not only for private life, but primarily for social and political problems. These two traditions sometimes weave a single strand and sometimes contradict each other, but both move in the same direction – that of rebuilding the traditional foundations, thereby ostensibly ending instability, restoring social harmony, and overcoming the identity crisis.

Two points of view emerged on the prospects for establishing an Islamic-based order in the North Caucasus at the crossroads of the 20th and 21st centuries. The first view, that of the Islamic opposition, envisioned building an independent Islamic state, while the second view sought to organize society along Islamic lines but within the Russian Federation. The first view was taken up by the Islamic opposition's radical wing, and the second by clerics loyal to the authorities and enjoying the support of a large part of the local population.

The idea that there is a need for sharia law is taking ever deeper root among people in the region. This is particularly true in Dagestan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia, and applies to Kabardino-Balkaria, too, since the mid-2000s. There have also been calls in recent years for a return to Islamic standards in Karachayev-Cherkessia and Adygeya, and among North Ossetia's Muslim community, which accounts for 30 percent of the republic's population. Until recently this was a mostly peaceful process without excesses, a "soft Islamicization," as Islam specialist Akhmed Yarlykapov put it. However, in 2009-2011 the situation began to escalate: several murders of clerics loyal to the authorities

and public figures opposing Islamicization took place, and in May 2011 in North Ossetia, local mufti Ali-Khadji Efteyev, an ethnic Russian, was ordered to resign after giving his backing to radical views and criticizing the clergy.

As a body of law in competition with secular legislation, sharia has the advantage in Muslims' eyes of coming from God, and thus being an absolute law, even if open to differing interpretations. Representatives of all of Islam's different currents lay claim to the single true interpretation of sharia.

The visible results of sharia's spread can be seen in the increasing number of religious courts (several hundred in the region now), the revival and legitimization of the *wakuf* system (in which property, including land, is transferred to mosques' ownership), the prohibitions on the sale of alcohol introduced in parts of Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, the ban on gambling (in Dagestan), bans on shows by performers whose acts violate Islamic norms, the introduction of a dress code for women, and the open spread of polygamy (especially among businessmen and officials). The *salafis* and supporters of traditional Islam share similar views on all of these issues.

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The media, including electronic outlets, are also engaged in promoting sharia, particularly in Chechnya, where the local state TV and radio company broadcasts a large number of religious programs.

Sharia's supporters are primarily young people who were born or reached adulthood after the Soviet collapse and did not receive any good-quality secular education, but studied in madrasas and Islamic universities, including those in the Arab countries, grew up in an environment of ongoing conflict, and took part in the Chechen wars. These young people are the most receptive to

Islamic indoctrination. The older generation, raised in the Soviet tradition and not used to observing religious prohibitions, takes a more skeptical and sometimes even hostile view of sharia. This is the cause of the conflict between the generations that has already begun, but that local politicians and spiritual leaders prefer to pass over in silence.

**Most migrants from the North Caucasus are law abiding, but people typically judge the behavior of migrant groups by the negative acts that stick in their memories. Russian ethnologists take the view that “the idea of some kind of cultural incompatibility between the Slavic majority and the non-Slavic minorities is nonsense”.**

The North Caucasus identity comprises three dimensions: a Russian civil dimension, an ethnic dimension, and a religious (Islamic) dimension. These three dimensions can follow the same direction, or can move in different directions. Movement of the civil and Islamic dimensions in different directions, or even confrontation between them, is becoming increasingly common. The civil identity no longer gives the Caucasus peoples the feeling of representing a great power, whereas self-identification as members of a huge 1.5-billion strong global Muslim community raises their self-esteem. The Islamic dimension of identity looks more impressive and helps to overcome the “younger brother” complex that ethnic minority groups invariably felt during the Soviet period. Islamic values and standards are gaining strength, marginalizing general civil values. The divergence between the Islamic and national dimensions of identity are contributing to the North Caucasus’s cultural or even civilizational drift away from Russia.

It is not just members of the Muslim clergy who act as conduits for Islam’s spread. Some secular politicians also promote and support it. This is especially true of Ramzan Kadyrov, who uses Islam as a rallying call in order to consolidate his own power. At a republic-wide academic and practical seminar, “Islam in Chechnya: History and Modernity,” which was held in Grozny in 2008, the point was made that “Islam is becoming a legitimate factor in Chech-

nya’s social and political life.”<sup>15</sup> Kadyrov is taking control of mosques and turning them into one of the primary institutions through which to keep watch on society, particularly young people. At a republic-wide conference of *qadis* in 2008, Mufti of Chechnya Sultan Mirzayev proposed that quarterly religious education seminars take place in Chechnya’s schools for children<sup>16</sup> (this is highly reminiscent of the Russian Orthodox Church’s efforts to introduce classes on “the basics of Orthodoxy” as part of the secular curriculum). It is possible that the Chechen authorities’ attempts to regulate young people’s lives on a religious basis was what prompted Alexander Khloponin’s remark in 2011 that “young people feel a lack of freedom and want to develop more dynamically”<sup>17</sup> (this comment stirred a lot of debate, although Kadyrov himself was perfectly tolerant in his reaction to it).

Kadyrov demands observance of sharia standards of behavior and seeks to have women dress according to Islamic tradition. In 2010, during the first days of Ramadan, representatives of the muftis approached women in central Grozny and reproached them for their immodest dress. Kadyrov supports polygamy and proposed introducing special “Muslim marriage certificates” that would need to be personally signed by an imam. In September 2011, Kadyrov had Islamic relics brought to Chechnya – a cup that belonged to Mohammed and two blankets used to cover his grave – and turned their display into an event of national significance (it is worth noting too, that Kadyrov’s opponent, State Duma member Ruslan Yamadayev, who was mysteriously killed in Moscow, said that Kadyrov was building a sharia state).

The native Caucasus ethno-cultural traditions – the *adat* – have not taken as aggressive a form as Islam’s offensive, but the fact that society turns to them is also an expression of the search for more effective institutions and instruments for stabilizing society that offer an alternative to the federal government and its institutions. The calls to create a modern “mountain people’s ideology” that the Caucasus people could use to deal with the reality of today’s world and combine it with their traditional behavioral standards and moral codes are also an expression of this same search.<sup>18</sup>



In Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov is attempting to revive the *teip* (local clan) system and thinks that this could help to preserve national cultural monuments, such as the famous Ingush watch towers. In Chechnya, the *wird* (small Sufi brotherhoods) system has been revived, with the Kadyrov family belonging to one of them (Kunta-khadji). Councils of elders are being established throughout the region. In 2011, Arsen Kanokov put forward this initiative, saying that these councils could help to educate young people and keep them from falling into the radicals' embrace. However, these councils do not enjoy much support today, and the elders' influence has weakened a lot over the last 20 years.

The return to traditions such as blood feuds is another sign of society's increasingly archaic turn. With an ineffective modern court system, blood feuds offer a means of regulating relations between social groups (families, clans), but at the same time fuel continued hostility between the opposition and the security services: a policeman kills a member of the opposition, and the opposition then kills the policeman or one of his relatives in revenge. Because of family and clan solidarity and collective responsibility for a family member's death, the cycle of mutual vengeance becomes endless. Ramzan Kadyrov and Yunus-bek Yevkurov have both said on numerous occasions that they have succeeded in reconciling the parties in blood feuds, but they have done so not as state officials but as respected people making use of their informal authority. Official bodies, on the other hand, are often helpless when it comes to dealing with conflicts of this kind, and, of course, such conflicts mark the region as distinct and serve as a symbol of its fundamental difference from the rest of Russia.

**Antipathy towards the North Caucasus is growing in Russian society.** This irritation is being fuelled not only by the region's local conflicts, religious extremism, and terrorism, but to an ever greater extent by migration from the region. This discontent is understandable, but at the same time, the problem is aggravated by Russia's lack of any normal migration policy.

There are no exact figures for the number of people from the North Caucasus living in Russia. In particular, there are no figures on the number of migrants from the North Caucasus living in Moscow,<sup>19</sup> St. Petersburg,

the Volga region cities, towns in the Krasnodar and Stavropol Krajs, the Rostov, Astrakhan, and Orenburg Oblasts, and Bashkortostan – all places where they have a visible presence.

The negative attitude towards people from the Caucasus is a typical expression of the hostile reaction to the “other” – people who differ in behavior, religion, the degree of internal community bonds that tie them together, physical appearance, and temperament. This is a perfectly explainable reaction towards those who have found themselves in an alien environment. What's more, the Caucasus migrants are economically active and enthusiastic in setting up their own businesses, buying up real estate, and often getting the upper hand in economic competition with the native local populations.

Most migrants from the North Caucasus are law abiding, but people typically judge the behavior of migrant groups by the negative acts that stick in their memories. Russian ethnologists take the view that “the idea of some kind of cultural incompatibility between the Slavic majority and the non-Slavic minorities is nonsense.”<sup>20</sup> Negative information about people from the Caucasus is often rooted in real events, however, as they increasingly attempt to demonstrate their ethno-cultural traditions and right to particular behavior in an in-your-face manner. There were real cases of people dancing the *lezginka* dance on the central squares of Pyatigorsk, Kislovodsk, and Stavropol in 2010; the “Caucasian motorcade” that blocked traffic on Moscow's inner ring road in 2009 was real, too, and Chechens started a shoot-out in a Moscow trolley that same year. In the northern town of Kondopoga, a dispute between Chechens and local people in 2006 resulted in several people being killed. The dispute arose out of a banal everyday quarrel, but turned into an interethnic clash. In 2010, at a youth camp in Tuapse, vacationing Chechens and local youth got into a fight during which the Chechens tore the Russian flag apart. In 2010, a fan of the Moscow football club Spartak was killed in a fight with Caucasus natives. The killing grabbed the headlines and triggered mass demonstrations, including in Moscow's Manezh Square, in which approximately 5,000 people participated (an unusually large figure for protesters in present-day Russia). Several headline-grabbing killings took place in 2011,

too, including one that led to the conviction of Rasul Mirzayev, a mixed martial arts world champion from Dagestan. The number of crimes committed by migrants is on the rise in Russia, and the term “ethnic crime,” firmly denounced by Caucasus representatives, has gained currency in society.

In the Stavropol Region, which has been included in the North Caucasus Federal District, but where Slavs account for more than 80 percent of the population, people have started collecting signatures to have the region taken out of the federal district. This is motivated by the arrival in the region of a large number of North Caucasus natives, which is fuelling interethnic tension, and which led to a more than four-fold increase in the crime rate in the course of 2010.<sup>21</sup> In Stavropol and the other southern regions, the authorities are taking various measures to limit migration, acting, they say, “out of the need to prevent open interethnic conflict” and lower the level of social tension.<sup>22</sup>

The media are also responsible for creating the image of the “bad Caucasian.” This is especially true of the print media, which often play heavily on emotions rather than giving objective information, and also of popular literature, especially detective series, such as *Anti-Terror*, *Special Forces*, *Officers*, and so on, with print runs in the millions, in which the main villain, the “evil doer,” is a Caucasus native these days.<sup>23</sup> The war in the Caucasus is a popular theme in songs performed not just by professional singers but also by street musicians dressed in military uniforms and singing outside metro stations or in suburban commuter trains.

The nationalists’ strong influence is also helping to shape this negative image of the Caucasians. Former State Duma member Andrei Savelyev, for example, calls for pressure against the peoples whose development “directly harms Russia and the Russians.”<sup>24</sup> In his view, the Caucasus natives (he calls the Chechens “ethno-parasites”) come to Russia to “get rich at the expense of the local people and then leave again.”<sup>25</sup>

Whatever the situation, the stereotype of “individuals of Caucasus nationality” (the term originally came from police reports) that is engrained in the general public consciousness is associated not with scholars or artists from the Caucasus but with everyday insolence on the part of migrants and with the instigators

and participants in interethnic clashes. Some say that this “Caucasophobia” is a spontaneous phenomenon born out of specific circumstances and will gradually fade away again with time and eventually disappear altogether. Unfortunately, this is far from being the case. This phobia has, on the contrary, become a deeply-rooted part of the mass consciousness and is born out of the general systemic crisis in the North Caucasus, which is unlikely to be overcome in the next ten years. Its potential influence on Russian society as a factor encouraging nationalistic views should not be underestimated.

**The concept of the “internal abroad”** reflects the reality of the North Caucasus’s drift away from Russia. Of course, the region is still part of Russia, sharing with it all of the country’s political, social, and economic problems, but Caucasus society is operating ever more openly on the basis of ethno-cultural and Islamic traditional standards. Federal control is weakening and in some situations is becoming nominal, and Russian laws are not capable of being enforced. Russian civil identity is increasingly giving way to a more dynamic Islamic identity. The federal authorities are not capable of achieving real change in the situation and controlling the budget transfers to the region, essentially handing it over to the local elites in exchange for the sole condition of loyalty. The North Caucasus is becoming self-governing, and this seems to suit both sides. Russian society takes a very negative view of the region’s exceptional status. Migration from the Caucasus is encountering ever greater hostility. Ultimately, it is all of this that is paving the way for the region’s definition as the “internal abroad.” This in turn fuels the increasing calls to separate the region from the rest of Russia, or at least from the federal budget (demonstrations using this slogan took place in different Russian cities in the second half of 2011). These trends are gathering force, despite Moscow’s attempts to implement a new policy and bring the North Caucasus “closer to Russia” once more.

The term “internal abroad” is offensive to both sides: to Moscow because it contains the implicit accusation of the Center’s inability to consolidate the entire country; and to the majority of the people of the North Caucasus because it suggests that they are “aliens” and pariahs in their own country.

In the late 2000s–early 2010s the North Caucasus has been at a crossroads. The dichotomy in Russian–North Caucasus relations remains unresolved. Neither the local separatists' victory nor the region's "exclusion" from Russia are possible. One can envisage, however, a specific form of relations between the North Caucasus and the federal authorities in which the region remains economically and politically part of Russia, but in the near future will have a fairly autonomous existence in terms of how it organizes its society and internal socio-cultural existence. Living partly in accordance with its own traditions but at the same time observing the letter of Russian federal law, the North Caucasus might be able to eventually become an organic part of a multi-ethnic and multi-faith Russia, but this will take considerable time and a lot of effective political effort.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I. Sukhov, "Dengi daet Allah" [The money comes from Allah], *Moskovskie novosti*, Oct. 5, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> "Svyshe 70% chitatelei *Novogo regiona* vystupayut za otdelenie Kavkaza ot RF" [More than 70 percent of *Novy region* readers support the Caucasus's separation from Russia], *Novy region*, Dec. 24, 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Protobierarch Vsevolod Chaplin, "Trudnye dorogi Kavkaza" [The Caucasus's difficult roads], *Nezavisimaya gazeta religii*, Nov. 17, 2010.

<sup>4</sup> N. Medvedev, "Chto meshaet etnopoliticheskoj stabilnosti na Severnom Kavkaze?" [What hinders ethno-political stability in the North Caucasus?], *Politicheskaya regionalistika i etnopolitika* (2010): P. 9.

<sup>5</sup> O. V. Romanko, *Krym pod piatoi Gitlera: Nemetskaya okkupatsionnaya politika v Krymu (1941-1944)* [The Crimea under Hitler's boot: Germany's policy in occupied Crimea (1941-1944)] (Moscow: Veche, 2011), P. 49.

<sup>6</sup> BSNews, "Kolichestvo teraktov na Severnom Kavkaze za god uvelichilos vdvoe" [The number of terrorist attacks in the North Caucasus doubled over the year], <http://www.blackseanews.net/read/6316>.

<sup>7</sup> Rosbalt, Sept. 30, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> A. Chernykh, A. Aripkhanov, and P. Netreba, "Natsionalisty trebuyut otdelenia Kavkaza ot byudzhet" [Nationalists demand that the Caucasus be cut off from the budget], *Kommersant*, Sept. 29, 2011.

<sup>9</sup> L. Kovalevskaya, "Putin na konferentsii v Kislovodske: v SKFO poyavitsya mashtabnyi gornolyzhnyi kompleks" [Putin at the Kislovodsk conference: a major ski resort will be built in the North Caucasus Federal District], *Stavropolskaya Pravda*, July 9, 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Newsru.com, Oct. 5, 2011.

<sup>11</sup> Kh.-A. Nukhayevev, *Vedeno ili Vashington* [Vedeno or Washington] (Moscow: Arktogeya-Center, 2001), P. 230.

<sup>12</sup> The North Caucasus politicians resort to various means in their attempts to free themselves from federal control. In May 2007, for example, when [head of the Audit Chamber] Sergei Stepashin came to Grozny to audit the proper use of budget funds, Ramzan Kadyrov decorated him with the diamond-studded medal of Akhmad Kadyrov (O. Allenova, "Zavari potikhonky kalitky" [Seal the gate quietly], *Kommersant Vlast*, No. 27 (731) (July 18, 2007).

<sup>13</sup> S. Tarasov, "Natsionalnye osobennosti kadrovoi politiki" [National features of personnel policy], *Rossiiskie vesti*, Feb. 7-14, 2011.

<sup>14</sup> V. Tishkov, ed., *Russkoe naselenie respublik Severnogo Kavkaza* [The North Caucasus republics' Russian population], [http://www.valerytishkov.ru/cntnt/publikacii3/kollektivn/puti\\_mira\\_/russkoe\\_na.html](http://www.valerytishkov.ru/cntnt/publikacii3/kollektivn/puti_mira_/russkoe_na.html).

<sup>15</sup> *Islam v Chechne: istoria i sovremennost* [Islam in Chechnya: its history and its present] (2008), P. 63.

<sup>16</sup> *An-Nur [Grozny]*, Oct. 15, 2008.

<sup>17</sup> "Kadyrov: Vpolne estestvenno, chto Khloponin vyskazyvaet mnenie o molodezhnoi politike v Chechne" [Kadyrov: It is perfectly natural that Khloponin should express his views on Chechnya's youth policy], Portal Yuzhnogo regiona, Sept. 12, 2011, <http://www.yuga.ru/news2389546/?print=1>.

<sup>18</sup> I. Babich, "Poiski sovremennoi 'gorskoj ideologii' na Severnom Kavkaze" [The search for a modern 'mountain people's ideology' in the North Caucasus], in *Kavkaz i globalizatsia* [The Caucasus and globalization], *Zhurnal sotsialno-politicheskikh i ekonomicheskikh issledovaniy* 1(1) (2006): P. 154.

<sup>19</sup> I would like to note in passing that the number of Muslims living in Moscow is somewhere between 600,000 and 2 million, which in and of itself shows the lack of accurate information about the ethnic and religious makeup of Russia's capital. The situation is little better with statistics in other cities.

<sup>20</sup> V. Malakhov, *Ponaekhali tut... Ocherki o natsionalizme, rasizme i kulturnom phyuralizme* [All these outsiders flooding in... Sketches on nationalism, racism, and cultural pluralism] (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 2007), P. 101.

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<sup>21</sup> S. Sukhova, "Chto na vykhode?" [What is the result?], *Itogi*, Oct. 18, 2010, P. 14.

<sup>22</sup> L. Khoperskaya, "Migratsionnye protsessy i politicheskaya situatsia na Severnom Kavkaze" [Migration processes and the political situation in the North Caucasus], in *Migratsii na Kavkaze* [Migrations in the Caucasus] (Yerevan: 2003), P. 63.

<sup>23</sup> A. Malashenko, Carnegie Moscow Center, *Islam dlya Rossii* [Islam for Russia] (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2008), PP. 65-77.

<sup>24</sup> A. N. Savelyev, *Obraz vraga: Rasologia i politicheskaya antropologia* [The face of the enemy: racial theory and political anthropology] (Moscow: Belye alvy, 2007), P. 290.

<sup>25</sup> A. N. Savelyev, *Vremya russkoi natsii* [The Russian nation's hour] (Moscow: Knizhnyi mir, 2007), P. 39.

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