

North Caucasus: the Russian Gordian knot

The key problems and conflicts in the region and the effect thereof on the future of Russia

Maciej Falkowski

Theses

1. North Caucasus is the most instable part of the Russian Federation: since the early 90's, there has been going on the military conflict in Chechnya, which is gradually spilling over into the other republics of the region, terrorism seems to have occupied its regular position in the political life of Caucasus, organised crime is flourishing, the tension persists there and military incidents and attacks are breaking out every now and again. During the recent year, the destabilisation of the region, which affects many fields of Russian political and social life, has grown to an alarming size.

2. There are many reasons for the instability in the region; they stem from numerous political, religious and socioeconomic problems and conflicts. They all overlap, interweave and create a complex network. The most difficult problem is the war in Chechnya, lasting since the early 90's, which is spilling over the neighbouring republics, takes increasingly more drastic shapes and poses a threat to the security and stability of the entire country. The conflict stimulates dangerous tendencies and processes all over Caucasus: it is one of the reasons for the intensifying anti-Russian sentiments in the local communities, and it accelerates their drifting towards radical Islam, etc. Moreover, the region is a scene of numerous ethnic conflicts (the conflicts in Dagestan, the western part of Caucasus, the Ingush-Ossetian conflict), religious (mainly inside Islam) and conflicts between the indigenous Russian people and immigrants from Caucasus and Central Asia in Stavropol and Krasnodar Krajs as well as acute socioeconomic problems (poverty, unemployment, overpopulation, growing crime).

3. Since the collapse of the USSR, the Kremlin has failed to frame a consistent and long-term concept for development of North Caucasus and its integration with the rest of Russia. The Russian authorities' policy towards Caucasus is limited to emergency actions, responding to crises instead of preventing them. It consists in abortive attempts to liquidate the effects of negative tendencies and events and not on counteracting the causes thereof. The authorities are still making the same mistakes, unwilling to recognise their

obvious failures. The key elements of the policy include: preventing any interference of other countries and international organisations in the region, conducting the “antiterrorist operation”, supporting the puppet regimes in particular republics, marginalisation of the opposition and the far-flung propaganda in the mass media, which shows a false picture of the reality. A great role in the Caucasian policy of the Kremlin is played by law enforcement structures, whose interests often collide with the interests of the Russian state. Such a policy does not lead to resolving problems and conflicts, on the contrary, it leads to deepening and escalation thereof.

4. The future of North Caucasus depends on either settlement or worsening of the existing problems; if they intensify, Caucasus will be plunging in chaos. The instability in the region is accompanied by further-reaching processes, i.e. gradual drifting apart of Caucasus from Russia, its derussification and increasingly faster Islamisation. Such tendencies, which in the prospect of several decades could end in a high degree of autonomy or even separation of the region from the Russian Federation, could be slowed down through working out of a comprehensive concept for development of the region. However, for the time being, the Kremlin has neither political will nor ability to develop and implement such a concept: the main reasons for that are the views of the Russian ruling elites and the general condition of the Russian state (the lack of sufficient financial means, lack of proper staff, resistance of the law enforcement structures, degeneration of the state structures, etc.).

5. North Caucasus is a region where many serious problems are concentrated. The future of Russia will depend on their resolution (the Chechen war, other ethnic and religious conflicts, rapid growth of non-Russian and Muslim population, decreasing number of ethnic Russians, etc.). So long as Moscow is unable to resolve them, Russia will be an unpredictable and instable country, in danger of terrorism and convulsed by internal conflicts. Unless the Kremlin copes with the issue of Caucasus, it will not be possible for Russia to enter on the path of democratic reform, to make the attempt to create a modern country, open to global cooperation. Caucasus is today a source of

disintegration of the Russian state, of its structures and society; unless this is held back, in the longer term, it may become a source of its collapse. Russia’s position in the post-Soviet area and, above all, in South Caucasus will also depend on the way the situation in North Caucasus develops.

Introduction

This paper is meant to systematise and describe the complex political, social, religious and economic situation in the region, above all, the key problems and conflicts, which give rise to the regional destabilisation. In our analysis of the causes of instability in North Caucasus and of the Kremlin’s policy in the region we will try to answer the question about the future of the Russian Caucasus and the influence of the processes and tendencies existing there on the future of Russia.

I. The key problems of the region

North Caucasus is situated in the southern part of the Russian Federation, between the Black and Caspian Seas. In the south, it borders on Georgia and Azerbaijan, which together with Armenia form South Caucasus¹. North Caucasus consists of eight autonomous republics, which are mainly inhabited by indigenous Caucasian peoples (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Adygeya and Kalmykia) and the Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai (where Russians are a majority)². [For detailed characteristics of the republics and kraia see the annex].

North Caucasus is characterised by a multitude and complexity of problems and conflicts existing there. They overlap, interweave and create a difficult to describe complicated network. Often, sources of one conflict can be found in another, and solution to a given problem is impossible without finding a way out from another. For instance, it is impossible to analyse the internal situation in Dagestan or Ingushetia without considering the situation in Chechnya; likewise it is difficult to understand the ethnic problems of the region without analysing the socioeconomic

situation. Therefore, to understand the complex situation in the entire North Caucasus and to identify the sources of instability there, it is necessary to systematise the problems which we have to deal with and to briefly describe each of them.

1. The war in Chechnya

The most serious problem of the region is the military conflict in Chechnya, lasting since the early 90's, the consequences of which affect not only North Caucasus but also Russia as a whole. The Chechen war is a conflict between the metropolis and the periphery aspiring to independence (for this reason it is often referred to as an anti-colonial war), which has risen out of the still remembered bitter events of the past (the conquest of Chechnya by Russia in the 19th century, the Tsarist and Soviet repressions aimed against Chechens, etc.). To justify its policy of force in the republic, the Kremlin attempts to place the events in Chechnya in the context of fight against international terrorism, while in fact the source and main reason for the conflict is the Chechen separatism, the striving of Chechens to leave the Russian Federation and create a state of their own.

1.1. The conflict in 1991–1999

The conflict broke out in autumn 1990, when the delegates gathered at the 1st Congress of the Chechen Nation announced separation of Chechnya from the USSR and proclaimed its independence. A year later (August 1991), the so-called Chechen revolution broke out (the abolishment of the communist authorities in Grozny by supporters of independence), during which gen. Jokhar Dudayev reached out for power (he was elected president in November 1991). After the retreat of the Russian army from Chechnya (1992), the republic gained real independence. The economic blockade imposed on Chechnya by Moscow and attempts to abolish Dudayev with the usage of the opposition had proven unsuccessful, therefore the Kremlin decided to launch a military intervention in December 1994³.

The so-called first Chechen war had been lasting until August 1996 and ended in a military and political disaster for Russia. The federal forces were not capable of defeating the Chechen guer-

rillas, who were supported by local civilians, and the war was unpopular among the Russian public; therefore president Boris Yeltsin, who was seeking re-election, decided to conduct peace negotiations with the separatist leaders. Under the accords signed in Khasavyurt on 31 August 1996, Chechnya gained real independence (the status of the republic was supposed to be determined during bilateral negotiations until 2001), the federal troops were withdrawn from the republic and the power was again taken over by the separatists⁴.

In January 1997 presidential election was held in Chechnya. The winner was the Chechen chief of staff Aslan Maskhadov⁵. The period of the second quasi-independence of Chechnya (1996–1999), during which the authorities in Grozny were awkwardly trying to lay the foundations for the Chechen state, was characterised by a constantly worsening internal chaos. The mass unemployment, the material and moral consequences of the war, the lack of any external support; all this led to unprecedented increase in organised crime (kidnappings for ransom, illegal trade in oil, guns, drugs, etc.), and the weakness of the central authorities contributed to the internal anarchy. Quite soon a strong Islamic opposition grew in Chechnya (its leaders being Shamil Basayev, Movladi Udugov and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev), which, from 1998, started making demands for Maskhadov's stepping down as president and transformation of the republic into an Islamic state. The crisis in the republic reached its climax in spring 1999, when the so-called Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan was held. The Chechen and Dagestani Islamic radicals opted at the congress for uniting both republics into an Islamic state by way military fight against Russia⁶.

1.2. The second Chechen war: from occupation to Chechenisation

The attack launched from the territory of Chechnya on Dagestan by Islamic activists led by Basayev and Khattab in August and September 1999 and the series of terrorist attacks in Russian towns (September 1999), which Chechens were accused of, gave the Kremlin a pretext for making another attempt to subjugate the rebel republic with the usage of military means⁷. In the atmosphere of

fear of subsequent attacks, heated by Russian propaganda, and the anti-Chechen campaign in the mass media, Vladimir Putin, who was Prime Minister at the time, terminated the Khasavyurt accords and promised launching an “antiterrorist operation” in North Caucasus. Having dislodged the militants from Dagestan, the Russian forces started heavy bombardments of Chechnya and, on 1 October 1999, they marched in the territory of the republic (the beginning of the military operation caused mass escape of Chechen civilian population; during the first months of the war, nearly 350 thousand Chechens took shelter in Ingushetia alone⁸). The so-called second Chechen war, which then began, has not ended until now. After several months of relentless fight (by spring 2000), Russians managed to occupy the entire Chechnya and defeat the key militant units, who started on guerrilla warfare.

During the first two years (2000–2002) the control over the de facto occupied Chechnya was in the hands of almost exclusively the federal army, which reaped profits from oil trade, robbing the local residents and other illegal sources of income, violating human rights on a massive scale, which had the features of homicide (mass murders, rape, robbery, torture, trade in people, etc.)⁹. The Kremlin started gradually, albeit insignificantly, curtailing the powers of the military from mid 2002. That was an element of the so-called Chechenisation policy, the official objective of which was the legalisation of the pro-Russian Chechen authorities, while the unofficial one was changing the nature of the war from Russian-Chechen into interchechen. As a part of the Chechenisation policy (the key figure of which was Akhmad Kadyrov, chief of administration of the republic and, from October 2003, president of Chechnya) the powers of the pro-Russian authorities in Grozny were gradually being increased, the Chechen militia was created, a constitutional referendum (March 2003) and presidential election (October 2003) were held in the republic, enlistment of former militants into pro-Russian forces was supported, etc. Such actions were accompanied by a far-flung propaganda in the mass media, with the usage of which attempts were made to persuade the international opinion and the Russian public that law and order had been restored in Chechnya¹⁰.

In spite of the successful image of Chechenisation in the mass media, it soon appeared that it could not bring the conflict in the republic nearer to the end. The policy failed, which was also a bitter political defeat of president Putin, after the 2004 events: death of president Akhmad Kadyrov (on 9 May; as a result of his assassination at the stadium in Grozny) and the whole series of terrorist attacks organised by Chechen militants¹¹. They proved that, contrary to what the Kremlin was claiming, the guerrillas still had significant forces and were able to destabilise the situation in the entire region. Chechenisation did not have any chance of success for several reasons. Firstly, it was opposed by the Russian army (the military think that the power in the republic should not be handed over to Chechens), for whom this meant weakening of their own position in the republic and reduction of their incomes from the businesses they were running there¹². Secondly, even the moderate militants were not admitted to take part in the political dialogue in Chechnya, which prevented any attempt to settle the conflict at its source, i.e. the Chechen separatism. Thirdly, the pro-Russian authorities in the republic were (and still are) made up of people who are only guided by the interests of their own clan, whose only purpose is to keep the power and get rich. Those individuals commit crimes against their own nation; they are hated and perceived as traitors by a vast majority of Chechens¹³.

Even though the Kremlin’s policy in Chechnya leads to escalation of the conflict in the republic, still nothing seems to indicate that it could be changed in the nearest future. This year presidential election, held on 29 August, in which Alu Alkhanov, minister of internal affairs of Chechnya, was elected to be Kadyrov’s successor, has proven that the policy is being continued.

1.3. The consequences of the war for Chechnya and for the entire region

Initially, the second Chechen war used to have a stabilising effect on North Caucasus. The decisive actions of the Kremlin in the republic significantly curtailed the quite strong separatist tendencies and influence of radical Islam in the region. The uncompromising defeat of the militants enabled president Putin to have greater

control over the local regimes and to get rid of such inconvenient local leaders as e.g. president of Ingushetia, Ruslan Aushev (1992–2001), who was replaced by a general of Federal Security Service Murat Ziazikov. The war had also caused further erosion of the Caucasian community spirit: while during the first war, Chechens had been popular and had enjoyed common sympathy in the region, starting from 1999, most of residents of Caucasus began to believe Chechens were the main culprits of their own troubles, which translated into acceptance of the military solution to the Chechen problem.

However, as the conflict in North Caucasus dragged out, there intensified socio-political processes that caused serious destabilisation of the situation in the region and extending military actions over other Caucasian republics (first of all, Ingushetia and Dagestan). Such processes concerned: the Chechen separatist camp, the Chechen society and residents of other Muslim republics in Caucasus.

Two very significant changes took place in the militants' camp: radicalisation of the war conducting methods and changes in the ideology followed by the guerrillas. In the military field, the separatists started using terrorist methods (including suicide attacks) and started to bring their military actions out of the territory of Chechnya¹⁴. While, initially, president Maskhadov was against carrying out military actions outside of Chechnya, now, even he started threatening Russia with attacks all over its territory (though he still condemns terrorism)¹⁵. In terms of ideology, noticeable is the turn from nationalism towards Islamic ideology among both radicals and moderate Chechens. At the beginning of the current war, most of the militant commanders claimed they were fighting first of all for independence, followed the idea of a secular democratic state and were oriented to the West, counting on its support. As the war stretched on, their views were evolving towards radical Islam: today, a significant part of the militants are fighting not under the independence slogans but under Islamic slogans¹⁶.

Since the beginning of the second war in Chechnya, significant changes have also taken place

in the Chechen society. The anti-Russian sentiments are extremely intense; most of Chechens do not consider themselves to be citizens of the Russian Federation and perceive Russian soldiers and representatives of the authorities as occupiers. This concerns both those Chechens who sympathise with the militants and those who formally represent the pro-Russian option. Moreover, the number of radical Islam supporters and the religiousness level are constantly growing among Chechens. Increasingly more residents of Chechnya support or at least justify the radical fight methods used by the Chechen commanders. Such processes (anti-Russian sentiments, increased religiousness and radicalisation of views) mainly concern the young generation, who were growing up in the conditions of war and did not get even primary education. The Russian culture is strange to them and, unlike middle-aged people, they do not feel attached to Russia and they are not sentimental about the USSR.

Similar processes are also taking place in other Caucasian Muslim republics. They stem from the deepening frustration about Moscow's policy in the region, which translates into increasing sympathy and even support for Chechens. The belief that it was the Chechens who were guilty of provoking the conflict is slowly replaced by accusing the Kremlin of unwillingness to end the war and treating residents of Caucasus as second-class citizens¹⁷. The radicalisation of sentiments in Caucasus is also due to the transferring of the methods used in the "anti-terrorist operation" outside of Chechnya; particular unrest is caused by the activity of the so-called Federal Security Service death squadrons, who kidnap, take to Chechnya, torture and often murder many innocent people in Ingushetia and Dagestan¹⁸. Young residents of Caucasus, seeing that they receive nothing in exchange for their loyalty to Russia, start supporting Chechens and joining their troops. In Caucasus, noticeable is also significant intensification of anti-Russian sentiments and increasingly more radical Islamisation, in particular, among young people (including the young elites of the region¹⁹). Islam is gradually becoming a unifying factor for residents of the Muslim republics of the region, which, seemingly, causes revival of the idea of Caucasian solidarity, which failed back in the 90's. As a result of such pro-

cesses, the Chechen war is gradually spilling over the entire region, the region is destabilised and non-Chechen guerrilla units, which organise terrorist attacks in the south of Russia, propagate separation of Caucasus from the Russian Federation and creation of an independent Islamic state there, emerge²⁰. Many things seem to indicate that, unless the processes are slowed down, Moscow will have to deal soon not with a Chechen war but with an all-Caucasian conflict²¹.

2. The ethnic conflicts

2.1. Dagestan: the land conflict

Dagestan is troubled by the greatest number of ethnic conflicts, which additionally overlap with the severe economic and social problems. The basic problem is the conflict between the peoples inhabiting the lowland and piedmont parts of north Dagestan (i.e. Kumyks, Chechens-Akins, Nogays and Russians) and the mountain peoples (Avars, Dargins, Laks and others). Its sources should be traced back to the policy of the Soviet authorities, which, starting from the 50's, had been conducting mass displacements of people from the highland regions down to the lowlands. It was mainly the Avars (the largest ethnic group of Dagestan), the Dargins and the Laks who had been displaced and forced to settle in the land of the Kumyks, Nogays, Russians and Chechens. Some time later, the voluntary migration of highlanders down to the lowlands began and it has been lasting until now.

The conflicts between the highlanders and lowlanders existed already in the USSR times, yet the totalitarian Soviet system kept them under control. *Perestroika* and the collapse of the Soviet Union caused national revival in Dagestan and uncovering of the so far hidden ethnic conflicts, the basis for which was a clash of economic interests. The situation was aggravated by the economic crisis, which affected North Caucasus much stronger than other parts of the former empire. The national movements of Kumyks, Nogays, Chechens and the Russian population started making demands for curtailing the settlement of the highland peoples on the lowlands and even for return of the land that had been taken away from them by the authorities. In turn, Avars, Dargins and Laks started forming military units,

threatening they would use force, if any attempts to remove them from the land occupied by them were made. The conflict between Chechens-Akins and the Avar and Lak peoples in western Dagestan is particularly bitter. In 1944, Chechens, who had lived there, were deported to Central Asia, their "national" (Aukhovskiy) district was liquidated, and Avar and Lak settlers came to replace the Chechen population. In the late 80's, the Chechen national movement demanded restoration of the Aukhovskiy district and displacement of the Laks and Avars from there, which met with determined resistance of the latter²².

Although the ethnic conflicts in Dagestan had many a time dangerously aggravated (especially in the 90's), the situation never ran out of control and each time open clashes were luckily avoided. Still, none of the ethnic problems linked to land conflicts has been resolved, which causes that they can escalate any time; and this will destabilise the situation in the republic²³.

2.2. Dagestan: the fight for power

There is constant fierce rivalry between the particular ethnic groups of Dagestan for power and influence in the republic. Since the late 80's, the power has been concentrated around the Dargin clan led by the 74-year-old Magomedali Magomedov, the Chairman of the State Council. Some Kumyk and Avar clans are allied to him, while the opposition core is made up of Avars, Lezgins and Laks. Neither representatives of the authorities (they are mainly former communist apparatchiks and people who have criminal past) nor most of the opposition members follow any ideology or have any clear political views or programmes. Their main motivations include striving for power, getting rich and dominating the other ethnic groups. Politicians who offer any concrete political programmes, make appeals for reconstruction of the socio-political life in the republic or those who enjoy actual prestige in the republic are systematically liquidated by either the authorities or the criminal groups connected with the authorities²⁴.

Until mid 2004, the political fight was unofficial: it was not mentioned publicly; instead the alleged "friendship between the peoples of the republic" was manifested on the outside. The

main method of elimination of the opponents was political murder (of which radical Islamists were usually accused) or their intimidation and forcing them to leave Dagestan, and not elections, which were notoriously fixed. The strongest trump card of the clan of Magomedov, which let him keep the power in Makhachkala for such a long time, was the support of the Kremlin, which in exchange for loyalty and support to its own policy in Caucasus gave him *carte blanche* to conduct his internal policy²⁵.

The situation in the republic changed when the new constitution was adopted as a result of the 2003 referendum (the collective State Council was liquidated and the post of the president of the republic was introduced; the first presidential election has been scheduled for 2006). The new constitution shook the previous system of power distribution in the republic, which, despite its fragility, has never turned into an open military conflict. The main division line has emerged between Magomedov and the Dargin and Kumyk activists, who support him, and Avar and Lezgin politicians²⁶. Although blood has not been shed in Dagestan as yet, as the election is drawing nearer, the situation is getting increasingly tenser, and there is real danger that an ethnic conflict will break out. The situation is additionally complicated by the proximity to Chechnya, activation of the Islamic opposition in Dagestan and the fact that every Dagestani politician has a several-thousand-strong, well-armed unit of militants at his disposal²⁷.

2.3. Dagestan: the Lezgin question

When the USSR broke up, the Lezgin, who inhabited southern Dagestan and northern Azerbaijan, were artificially separated by the state border. The Lezgin national movement, which emerged then, was advocating unification of the Lezgin territories and creation of one Lezgistan as a part of Russia. This aroused anxiety in Azerbaijan, whose authorities feared that Russia, which was striving for maintaining its influence in South Caucasus, could use the Lezgin question to destabilise the internal situation in their country. Lezgins have many a time protested against the tightening of the Russian-Azeri border, which makes life more difficult for inhabitants of the frontier. There have also happened several clashes

between the Lezgin population and Azeri border guards. Even though the Lezgin issue has noticeably relaxed since the late 90's, still it remains a very serious potential source of tension in south Dagestan (*inter alia* in Derbent, inhabited by Lezgins and Azeris) as well as in the relations between Russia and Azerbaijan²⁸.

2.4. The Ingush-Ossetian conflict

The tension between Ossetians, who are members Orthodox Christians and speak a language belonging to the Iranian branch, and Ingushes, who are Muslims and are closely related to Chechens, has existed since 1992. In that year, the two peoples engaged in a brief military conflict: as a result of fights for the so-called prigorodnyi district (the suburbs of Vladikavkaz) more than 800 people were killed and nearly 30 thousand Ingushes escaped from Ossetia to Ingushetia (most of them still live in refugee camps)²⁹. The enmity between the two nations, manifesting itself *inter alia* in their mutual, almost total, isolation, has not eased, even though more than 12 years have passed since the end of the clashes. Moreover, following the tragic terrorist attack in Beslan, in which many Ingushes took part, re-escalation of the conflict cannot be excluded (the public opinion in Ossetia blames Ingushes for organising the attack)³⁰.

The Ingush-Ossetian conflict is so bitter for several reasons: its protraction, failure to sign a compromise peace accord after the 1992 fights (the conflict ended in a ceasefire, forced by Moscow), the negative effects of the war in Chechnya, the growing cultural and civilisation-related differences between the secularized Ossetia and the fast-Islamising Ingushetia, and the demographic processes (Ingushetia has the greatest population growth rate in the Russian Federation, while in Ossetia it is much lower).

Another outbreak of fights between Ingushes and Ossetians would have very negative consequences for Moscow, mainly due to the fact that both republics are situated in the central part of Caucasus, which is strategically the most important one. This would also frustrate the Kremlin's policy in South Ossetia, which following the war in the early 90's has separated from Georgia and is today a quasi-independent state, unofficially

supported by Moscow (Tbilisi strives for taking over control of South Ossetia, while Russia aims at freezing the conflict, which enables it to exert pressure on Georgia; South Ossetia would like to join the Russian Federation).

2.5. Conflicts in the western part of North Caucasus

The danger of turning of the conflicts in the western part of North Caucasus into military clashes has many a time seemed imminent. These include, above all, the conflicts in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia (between the Turkic-speaking Balkars and Karachays and Kabardins and Circassians, whose languages belong to the Caucasian branch)³¹. Both republics were artificially created in the 1930's. When, following the collapse of the USSR, the Balkar, Karachay and Circassian national movements emerged (Circassians, Kabardins and Adygeyans basically form one nation) it seemed that they would naturally break up. Since the early 90's, the nationalist opposition has *inter alia* made demands for either separation of Balkaria and creation of a separate republic or its unification with the Karachay, as well as for uniting all the lands inhabited by the Circassian people (Kabarda, Cherkessia and Adygeya), creation of one republic and gradual separation from the Russian Federation. The slogans of return of the so-called *muhajir* from Turkey and Middle East countries to their ancestors' land were also popular in the Circassian national movement³². However, like it was in the case of Dagestan, the Kremlin actively supported the local communist elites, who have kept the power in Nalchik and Cherkessk and prevented any such divides³³.

Even though the conflicts between Kabardins and Balkars and between Karachays and Circassians have never turned into a military confrontation, the tension is all the time there and it substantially grows before every elections. The most serious crisis emerged during the 1999 presidential election in Karachay-Cherkessia; mass demonstrations and riots sparked then in Cherkessk between supporters of the Karachay Vladimir Semionov and the Circassian Stanislav Derev³⁴.

3. The religious conflicts

3.1. The major religions of the region

In terms of religion, North Caucasus can be divided into two parts: the Russian Orthodox north and the Muslim south. Most of the residents of Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai and 2/3 of the residents of North Ossetia are members of the Russian Orthodox Church. A great majority of the population of the autonomous republics practice Islam in the Sunni version (only Azeris living in Dagestan are Shiites)³⁵. There also live representatives of other religions, including Buddhists (most of the Kalmyks), Jews, Catholics, Protestants and Russian Old Believers, in the region.

3.2. The divides and conflicts inside Islam

The North Caucasian Islam is not uniform; it is inside it that the most numerous religious conflicts occur. The conflicts, which had been growing as Islam had been reviving since the collapse of the USSR, became subdued after the outbreak of the second Chechen war. However, currently, they are getting sharper again.

The bitterest conflict is the one between the supporters of the so-called traditional Islam and the reformers; it mostly concerns the Dagestani and Chechen Islam. In Caucasus, the following groups are referred to as traditionalist:

- **representatives of the so-called official Islam:** these include the muftiats of particular republics, which are called the Spiritual Administrations (e.g. the SA of Muslims in Dagestan), each of which forms a separate organisation; all the "legal" Muslim clergymen report to them;
- **sheikhs and members of Sufi brotherhoods (*tariqas*):** many Muslims of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia belong to them; in Dagestan, the most popular is the *Naqshbandiya* brotherhood, and in Chechnya, the *Kadiriya*; the sheikhs and their murids form very strong and well-organised groups; they have an immense influence on the political life of Chechnya and Dagestan³⁶.

Representatives of the official Islam and members of the Sufi brotherhoods claim that the North Caucasian Islam differs from the rest of the Islamic world; it has its own traditions, ceremonies and forms of cult. Both of them do not

see any need for religious reform (they treat the reform advocates as extremists) and they strive for isolation from the external world. Both of them are loyal to the authorities and they closely cooperate with them, which ensures them favour and support from the authorities in fighting their opponents (except for Chechnya, where many members of the brotherhoods fight on the side of the militants)³⁷.

The reformers, who are usually referred to as Wahhabis or Salafis (Arabian *salaf* means ancestor or going back to the roots), can in turn be divided into:

- **moderate:** a small group made up of representatives of the intelligentsia and clergy; they oppose the official Islam and Sufism, claiming these forms are fossilized, outdated and discredited due to their cooperation with the authorities; in their opinion, Islam in Caucasus should be reformed and cleaned off the non-Islamic loans, which occurred in the Soviet times; they are advocates of the idea of Muslim solidarity (both in Caucasus and all over the world); they believe that the changes should be made in a peaceful way; they are not well-organised, they do not found any organisations or political parties;
- **radicals:** a conglomerate of small groups of people organised in the so-called *Jamaats*; similarly to the moderates, they opt for reform of the North Caucasian Islam, yet they believe that this should be done through abolishment of the current authorities (both secular and religious); some of them are advocates of creation of an independent Islamic state in Caucasus; the radical Wahhabis are stronger and more numerous than the moderate ones; they are mainly active in Chechnya and Dagestan, yet also in Ingushetia, Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria³⁸.

The conflict between the Wahhabis and the traditionalists has existed since the appearance of the former ones in Caucasus³⁹. It reached its peak in 1996–1999. At that time, the centre of the radical Islam was the uncontrolled by the Kremlin Chechnya, which, in early 1999, was proclaimed an Islamic state, and the Shariah law was introduced in its territory⁴⁰. Many Chechen commanders then accepted the Wahhabi ideology as their own and supported its followers outside of Chechnya⁴¹. Wahhabis were also very active in Dage-

stan. The best-known “Islamic experiment” in the republic was the proclamation in spring 1998 of several villages of Buinaksk district (the so-called Kadar zone) a free Islamic territory (where the Shariah law applied) and driving representatives of the authorities out of there. As the second Chechen war began, the Kadar zone was liquidated by the federal troops (September 1999).

Since 1999, Islamists in North Caucasus (both activists and people who sympathise with them) and any opponents of the official Islam have been persecuted. This has taken a particularly brutal form in Dagestan, where under the pressure of the Muslim clergy a law that bans propagation of Wahhabism has been adopted. In spite of the persecutions, the number of supporters of radical Islam in Caucasus is constantly growing: most of the Chechen militants today are followers of the Islamic ideology; strong Wahhabi groups exist in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia and in Stavropol Krai. The conflict of Wahhabis with the traditionalists and the authorities is intensifying and it soon may become much more serious than the ethnic conflicts. The stimulating factors include the Chechen war spilling over the neighbouring republics, the persecution of the Caucasian population by the Russian law enforcement agencies and the terrible socioeconomic situation in the region. The authorities reject any possibility of dialogue with the Islamists; therefore this movement is getting increasingly more radical and it not infrequently chooses terrorism as a fight method⁴².

It is very difficult to assess the scale of external influence on the development of the Wahhabi movement in North Caucasus. The Kremlin exaggerates this, trying to prove that radical Islam and terrorism linked to it are an effect of the influence of the international terrorism. However, the reality is slightly different. Although contacts of the North Caucasian radicals with Islamists all over the world, including with terrorist organisations, really exist, still they should not be overestimated. Both terrorism and development of radical Islam in Caucasus are a direct result of the regional problems, and the existence of an external factor is of secondary meaning in this context.

3.3. The Orthodox Church vs. Islam

Disputes between Islam and the Orthodox Church are rare in the region. Nevertheless, the growing tension and escalation of violence there bring about first signs of such a conflict. This, in particular, concerns the regions inhabited mostly by Russians, to which increasingly more Muslims are migrating. Conflicts between the indigenous population and immigrants (usually economically motivated) very often take the form of religious conflicts. They are also presented in this context by some Russian nationalist politicians and some hierarchs and clergymen of the Russian Orthodox Church. There also are increasingly more conflicts between members of the Orthodox Church and Muslims over the construction of temples and other places of religious cult.

4. The problems of the “Russian-speaking” Caucasus

One of the greatest problems of the Russian-speaking Caucasus (Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai) is the issue of migrations (both internal and external) and the ethnic and religious conflicts linked thereto, as well as the problem of growing xenophobia and radicalisation of the public sentiments.

4.1. The migrations

Since the break-up of the USSR, the North Caucasian region, which used to be located inside the country, has become the southernmost part of the Russian Federation, a region directly bordering on the turbulent South Caucasus and Central Asia. The military conflicts in the countries of those regions, the economic crisis that emerged there as a result of the breakdown of the Soviet economy and the intensifying anti-Russian sentiments caused that Stavropol and Krasnodar Krai have since the early 90's become targets of mass immigration⁴³. The immigrants who go there can be divided into the following groups:

- **ethnic Russians**: they are leaving both the states of South Caucasus and Central Asia and the autonomous republics of North Caucasus (nearly 300 thousand Russians, most of whom settled in both kraies, have left Chechnya alone);
- **Armenians, Azeris, Georgians, Abkhazians and other indigenous residents of South Caucasus**: initially, they were mostly refugees from the

areas troubled by military conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, thereafter economic emigrants joined them;

- **Chechens, Dagestanis and other North Caucasian autochthones**, who leave their republics due to the war or economic difficulties (vast unemployment, hunger for land, overpopulation);
- **Tajiks, Kazakhs, Uzbeks and other representatives of the indigenous population of Central Asia**: initially, they were refugees from civil-war-torn Tajikistan and groups prosecuted due to their ethnic background (e.g. Meskhetin Turks); thereafter economic emigrants joined them.

The influx of non-Russians is accompanied by the constantly lessening number of the native Russian population due to low population growth rates (small number of births and high mortality rate) and emigration of Russians to other regions of the Federation (mainly to Moscow) and abroad (United States, Western Europe, Israel). In contrast, among the immigrants (mainly Muslim), the population growth rate is very high, which makes them even more numerous in southern Russia⁴⁴.

4.2. The conflicts of Russians with immigrants

Initially, conflicts between Russians and immigrants resulted mainly from contradictory economic interests. The newcomers, who were more mobile, hard-working, willing to take the hardest jobs and engage in the most risky enterprises and, additionally, supported by the well-developed clan structures, were perceived by Russians as strong competitors, who were taking away their jobs and dishonestly getting rich at their expense. Problems with contacts between the two groups stemmed from the differences between their cultures and mentalities as well as from the common stereotypes and superstitions. The prejudices and misunderstandings started gradually turning into enmity manifesting itself in increasingly more frequent violent conflicts and gradual mutual isolation of both communities. The factor that has stimulated the ethnic conflicts, which are now turning even into racial conflicts (hatred to all the “black”, as Russians call residents of Caucasus and Central Asia), is the war in Chechnya and the terrorist attacks in Russia, which are linked to the war.

The local authorities not only do nothing to counteract the mounting wave of xenophobic sentiments among Russians (which are referred to by analysts and journalists as Caucasophobia or Islamophobia), but also even instigate such attitudes. This is the case for instance in Krasnodar Krai, the governor of which, Aleksandr Tkachov, known for his nationalist views, has for many years lobbied in Moscow for sharpening of the immigration law, including for making easier deportation of illegal immigrants and introducing settlement quotas for particular ethnic groups⁴⁵. Repressions, harassment, deprivation of rights and other forms of persecution used by the authorities (above all, militia and administration clerks) against immigrants from Caucasus and Central Asia are considered normal there⁴⁶. Pogroms of non-Russian population are sporadically organised by neo-fascist or Cossack gangs, while the authorities remain totally passive⁴⁷.

5. The socioeconomic problems

5.1 The socioeconomic situation

North Caucasus is one of the poorest regions of the Russian Federation. Already in the Soviet times, it was backward as compared to other parts of the empire; there was hidden unemployment there (e.g. in Chechnya and Dagestan) and many people were forced to emigrate in search for jobs. The break-up of the USSR, the collapse of the centrally planned economy, the outbreak of military conflicts, closure of many borders: all this has only aggravated the existing problems.

The situation is the worst in Chechnya, whose economy is in ruin despite the existence of high-quality oil deposits in the republic; most of the towns and villages destroyed during the two wars (including Grozny) have not been rebuilt, land cultivation or cattle breeding is impossible in many parts of the republic due to the minefields. The unemployment level is as high as 80%, and people only survive owing to barter economy and trade in illegally produced oil. Although the Russian budget allocates enormous funds for economic reconstruction of Chechnya (since 2000, 62 billion roubles, i.e. over US\$ 2 billion), most of them remain in the hands of officials in Moscow and Grozny and some are taken over by the militants⁴⁸.

The economic situation in such republics as Dagestan, Ingushetia or North Ossetia is not much better: basically, no enterprises are operating there, most of the population live in unimaginable poverty, surviving only thanks to cultivation of small bits of land around their houses, relatively regularly paid old-age pensions, small trade and work of young men outside Caucasus. The only ones to be well-off are the people having connections with the authorities (approximately 2% of the population), whose sources of income include: subsidies from the federal budget, trade in profitable goods (mainly oil and caviar), forcing out protection money from the population (e.g. for accepting a child to a school, at militia stations, for “safe” business running, etc.)⁴⁹.

The economic situation is even aggravated by the high population growth, which e.g. in Ingushetia is approximately 11 per mils annually, and in Dagestan the rate is approximately 9⁵⁰. The hunger for land and the lack of jobs in the mountains forces a multitude of people (above all, the young) to emigrate to the cities, where they do not have any bright prospects, either; as a result, in such cities as Makhachkala (its population has grown from 300 thousand in 1989 to 550 thousand in 2004) or Vladikavkaz, there are districts where people live in extreme poverty, there are increasingly more unemployed and desperate people, ready for anything⁵¹.

The constantly worsening economic conditions and the lack of any prospect for improvement of the situation have very far-reaching social effects. The lack of jobs causes many people choose crime as their way of living and the common availability of guns makes North Caucasus the most criminalised region of the Russian Federation⁵². One of the most profitable sources of income is kidnapping people for ransom, which is not only done by armed gangs in Chechnya and Dagestan, but also by federal soldiers and pro-Russian Chechen groups (above all, the troops reporting to deputy prime minister of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov). The economic crisis is also the cause of the progressing disintegration of family and clan ties (mass emigrations of men in search for jobs lead to break-up of many families) and decay of the traditional moral values (earlier, e.g. there was no prostitution, begging or homelessness in

Caucasus; now, this occurs increasingly more often). Additionally, more and more people are engaged in drug production and smuggling⁵³.

5.2. The danger of social revolt

The current socioeconomic crisis in Caucasus is so serious that an outbreak of mass social unrest or even social revolt cannot be excluded. In particular, this concerns the eastern part of the region, where the situation is the hardest, the population growth is the highest and the population is the youngest. In case of a sudden destabilisation of the political situation, which is possible any time there, the accumulated social frustration may lead to an uncontrolled explosion. This is even more probable because the conflict between the great majority of people living in extreme poverty and the commonly hated elite, which is constantly getting richer, is getting bitterer in those communities. The fact that people show deep dislike to the authorities can be proven for instance by the silent support they give to the radical Islamist groups which organise attacks on representatives of the Dagestani law enforcement agencies (since the beginning of this year, tens of them have been killed). Regardless of their enormous efforts, the authorities have not managed to catch even one perpetrator of such crimes. For some time now, increasingly more Dagestanis, Ingushes and representatives of other ethnic groups join Chechen guerrilla forces or form their own military units. Many facts also indicate that residents of the republics neighbouring on Chechnya sympathise with or actively help the militants moving towards the republic. Unless the situation in the region starts improving, it cannot be excluded that, if e.g. radical Islamists make an attempt to abolish the authorities in one of the republics, a great part of the population can take their side.

II. The Kremlin's Policy in North Caucasus

Regardless of the existence of so many problems and conflicts in the region, the Kremlin has failed to work out any coherent and long-term concept for the development of North Caucasus or a programme for integration of the region with the rest of the Russian Federation that would take

into consideration its ethnic, religious and social peculiarities. The authorities often take emergency actions in response to crises instead of preventing them; decisions taken by various authorities responsible for the Kremlin's policy in Caucasus are often mutually contradictory and their actions are uncoordinated (e.g. in Chechnya, particular law enforcement agencies are rivaling one another, which affects the security level in the republic). This policy consists in abortive attempts to liquidate the consequences of negative tendencies and phenomena and not in fighting the causes thereof. Sticking to some dogmas in the Caucasian policy (e.g. the belief that forceful solutions are successful), the authorities are all the time making the same mistakes, unwilling to recognise their obvious failures. A perfect example is Vladimir Putin's policy in Chechnya: although the assassination of president Kadyrov clearly showed that a politician with no public support, elected as a result of fixed elections that provide no other alternative, is not able to keep the power for a long time, again, this August, the Kremlin conducted another identical election in Chechnya (Alu Alkhanov was "elected" president)⁵⁴.

1. Caucasus as an internal affair of Russia

One of the priorities of the Kremlin's policy in Caucasus is preventing other countries from interfering in the region's affairs. Even though no state or international organisation challenges the fact that Caucasus is an internal affair of Russia, still Moscow treats any, even the softest, criticism of its policy in the region (in particular, violations of human rights by Russian soldiers in Chechnya, appeals for Moscow to embark upon peace negotiations with the Chechens or attempts to discuss the issue of Chechnya at the international forum) as violation of this principle⁵⁵. Although internationalisation of the Chechen problem to some degree, engagement of international organisations in resolution of the conflict and enabling them to act in the republic could have contributed to ending the war, Moscow strongly opposes any external interference.

2. The “antiterrorist operation”

An important element of the Russian policy in North Caucasus is the “antiterrorist operation”⁵⁶. From autumn 1999, it was led by the federal army, from June 2000 to June 2003, it was conducted by the Federal Security Service, and currently it is controlled by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The official purpose of launching the operation was to detain or liquidate the terrorist leaders responsible for the raid on Dagestan and bombings in Russian cities, who were hiding in Chechnya, while the real target was to pacify the separatist Chechnya and liquidate its authorities and military units reporting to them.

It was only possible to launch the antiterrorist operation in Caucasus owing to the victory of supporters of the forceful solution to the Chechen issue at the Kremlin. It is based on the conviction, which has lingered on in Russia at least since the 19th century, that force is the only successful method in Caucasus, and that Caucasian nations and politicians cannot be trusted and that they cannot be treated as equal partners in dialogue but only as inferiors. This view is, above all, represented by the law enforcement agencies (the federal army, the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Federal Security Service), a significant part of Russian politicians (including president Vladimir Putin) and by the public opinion. Subsequent Russian failures in Caucasus are usually blamed on too lenient methods, poor performance of special forces or lack of coordination between particular law enforcement forces, and never on disproportionate usage of force. Those few politicians, journalists and human rights activists who appeal for revising the policy of force in Caucasus and launching negotiations with the Chechen separatists (e.g. Anna Politkovskaya, Sergey Kovalov, Andrei Babitsky) are seen by the authorities as traitors and representatives of the interests of the West or even supporters of the “terrorists”.

The operation objective set in 1999 (both the official and unofficial one) has never been achieved: those guilty of the raid on Dagestan and bombings in Russian cities have not been caught, it has proved impossible to finally defeat the militants, who still are a serious military force and

are supported by a significant part of the residents of Chechnya. Instead, the consequences of the actions taken as a part of the operation have been born, first of all, by the Chechen civilian population and at times also by residents of the republics neighbouring on Chechnya. The operation has had the opposite effect to the intended one: the Chechen conflict has not ended or even localised, instead, it is gradually spilling over the entire North Caucasian region; terrorism has not been liquidated, instead, its real birth has been provoked⁵⁷.

3. The role of the law enforcement agencies

North Caucasus is often referred to as a “republic of the military”. This is due to the fact that it is the most militarised region of the Russian Federation, where the law enforcement agencies have the greatest influence and the strongest standing⁵⁸. Of the three key Russian law enforcement agencies (Ministry of Defence, Federal Security Service and Ministry of Internal Affairs), the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (usually referred to as the federal army, reporting to the Russian Ministry of Defence), which *de facto* control the “antiterrorist operation”, are taking the lead. The standing and influence of the army, which had been weakened by its defeat in the first Chechen war and humiliated by the need to withdraw from Chechnya (1996), have excessively strengthened since the beginning of the “antiterrorist operation”.

The law enforcement agencies are interested in keeping the situation instable in North Caucasus, owing to which their influence in the country is strengthening. This also causes constant growth of the budget spending on military purposes (e.g. the outlays on the military in 2005 are supposed to be higher by 35% as compared to 2004⁵⁹) and provides additional chance of being promoted and making a career outside of the army⁶⁰. The war has also provided the military with the opportunity to do numerous illegal businesses, such as: trade in oil produced in Chechnya⁶¹, robbing the civilian population, forcing out protection money (mainly at checkpoints and on roads) and trade in people.

Law enforcement agencies form a pillar of the Caucasian policy of president Putin, who has been consistently applying the forceful solution there. This, however, also affects the head of the Russian state, who by relying on the army and special forces in his Caucasian policy is becoming their hostage. It was the war in Chechnya that enabled Putin rise to power and today he must pay due respect to the interests of the military, even though protracting the conflict in Chechnya, and even less so its spilling over the neighbouring republics, is not in the Kremlin's interest.

4. Supporting the puppet regimes

The political system in the republics of North Caucasus reminds of a classical colonial system (the system is also similar in other Russian regions; however, in Caucasus this is particularly noticeable). The power is there in the hands of corrupt local clans (always made up of representatives of the autochthon population) having connections with the criminal world, whom Moscow, in exchange for their loyalty, allows for a certain degree of economic independence and conducting their independent internal policy (fighting the opposition, nominating their people to important posts, etc.). The Kremlin gives the local regimes, hated by most of the local population, the ability to dispose of the funds received by them from the federal budget, which they spend almost exclusively on their private needs, in an uncontrolled way (to a certain extent). This is the price Moscow is ready to pay for keeping the republics in relative peace, unarguably fulfilling its directives concerning regional and foreign policy and ensuring proper outcome and turnout in presidential and parliamentary elections⁶². The classical examples of such puppet regimes, separated from their own communities and supported by the Kremlin, are the rules of the clans of Kadyrov in Chechnya, Magomedali Magomedov in Dagestan or Valery Kokov in Kabardino-Balkaria.

5. The marginalisation of the opposition

Relying on puppet regimes, Moscow at the same time rejects any possibility of dialogue with the opposition forces in particular republics, which often enjoy much greater support and respect of the public than the authorities. Since the beginning of the current war in Chechnya, Moscow has consistently refused embarking on negotiations with the leaders of the militants, including with the legally elected (January 1997) president Aslan Maskhadov, who has many a time appealed for dialogue, giving to understand that the Chechen leaders are ready to make far-reaching concessions on many issues (including on the issue of independence of Chechnya)⁶³. Although Maskhadov and his envoys abroad (among others Akhmad Zakayev, Umar Khambiyev) have many a time condemned terrorism as a method of struggle and the Kremlin has never presented any proof for their participation in staging any attacks, the Russian authorities label the Chechen leaders terrorists, with whom only unconditional capitulation can be discussed.

The situation is similar in Ingushetia. In December 2001, president of the republic, Ruslan Aushev, who was deeply respected among the Ingush public, was removed from his post and replaced by Murat Ziazikov, the unpopular and deprived of any charisma general of Federal Security Service⁶⁴. His policy (or rather implementation of directives given by the Kremlin or particular law enforcement agencies) has led to destabilisation of the internal situation in the republic, which is on the brink of civil war now (even the mufti of Ingushetia, Magomed Albogachiyev has rebelled against Ziazikov). The opposition forces in other republics of the region are deprived of any influence, as well.

The authorities also reject any dialogue with the increasingly stronger Islamists (Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia), who, under the pretext of combating terrorism and Wahhabism, are fought against by the local authorities and representatives of the official Islam. Pushing opposition forces on the margins of political life leads to their radicalisation (in terms of both ideology and political struggle methods), taking the

anti-Russian position, search for contacts with Chechen separatists and often joining the militant troops.

6. The propaganda

Another important element of the Kremlin's policy in Caucasus is the propaganda in the mass media, which is targeted at both the domestic audience and the international opinion. Through adequate selection of information on the region and intentional disinformation, which is possible owing to their control over the key mass media (above all, television) the Russian authorities are trying to convince Russians and the West that the situation in the region is stable and peaceful, and that any problems are resolved owing to the perfect cooperation of the federal centre with the local authorities⁶⁵. The Kremlin's propaganda in the mass media is particularly aggressive when it comes to the situation in Chechnya: the information is often untrue and reports e.g. on elections in the republic look as if they were made in the worst communist times. The Kremlin is able to provide information that could not be further from the truth and to present Chechnya as a kind of a "Potiomkin-style village" due to the limitation of freedom of the mass media under president Putin's rules and holding an almost total monopoly on information from Chechnya⁶⁶. The propaganda really works in the Russian society, a proof to that being the results of public opinion polls carried out after the tragic events in Russia linked to the situation in Caucasus, e.g. after the Dubrovka theatre or Beslan attacks. The proper way of reporting and commenting such events causes that they do not affect the popularity of president Putin, who is to a great extent responsible for them⁶⁷.

III. North Caucasus and the future of Russia

1. The effect of the situation in Caucasus on Russia

The instable situation in North Caucasus profoundly affects many spheres of Russian political, social and economic life. It leaves its mark on the internal situation, foreign policy, power

system, elites, state institutions and structures, on the society, economy, mass media, etc. It is a serious threat to the national security, an impediment to implementing reforms, a source of degeneration of the state administration and demoralisation of the Russian army. The situation in Caucasus is also a key reason for the development of terrorism in Russia, it is one of the stimulants to increasing the influence of the law enforcement agencies in the state, it causes strengthening of authoritarianism and limitation of the freedom of speech under the rule of president Putin as well as intensification of Caucasophobia and Islamophobia among the Russian society and development of nationalist sentiments⁶⁸.

2. The future of Caucasus

The future of North Caucasus to a great extent depends on whether the problems and conflicts existing in the region are resolved or aggravate. If they intensify and deepen, in the nearest years, Caucasus will be plunging into chaos and instability; further escalation of violence and subsequent terrorist attacks should also be expected. Such a scenario will also mean continuation of the dangerous for Russia tendencies and processes: the gradual drifting away of Caucasus from Russia, its derussification and Islamisation. An extreme example of this is Chechnya: the Russian law practically does not apply there (interpersonal relations are based on either the law of the stronger, Shariah or adat, the unwritten Chechen law), Chechens do not serve in the Russian army, almost all the Russians who had lived in Chechnya before 1989 have left the republic, and the young generation does not feel in any way tied with the Russian state, culture or society⁶⁹.

Other Muslim Caucasian republics are also becoming less and less Russian (although this process is much slower there than in Chechnya), drifting towards Islam, which is slowly becoming one of the most important components of the North Caucasian identity⁷⁰. Their residents less and less identify themselves with the Russian state, feeling they do not belong to it, and even though they leave for Moscow and other Russian regions in search for jobs, they feel strangers there⁷¹. This is to a great extent a result of the widespread xenophobia in Russia towards all

“people of Caucasian nationality” as people coming from Caucasus are there commonly referred to (this term is perceived by them as extremely offensive). Already today, North Caucasus is a kind of an enclave, a foreign body within the borders of the Russian Federation, which is also confirmed by Russians visiting this region (journalists, soldiers on military service there and people who have accidentally found themselves in any of the Caucasian republics). This explains to a certain degree the reactions of the Russian society to the events happening in Caucasus: information on Caucasus in the mass media is perceived by a majority of Russians as reports from abroad and not as from a part of their country. So long as the tragedies happening there (except for such terrible ones as e.g. the attack in Beslan) do not cross the borders of Caucasus and do not affect Russia proper, the public opinion is indifferent. This is due to the fact that Caucasus is departing from Russia not only in reality but also in the minds of Russians themselves.

The tendencies described above could be slowed down by a change in the Kremlin’s policy towards the region: making a real attempt to end the Chechen war, curtailing the powers of the law enforcement agencies in the region, dialogue with the opposition in particular republics, giving up forceful methods and letting the international community become involved in cooperation in the region. It would also be necessary to work out a coherent long-term concept for socio-economic development of the region and its integration with the Russian Federation. This would certainly need huge financial outlays, enormous effort by authorities on all the levels and the will to overcome the objection of those who benefit from instability in the region. However, such a change is impossible in Russia today for many reasons.

Firstly, the Kremlin lacks the will to revise its policy towards Caucasus: president Putin and his closest milieu, most of whom originate from the Soviet special services, see any will to compromise and admitting their own mistakes as showing their weakness, and the only remedies for their failures in Caucasus they can resort to include increasing the powers of the law enforcement agencies and strengthening their control

over the society and sharpening the regime in Chechnya and other republics. Any decided moves in Caucasus meant to change the policy in the region must have been accompanied by extensive political, social and economic reforms in the country, which president Putin has failed to choose⁷². Secondly, even if the Kremlin made an attempt to change its policy in Caucasus, this could be blocked by such factors as:

- the lack of sufficient funds,
- the lack of proper staff,
- the resistance of the law enforcement agencies,
- degeneration of state officers (soldiers, clerks, etc.).

Russia’s cooperation with international organisations and its opening to foreign aid would have made it easier for Moscow to overcome such difficulties, yet president Putin’s team is unwilling to such cooperation. Thus, with the current administration, which is striving for imposing on the country as authoritarian rules as possible, and given the present condition of the Russian state, any change of the Caucasian policy is impossible. This means that the chaos in Caucasus, which is departing increasingly further away from Moscow, and the processes described herein above will be deepening. In the longer term, this may end in a far-going autonomy or even separation of the region from the Russian Federation⁷³.

2. The impact of North Caucasus on the future of Russia

Even though as recently as in the first half of the 90’s North Caucasus seemed to be an unimportant periphery of the empire, and the problems and conflicts there seemed insignificant for the Russian state, the first Chechen war has proven that the situation in the region is of enormous importance for Russia. North Caucasus is the region where many extremely serious problems are concentrated, and the resolution to them will decide on the future of Russia⁷⁴. Such issues as: the Chechen war, other ethnic and religious conflicts, rapid growth of non-Russian and Muslim population, decreasing number of ethnic Russians, etc. pose questions of existential nature to the Russian state. How to integrate the non-Russian population with the rest of the country’s residents, on what basis should the state be built

and which idea should unite the increasingly more diverse society (whether the state should be national or multiethnic, federalised or centralised, secular or based on the Orthodox Church)? How to prevent ethnic and religious conflicts which may blow up the Russian Federation from within? Therefore, such fundamental issues as endurance of the Russian Federation, its future shape and political, administrative and social system, stability and security of the state will depend on whether and how Russia copes with the problems of Caucasus.

So long as Moscow is unable to resolve the problems of North Caucasus, above all, to end the war in Chechnya as soon as possible, it will remain a greatly unpredictable and instable country in danger of terrorism and shaken by increasingly deeper internal conflicts, a country from which thousands emigrate because they are persecuted for their nationality or religion⁷⁵. Unless the Kremlin copes with Caucasus, it will not be possible for Russia to take the path of democratic reform and to make the attempt to create a modern country, open to cooperation with the world. The alternative is an authoritarian state, limiting civil liberties and exerting increasingly greater control over the society, an economically backward country, isolating itself from the rest of the world. Already today, Caucasus is the cause of gradual disintegration of the Russian state, its structures and society⁷⁶; unless this is slowed down by changing the policy towards the region, it may become the cause of its collapse.

Caucasus is strategically very important for Moscow, as it is the southernmost part, the “soft underbelly of Russia”, a region which separates Russia proper from South Caucasus and the Middle East and Central Asia, where very disturbing processes are taking place (e.g. the development of Islamic fundamentalism). A stable and integrated with the rest of the Federation North Caucasus can be a dam protecting Russia against ingress of such processes, while an instable one will be an entry gate for Islamic radicals, international terrorists, organised crime, etc. Further development of the situation in North Caucasus will also decide on Russia’s standing in the post-Soviet area, above all, in South Caucasus. North

Caucasian republics are a kind of back-up facilities for the Russian policy towards Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan; therefore, to maintain its influence there, Moscow must ensure stability and security in North Caucasus.

Maciej Falkowski

Annex

Brief characteristics of particular parts of North Caucasus

Dagestan

area: 50.3 thousand km²;

location: eastern part of North Caucasus by the Caspian Sea: borders on Azerbaijan, Georgia, Chechnya, Stavropol Krai and Kalmykia;

capital: Makhachkala (pop. approx. 550 thousand);

other large cities: Derbent (95 thousand), Khassavyurt (88 thousand) and Kaspiysk (71 thousand);

population: 2.58 million;

ethnic make-up: Avars (27.5%), Dargins (15.5%), Kumyks (12.8%), Lezgins (11.3%), Russians (approx. 6%), Laks (5.1%), Tabassarans (4.3%), Azeris (4.1%), Chechens-Akins (3.2%), Nogays (1.5%), Rutuls (0.8%), Aghuls (0.7%), Tats (0.7%), Tsakhurs (0.2%) and other;

religion: more than 90% of the residents are Sunni Muslims, other religious groups: Shiite Muslims, Orthodox Christians and Jews;

chairman of the State Council: Magomedali Magomedov (since 1990)⁷⁷

Chechnya

area: approx. 16.5 thousand km² (since the division of the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1992, the border between Chechnya and Ingushetia has not been formally fixed);

location: central-eastern part of North Caucasus; borders on Georgia, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Stavropol Krai and Dagestan;

capital: Grozny (from 40 to 120 thousand residents);

other large cities: Urus-Martan (approx. 40 thousand), Gudermes (approx. 30 thousand), Shali (approx. 24 thousand), Argun (approx. 23 thousand);

population: approx. 600 thousand (officially 1.1 million, however, the number is, in all probability, overstated);

ethnic make-up: Chechens (more than 90%; until 1989, they accounted for 57.8% of the population), Russians (no data available, a little more than ten thousand people; until 1989, 23.1%);

religion: Sunni Muslims (over 90%), a small number of Orthodox Christians;

president Alu Alkhanov (since 2004)

Ingushetia

area: approx. 4.3 thousand km² (the smallest entity of the Russian Federation);

location: central-eastern part of North Caucasus; borders on Georgia, Chechnya, North Ossetia and Stavropol Krai;

capital: Magas (no permanent residents, only administration centre);

other large cities: Nazran (120 thousand; until 1998, the capital city), Malgobek (50 thousand), Karabulak (29 thousand);

population: 468 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Ingushes (approx. 80%), Chechens (approx. 20%; most of them are Chechen refugees);

religion: Sunni Muslims (almost 100%);

president Murat Ziazikov (since 2002)

North Ossetia

area: 8 thousand km²;

location: central part of North Caucasus; borders on Georgia (including the separatist South Ossetia), Ingushetia, Chechnya, Stavropol Krai and Kabardino-Balkaria;

capital: Vladikavkaz (313 thousand);

other large cities: Mozdok (40 thousand) and Beslan (35 thousand);

population: 709 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Ossetians (59%), Russians (24%), Ingushes (5.4%), Armenians (2.2%) and others;

religion: Orthodox Christians (approx. 70%), Sunni Muslims (approx. 30%);

president Aleksandr Dzasokhov (since 1998)

Kabardino-Balkaria

area: 12.5 thousand km²;

location: central-western part of North Caucasus; borders on Georgia, North Ossetia, Stavropol Krai and Karachay-Cherkessia;

capital: Nalchik (234 thousand);

other large cities: Prokhladnyi (60 thousand) and Baksan (32 thousand);

population: 900 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Kabardins (48%), Russians (32%), Balkars (9%) and others;

religion: Sunni Muslims (Kabardins and Balkars) and Orthodox Christians (Russians);

president Valery Kokov (since 1991)

Karachay-Cherkessia

area: 14.1 thousand km²;

location: western part of North Caucasus; borders on Georgia (including the separatist Abkhazia), Krasnodar Krai, Stavropol Krai and Kabardino-Balkaria;

capital: Cherkessk (122 thousand);

other large cities: Ust-Jeguta (31 thousand) and Karachayevsk (15 thousand);

population: 439 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Russians (40%), Karachays (33.4%), Circassians (11%), the Abaza (4.6%), Nogays (3.1%);

religion: mainly Sunni Muslims;

president Mustafa Batdiyev (since 2003)

Adygeya

area: 7.6 thousand km²;

location: western part of North Caucasus (encircled by the territory of Krasnodar Krai);

capital: Maikop (167 thousand);

other large cities: Adygeysk (12 thousand);

population: 447 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Russians (68%), Adygeyans (22%), Ukrainians (3.2%), Armenians (2.4%);

religion: Orthodox Christians and Sunni Muslims;

president Khazret Sovmen (since 2002)

Stavropol Krai:

area: 66.5 thousand km²;

location: central part of North Caucasus; borders on Rostov oblast, Krasnodar Krai, Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Chechnya, Dagestan and Kalmykia;

capital: Stavropol (346 thousand);

other large cities: Piatigorsk (134 thousand), Nevinnomyssk (134 thousand), Kislovodsk (123 thousand) and Essentuki (99 thousand);

population: 2.73 million;

ethnic make-up: Russians (approx. 70%), Caucasian peoples (approx. 30%, including Armenians, Georgians, Azeris, Chechens, Dagestani peoples, Karachays and others);

religion: Orthodox Christians are the great majority, other religious groups include Sunni Muslims;

governor Aleksandr Chernogorov (since 1996)

Krasnodar Krai (Kuban)

area: 76 thousand km²;

location: western part of North Caucasus by the Black Sea; borders on Georgia (the territory of the separatist Abkhazia), Adygeya, Karachay-Cherkessia, Stavropol Krai and Rostov oblast;

capital: Krasnodar (643 thousand);

other large cities: Sochi (366 thousand), Novorossiysk (205 thousand), Armavir (166 thousand);

population: 5.1 million;

ethnic make-up: Russians (approx. 80%), Caucasian peoples (approx. 20%; mainly Armenians, Georgians, Azeris, Abkhazians and others);

religion: Orthodox Christians are the majority, other religious groups include Muslims;

governor Aleksandr Tkachov (since 2000)

Kalmykia:

area: 76.1 thousand km²;

location: north-eastern part of North Caucasus by the Caspian Sea; borders on Dagestan, Stavropol Krai and the oblasts of Rostov, Volgograd and Astrakhan;

capital: Elista (105 thousand);

other large cities: Lagan (15 thousand);

population: 292 thousand;

ethnic make-up: Kalmyks (approx. 50%), Russians (approx. 40%);

religion: Buddhists (Kalmyks) and Orthodox Christians (Russians);

president Kirsan Ilumzhinov (since 1993)

¹ According to the Russian terminology, Transcaucasia (North Caucasus is also referred to as North Casasia).

² In some definitions, North Caucasus also includes the other units of the southern federal district, created in 2000, its central city being Rostov-on-Don, i.e. the Rostov, Astrakhan and Volgograd oblasts. According to such a definition, the North Caucasian region has the area of 582 thousand km² (3.4% of the Russian Federation territory) and is inhabited by more than 21 million people (14% of the population of the Russian Federation); http://wgeo.ru/russia/okr_ugn.shtml

³ For more details on the events in Chechnya in 1991–1994 and on the causes of the so-called first Chechen war see: P. Grochmalski, *Czeczenia: rys prawdziwy*, Wrocław: atlas 1999; A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *Vremia Yuga*, Moscow: Moskovskiy Centr Carnegie 2002; D. Furman, *Rossiya i Chechnya, obshchestva i gosudarstva*, Moscow 1999; S. Ciesielski, *Rosja – Czeczenia. Dwa stulecia konfliktu*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego 2003.

⁴ For information on the so-called first Chechen war see: *Ibidem* and: J. Cichocki, *Wojna rosyjsko-czeczeńska*, CES Materials 1997.

⁵ The election was recognised as democratic and legal by many international organisations (e.g. OSCE) and by Russia itself.

⁶ For more information on the inter-war period see *inter alia*: A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *op. cit.*, D. Furman, *op. cit.*; W. Górecki, *Czy Rosja straciła Kaukaz Północny?*, *Week in the East*, 28 December 1998; M. Evangelista, *The Chechen Wars*, Washington: Brookings Institution Press 2002.

⁷ Although the Russian authorities accused Chechens of the attacks, it has not been cleared out until now who they in fact were organised by. Many facts indicate that they could have been staged by Russian special forces. This thesis is advanced among others by the former Federal Security Service officer, Aleksandr Litvinenko in the book by Aleksandr Mikhailov: *Chechenskoye koleso*, Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno 2002 and by the Russian press baron Boris Berezovski (he presented his views on this subject, *inter alia*, in the film *Blown up Russia*). For information on the events in Dagestan see *inter alia*: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/conf2809.htm>

⁸ In 2002, the compulsory returns of refugees from Ingushetia to Chechnya began: by exerting administrative pressure (gradually, all the refugee camps were liquidated), using threats and promises of compensation payment, most of the escapees were forced to leave. Currently, approximately 70 thousand refugees are staying in Ingushetia. For information on the current situation of Chechen refugees in Russia see: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/refugees/doklad2004/chech04.htm>

⁹ For information on violation of human rights in Chechnya by the Russian army see *inter alia*: Memorial o voyne na Severnom Kavkaze <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm>; <http://www.hrw.org/russian/editorials/chechnya/index.html>

¹⁰ Chechenisation (a press term) was officially referred to by the Russian authorities as a „peacekeeping process in the Chechen Republic”. For more information on particular stages of the Chechenisation policy see: A. Makarkin, *Uzako-*

nennaya chechenizatsiya, <http://www.politcom.ru/2002/pvz10.php>; A. Makarkin, *Gibel Kadyrova i sudba chechenizatsiyi*, <http://www.politcom.ru/2004/pvz417.php>; N. Serova, *Tri problemy chechenizatsiyi*, <http://www.politcom.ru>

¹¹ The most significant armed operations of the militants in 2004 included: the assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov at the stadium in Grozny (9 May), the attack on Ingushetia (at night on 21/22 June), in which nearly 100 people were killed and the raid on Grozny (at night on 21/22 August); in late August/early September, there also happened three awful terrorist attacks: the blowing up of 2 airplanes in southern Russia (24 August; 90 people were killed), the suicide bombing at Rizhskaya metro station in Moscow (31 August; 11 people killed) and the seizure of the school in Beslan, North Ossetia (the worst terrorist attack in the Russian history; during the assault on the terrorist-controlled school, which was launched in unclear circumstances, nearly 350 people were killed, including several hundred children). Shamil Basayev admitted he was the author of all those attacks on one of the Chechen separatists' websites www.kavkazcenter.com

¹² It cannot be excluded that the assassination of Akhmad Kadyrov was staged by the military, as his strong authority started to challenge their position in the republic. Kadyrov openly criticised the army for prosecution of civilian population and demanded limiting their powers in the republic.

¹³ This mainly concerns representatives of the so-called Kadyrov's clan, the leader of which is a son of the assassinated president, Ramzan Kadyrov (currently deputy prime minister of Chechnya). The security service, which he is in charge of, terrorises the local residents and commits crimes on a mass scale.

¹⁴ The Dubrovka attack (October 2002) was a harbinger of the introduction of new methods into the military actions. Since that time, Chechens have executed tens of terrorist attacks and armed raids outside the territory of Chechnya. For statistical data on the worst terrorist attacks since October 2002 see: M. Falkowski, *Nowa fala terroru w Rosji*, *Week in the East*, 2 September 2004.

¹⁵ Maskhadov admitted among other things having launched the attack on Ingushetia this June. Then, he also promised subsequent military actions would be conducted in the territory of Russia.

¹⁶ The ideological changes in the militant camp have been described among others by the journalist of Radio Svoboda, Andrei Babitsky in his recent reports from Chechnya (see: www.svoboda.org).

¹⁷ This is mainly a result of the growing Caucasophobia and Islamophobia in Russia. For more thorough analysis of these problems see: A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *op. cit.*, pages 57–62; A. Levinson, *Kavkaz podo mnoiu*, <http://www.polit.ru/docs/618834.html>; A. Gorbova, *My nie shakhidki*, *Novye Izvestia*, 01.10.2004.

¹⁸ The death squadrons kidnapped and killed among others the deputy prosecutor of Ingushetia Rashid Ozdoyev, who had been making attempts to oppose their illicit actions; this affair is thoroughly described in the opposition website www.ingushetiya.ru; see also: A. Politkovskaya, *Mestonakhozhdenie zakona ne ustanovleno*, *Novaya Gazeta*,

02–04.08.2004; FSB pokhishchayet ludei v Dagestane, <http://yaseen.ru/politica/fsb.htm>

¹⁹ The views of the young elite of Caucasus (mostly of Dagestan), which are evolving fast towards Islam, can be read on the website www.yaseen.ru

²⁰ The most numerous of them are the troops commanded by Rappani Khalilov and Rasul Makasharipov (Dagestan) and Magomed Yevloyev (Ingushetia).

²¹ For information on the war spilling over the neighbouring republics see inter alia: A. Riskin, M. Bondarenko, N. Popova, Nowoye podbrushye Rossii, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 20.08.2004; A. Magomedov, Dagestan na grani, http://yaseen.ru/politica/dag_na_grani.htm; O. Allerova, Dalshe budut Dagestan, Kabarda i Karachayevo-Cherkessia, *Kommersant*, 28.06.2004; S. Gomzikova, A. Riskin, Kavkaz rastrelnyi, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 01.10.2003; I. Sukhov, Eto privediot k bolszoj krovi, *Vremia Novostei*, 03.09.2004.

²² For more information on the Chechen problem in Dagestan see: Y. Kulchik, A. Adilsultanov, Chechentsi-Akkintsi (Aukhovtsi) i ikh grazhdanskiye formirovaniya, http://www.igpi.ru/bibl/igpi_publ/dag_akk/chechen.html; A. Aliyev, Chechentsi-Akkintsi Dagestana, Makhachkala 1993.

²³ For more information on the ethnic conflicts in Dagestan see: E. Kisriyev, Dagestan: prichiny konfliktov i faktory stabilnosti, *Centralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz*, <http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-10-2000/20.kisriev.shtml>; M. Savva, Konfliktnyi potentsial mezhetnicheskikh otnosheniy na Severnom Kavkaze, *Centralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz* no. 3/2004.

²⁴ E.g. Nadirshakh Khachilaev, the leader of the Lak national movement and thereafter advocate of creation of an Islamic republic in Dagestan, who was murdered in August 2003, or the well-known Magomedsalikh Gusaev, who was considered as a potential successor of Magomedov, killed in the same month. For the story of the charismatic Khachilaev see: Komu mogla byt' nuzhna smert' Nadirshakha Khachilaeva?, <http://www.politcom.ru/2003/gvozdz181.php>

²⁵ For more information on the power distribution system in Dagestan see: Vvedeniye posta presidenta v Dagestane, <http://www.svoboda.org/programs/cauc/2004/cauc.021804.asp>; K. Kazenin, Krepok li tyl Rossii na Kavkaze? Chast' 1, <http://www.regnum.ru/allnews/326969.html>

²⁶ Among others, Saigidpasha Umakhanov, mayor of Khasavyurt; Gadji Makhachev, deputy to the Russian Duma; Ramazan Abdulatipov, member of the Federation Council of Saratov oblast. While Magomedov, who is still supported by the Kremlin, has taken actions to secure his own victory in the approaching election (e.g. removing representatives of local authorities who are disloyal to him), the opposition, among whom Umakhanov has taken the lead, has promised it will prevent his re-election. In late July/early August 2004, there was serious unrest in Khasavyurt, during which Umakhanov demanded that Magomedov should step down and early elections should be held.

²⁷ For information on the power struggle in Dagestan during the recent months see: S. Samoilova, Dagestan: krizis klanovoi sistemy, <http://www.politcom.ru/2004/zloba4596.php>; A. Riskin, Raskol Dagestana stanovitsia realnostiu, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 17.08.2004.

²⁸ For more information on the so-called Lezgin issue see: E. Kisriyev, *op. cit.*

²⁹ The conflict genesis dates back to 1944, when Ingushes and Chechens were displaced and forced to settle in Central Asia. The prigorodnyi district, which had earlier belonged to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR, was then made a part of North Ossetia, and Ossetians began settling on the Ingush land. Ingushes have never accepted this state of affairs. For more information see: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas/left41.htm>; A. Dzadziyev, A. Dzarasov, Po zniesieniu stanu wyjątkowego, *Eurazja* no. 1/1996, CES.

³⁰ Severnaya Osetiya – Ingushetiya: posledstviye terroriticheskogo akta w Beslane, <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/prigorod/rubr/1/index.htm>; Ivan Sukhov, Ogneopasnyi raion, *Vremia Novostei*, 06.09.2004.

³¹ Similarly to Chechens and Ingushes, Balkars and Karachays had been displaced to Central Asia in the 40's. While they had been living in Kazakhstan, Kabardins and Circassians had settled on their land, which caused serious conflicts after the return of Balkars and Karachays from exile.

³² The muhajir were those residents of Caucasus, who were forced by the Tsarist authorities to emigrate to Turkey and the Middle East after the end of the Caucasian war in the 19th century (they were mostly (Circassians, Chechens and Dagestanis).

³³ For more information on the conflicts in the western part of Caucasus see: K. Kazenin, Krepok li tyl Rossii na Severnom Kavkaze? Chast' 3. Informatsionnoye Agentstvo Regnum, <http://www.regnum.ru>

³⁴ Situatsiya v Karachayevo-Cherkessii posle vyborov; <http://www.memo.ru/hr/news/karach3.htm>; M. Bondarenko, Zharkiy iyul dla Karachayevo-Cherkessii, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14.03.2004.

³⁵ According to calculations made by Alexei Malashenko of the Moscow Carnegie Centre, approximately 4 million Muslims, i.e. one fourth of all the Muslims in Russia, live in North Caucasus. A. Malashenko, Islamskiye orientiry Severnogo Kavkaza, Moscow: Moskovskiy Centr Carnegie 2001.

³⁶ Members of *Kadiriya* brotherhood e.g. played a great role in the radicalisation of the Chechen separatists under the rule of Jokhar Dudayev, and one of the Dagestani sheikhs, Said-efendi of Chirkey, is one of the key figures in the republic, who *de facto* controls the SA of Muslims in Dagestan. For more information on the North Caucasian Sufism see: A. Shykhsaidov, Islam v Dagestane, *Centralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz* no. 5/1997; A. Malashenko, Islamskiye orientiry..., *op. cit.*; Y. Chesnov, Sufizm i etnicheskii mentalitet chechentsev, *Rasy i Narody*, no. 26/2001.

³⁷ In the Soviet times, many Muslim clergymen, similarly to Russian Orthodox priests, collaborated with KGB. For this reason, they are not really respected by people. For more information on the traditional Islam see: S. Berezhnuy, I Dobayev (edited), Islam i islamizm na yuge Rossii, *Yuzhno-rossiyskoye Obozreniye* no. 11/2002; K. Kazenin, Prizrak wahhabizma, *Vremia Novostei*, 09.01.2003.

³⁸ For more information on the Wahhabi movement in North Caucasus see: V. Akayev, Islamskiy fundamentalizm na Severnom Kavkaze: mif i realnost, *Centralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz*, no. 9/2000., A. Malashenko, Islamskiye orientiry..., *op. cit.*

³⁹ The first Islamic organisation in the USSR to opt for reform of Islam was the Islamic Rebirth Party, founded in 1990 in Astrakhan. Among its founding fathers were many Dagestanians, including the key ideologist of Wahhabis, Bagautdin Kebedov.

⁴⁰ Both in Russian and international opinion, this was considered barbarian (*inter alia*, several public executions in Grozny were shown), meanwhile, according to many scientists, among others Vladimir Bobrovnikov of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Shariah could have had very positive effects on the security and stability in Caucasus. See: V. Bobrovnikov, Islamofobia i religioznoye zakonodatelstvo v Dagestane, *Centralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz*, <http://www.ca-c.org/journal/cac-08-2000/15.bobrovn.shtml>, V. Bobrovnikov, <http://www.carnegie.ru/ru/pubs/books/volume/36592.htm>

⁴¹ In many cases, activities of Chechen commanders (e.g. trade in people) had nothing to do with Islam. There is evidence proving that some Wahhabi groups, whose actual main activity is kidnapping people for ransom, are supported by Federal Security Service to destabilise the situation in Chechnya (Russian services supported *inter alia* the groups of Arbi Barayev and of brothers Akhmadov).

⁴² Many terrorist attacks in south Russia have been staged not by Chechens but by Wahhabis from other republics.

⁴³ According to official data, the population of the entire North Caucasus grew by nearly 1 million in 1992–1999, V. Beloziorov, Migratsionniye processy na Severnom Kavkaze, <http://www.polit.ru/country/2003/08/12/622836.html>

⁴⁴ V. Beloziorov, Rusifikatsiya i derusifikatsiya: etnicheskaya karta Kavkaza vchera i siegodnia, Moscow: OGI 2003.

⁴⁵ Persecutions in Krasnodar Krai especially painfully affected the community of Meskhetin Turks (several ten thousand people), who after their driving out of Uzbekistan (they had been deported there in 1943 upon an order of Joseph Stalin from the Georgian Meskhetia) started settling there, Ocherednoye izbiyeniye turok na Kubani, Informatsionnoye Agentstvo Regnum of 17 January 2000, Mikhail Savva, Meskhetians head for America, http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau_200408_246_2_eng.txt

⁴⁶ The most widespread form of harassment is causing problems with getting the so-called propiska (permanent residence registration) and registration (temporary residence registration) as well as forcing out protection money from entrepreneurs and small traders of non-Russian national background.

⁴⁷ See *inter alia*: M. Nersesian, Southern Russia's migrants force deportation, http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau_200303_172_3_eng.txt; A. Nikolayev, Kuban dla kubanoidov, <http://www.polit.ru/world/2003/09/12/624815.html>; M. Bondarenko, Migranty ne dolzhny zhyt vozle strategicheskikh objektov, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 14.04.2003.

⁴⁸ <http://echo.msk.ru/7news/archive/197224.html>

⁴⁹ According to official data, the average monthly income per person in North Caucasus is 65% of the general Russian mean, the average wages are 1.5 times lower than in the other parts of the Russian Federation, and 35% of all the Russian unemployed live in the region; http://www.gzt.ru/rubricator_text.gzt?rubric=novosti&id=64050700000030580;

⁵⁰ For more information on the demographic processes taking place in North Caucasus see: <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2004/0157/analit05.php>; <http://www.mhg.ru/publications/3DDF634>

⁵¹ N. Agayeva, Dagestan's capital bursts with migrants, http://www.iwpr.net/index.pl?archive/cau/cau_200406_236_4_eng.txt

⁵² I. Maksakov, Kavkazskiy barometr, *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 18.03.2002; V. Gavrikov, Biznes kavkazskoi natsionalnosti, *Profil*, 25.12.2000.

⁵³ For more information on the socioeconomic situation in Caucasus see: <http://www.kavkaz.memo.ru>.

⁵⁴ Alkhanov allegedly won over 70% votes, with the turnout exceeding 80%. However, independent journalists and human rights activists claim that not more than 20% of Chechens cast their ballots.

⁵⁵ The hysterical and highly emotional reactions of Russia's representatives (including president Putin) any time the Chechen issue is raised by Western politicians or journalists prove how painful a problem Chechnya is for Moscow.

⁵⁶ I.e. *de facto* a war, though the current conflict in Chechnya has never been called a war. Instead, the term "antiterrorist operation" is used.

⁵⁷ For more information on the development of terrorism in Russia see: M. Falkowski, Skąd się wzięł terroryzm w Rosji?, *Week in the East*, 22 January 2004.

⁵⁸ In Chechnya alone, nearly 80 thousand officers of the Russian law enforcement agencies are stationed, more than a half of which are soldiers of the federal army (the other units report to *inter alia* the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Federal Security Service). As a total, the North Caucasian Military District has more than 102 thousand soldiers (of the Russian Ground Forces alone), which accounts for 10% of the total professional staff of the Russian army and as much as 32% of the Ground Forces.

⁵⁹ CES News, 15 September 2004.

⁶⁰ For many Russian generals Chechnya has meant the beginning of their political career; e.g. Gen. Viktor Kazantsev, former commander of the federal forces in Caucasus, in 2000–2004, was the Russian president's envoy to the southern federal district, Gen. Vladimir Shamanov, former commander of the 58th Army in Chechnya, is the governor of Ulyanovsk oblast, Gen. Konstantin Pulikovskiy, former commander of Russian forces in Chechnya (during the first war) is the Russian president's envoy to the far-east federal district, etc.

⁶¹ For more information see: W. Górecki, E. Paszyc, Walka o czeczeńską ropę, *Week in the East*, 4 January 2001.

⁶² The election results in the Caucasian republics are always incredibly good for the Kremlin, and the turnout is very high. E.g. in this March presidential election, in Dagestan the turnout was allegedly 94.09% (94.61% voted for Putin), in Ingushetia 96.22% (98.28% for Putin) and in Chechnya 94% (92.3% for Putin). Such results indicate that the elections are evidently fixed there, <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/reginfotext/reginfo/id/656852.html>

⁶³ The only contact between the Kremlin and the separatists were the talks between president Maskhadov's envoy Akhmad Zakayev and of the Russian president's envoy to

the southern federal district, Gen. Viktor Kazantsev, which were held in December 2001 at Sheremetievo airport in Moscow. Due to the negative attitude of the Kremlin to further talks, they have not been continued.

⁶⁴ Ziazikov, who has been forced upon Ingushes, is so unpopular that eruption of serious social unrest in Ingushetia cannot be excluded in the nearest future (the opposition has many a time promised active undertakings to remove him from power).

⁶⁵ The Kremlin's propaganda of success in Chechnya has not overlooked even such a field as sports: president Putin himself has engaged in this by meeting several times with Terek Grozny football team (by the way playing outside of Chechnya) after the Chechen club had won the Cup of Russia.

⁶⁶ It is impossible for western journalists to legally get into Chechnya, and most Russian journalists stick to the authorities' directives on proper selection of information on Chechnya. Noticeable is the clear difference between the first and the second Chechen wars: during the conflict in 1994–1996, journalists used to go to Chechnya unimpeded, and their independent and critical reports contributed to ending the first war (the Russian public, who were informed in an unbiased way, were definitely against the continuation of the war).

⁶⁷ The mass media which the Kremlin uses for its propaganda concerning the situation in North Caucasus include: TV stations ORT and RTR, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta* daily newspaper (<http://www.rg.ru>), and the websites: www.strana.ru, www.kavkaz.strana.ru, www.chechnyafree.ru, www.utro.ru, www.rian.ru and other.

⁶⁸ For information on the negative effect of the situation in Chechnya on Russia see: M. Falkowski, Chechnya and Russia: The significance of the Chechen problem for contemporary Russia, CES Studies, August 2003.

⁶⁹ L. Radikhovsky, Zakon sokhraneniya energii, <http://www.politcom.ru/2004/pvz486.php>

⁷⁰ The tendency is noticeable, although, for the time being, it is difficult to assess its real scale. It, however, cannot be excluded that in the future the idea of Caucasian solidarity, which failed in the 90's, will revive owing to the religious unity of Caucasian nations.

⁷¹ An example of lack of identification with the Russian state can be the results of conscription to the army in North Caucasian republics, for instance, in 2003, in Chirkey, one of the largest Dagestani villages in Buinaksk district, out of the 197 conscripts only 4 could be drafted in due time; <http://www.regnum.ru/allnews/199836.html>. The intensifying anti-Russian sentiments, the growing feeling of being distinct from the rest of Russia and of Caucasian solidarity, as well as the increasingly faster Islamisation of the region are also reflected in the trends dominating in the cultural works of young residents of Caucasus, such as Chechen bards (Timur Mutsurayev, Imam Alimsultanov and others) popular in the entire region, and of many Caucasian musicians, writers and poets.

⁷² See: J. Rogoza, Putin after re-election, current issue of the CES Studies.

⁷³ This forecast is based on the assumption that the current tendencies will persist in the region for at least ten years or

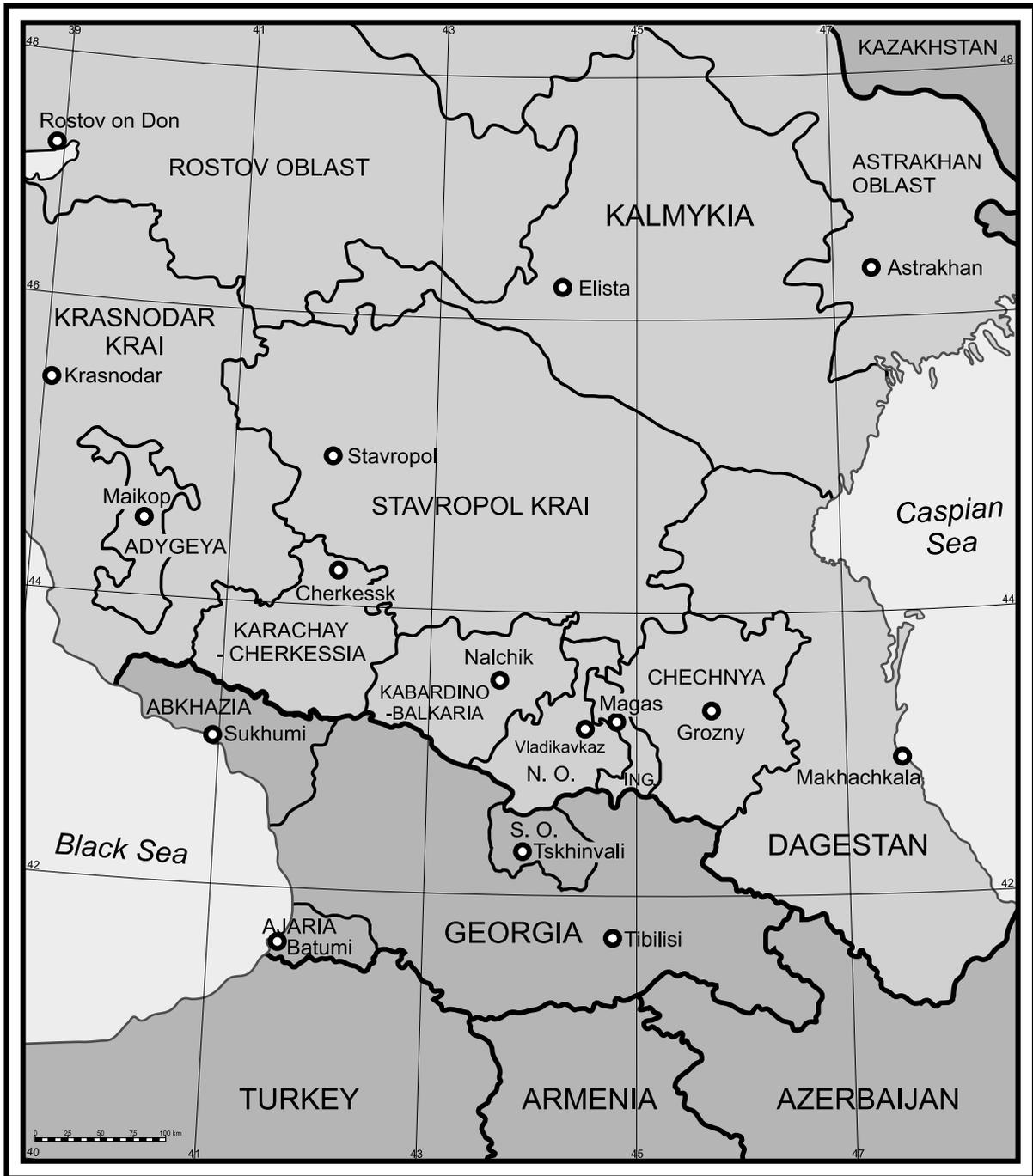
even several decades. It also seems that such a scenario would only have been possible in the case of a radical change of both the ruling team and the political system in Russia. Most of the Russian public seems not to be against such a turn of events: already today, the number of supporters of withdrawing the troops from Chechnya and separation of the republic from Russia (to get rid of an unnecessary area which absorbs enormous funds and where hundreds of Russian soldiers die) is relatively high.

⁷⁴ Even though problems of North Caucasus are very significant for Russia, still they must not be overrated, as there exist many other important issues, the meaning of which is equally important for the future of the Russian Federation.

⁷⁵ Already today, a few dozen thousand Chechen refugees live in European Union countries, and their number is constantly growing; nearly 4 thousand Chechens annually apply for being granted the refugee status in such countries as Austria, Czech Republic or Poland.

⁷⁶ Since 1994, nearly 1 million young Russians coming from all the regions of the country have served in Chechnya. Most of them are unable to normally function in the society.

⁷⁷ Data on all the republics, according to: http://wgeo.ru/russia/okr_ugn.shtml; <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/encyclopedia/>; <http://www.c-s-r.ru/rusinfo/sev-kavkaz.htm>



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