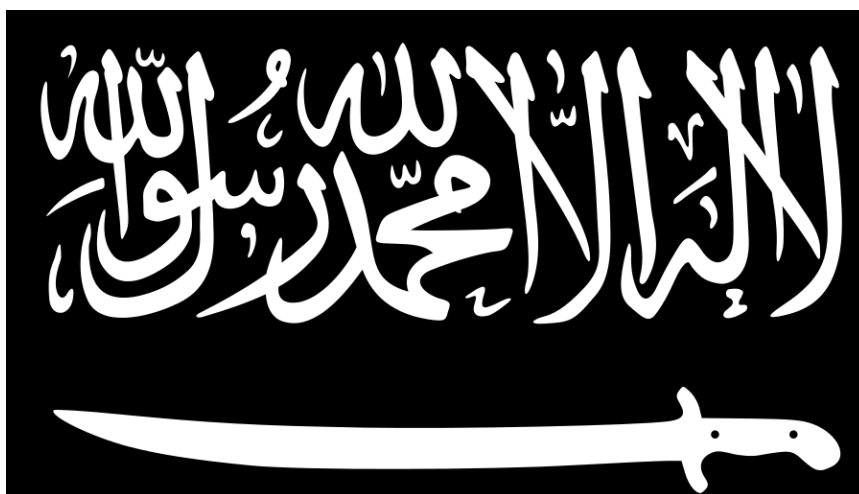


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# THE CAUCASUS EMIRATE AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR SECURITY IN THE CAUCASUS

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## **Chapter I**

### **The origin of the Caucasus Emirate**

Proclaimed in 2007 by the President of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Dokka Umarov, the Caucasus Emirate (CE) did not emerge from an ideological void. Despite a mental, cultural and socio-political chasm between modern Caucasus and Caucasus from the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (caused mainly by strong Sovietisation of the region), the source and inspiration for proclaiming the Emirate came from history. The archetype of an Islamic state in Caucasus was the Caucasian Imamate, which existed on the territory of Dagestan and later on also in the mountainous region of Chechnya in the years 1828-1859. In the first years of its existence, in the reign of two imams, Ghazi Muhammad (in Russia known as Kazi-Mulla) and Gamzat-bek, it was hard to talk of a state *per se*. It was rather a religious and military movement, striving towards intensification of the islamisation of the region, introduction of sharia law in Dagestan (and eliminating the conflicting local adat), abolishment of the local aristocracy and prevention of the subjugation of this part of Caucasus by Russia. In the reign of Shamil (1834-1859), the Imamate became an actual state, controlling quite a vast territory (mountainous Dagestan and mountainous Chechnya), having executive power, judiciary, an army, administration, legal and tax systems, maintaining foreign relations and conducting effective islamisation of the occupied areas, as well as engaging in a long-term war with Russia and its ally, the central government of Dagestan. The Imamate failed in 1859, along with the capitulation of Shamil and his imprisonment by Russia.<sup>1</sup> Paradoxically, the core of the ideology and the military muscle of the Imamate was Sufism, at the time known as Muridism (the founder of the movement was a mystic and Sufi master, Muhammad al-Jaragi from southern Dagestan, and all the subsequent leaders were Sufi SheCEhs of the Naqshbandi order), the basis

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<sup>1</sup> Based on: Moshe Gammer, Шамиль. Мусульманское сопротивление Царизму. Завоевание Чечни и Дагестана, Moscow 1998, pp. 305-359.



for the holy war, back then known as *ghazwa* rather than jihad. Presently, the ideology of the Caucasus Emirate, deeply rooted in the Salafist movement, is extremely anti-Sufi and the leaders and militants consider Sufism a heresy, conflicting with one of the pillars of Islam: monotheism. This, however, does not prevent militants from referring to the heritage of the 19<sup>th</sup> century imams (in the area of armed battle for the establishment of sharia law), although they dismiss the Sufi elements.<sup>2</sup>

The North Caucasian Emirate, existing between 1919 and 1920, was also a source of ideological inspiration for creating the modern Caucasus Emirate. This formation, covering an area similar to the Imamate (with its capital in the village of Vedeno, Chechnya), also led by a Sufi Sheikh, Uzun Haji, was established in the climate of political chaos which had become prevalent in Russia after the fall of tsarist autocracy. It was a response of Caucasian Muslims to the policy of General Anton Denikin's army, which was discriminatory against non-Russian people and which occupied a greater part of the North Caucasus in 1919. The Emirate was proclaimed as an independent Islamic state (monarchy with emirate at its forefront), which was a protectorate of the caliph, the sultan of Turkey). Although it existed only several months (from September 1919 to March 1920), similarly to Shamil's state, it had its own territory, army, central government, judiciary and even its own currency. The official language of the Emirate was Arabic, and the legal system was sharia law. Considering white men his main enemies, Uzun Haji allied himself with the Bolsheviks, which led to Denikin's failure in Caucasus. The seizure of power by the Bolsheviks brought an end to the existence of the North Caucasian Emirate. The Dagestan ASSR was created in western Caucasus and the Mountain ASSR in middle Caucasus (divided into smaller republics: Chechen-Ingush, North Ossetian etc.) and the Soviet authorities made a promise to keep sharia law as the legal system of the region. However, sharia was gradually removed after the Soviet authorities had grown stronger, and the region underwent a wave of unusually brutal repressions targeted at Islam (Uzun Haji himself died in March 1920).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> E.g. <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/04/30/50767.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> The North Caucasian Emirate also appears in some writings of the contemporary Caucasian Islamists who fight in the Caucasus Emirate, see e.g. <http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2006/01/14/41024.shtml>



In the Soviet times, the idea of creating an independent united state in the North Caucasus existed only in the emigration circles (and within the so-called Prometheist movement), however its vehicles were not Islamic, but democratic activists. Only after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and a series of events that took place in Caucasus after 1990 was the idea of creating an Islamic state in the region restored.

The deep Sovietisation of the North Caucasus, whose element – paradoxically – was the strengthening (and in certain cases even creation) of an ethnic identity, as well as an increase in nationalist movements in the region due to the Soviet nationalistic policy,<sup>4</sup> resulted in the fact that the ideology taken up by North Caucasian elites after the disintegration of the USSR, was narrowly understood nationalism (Chechen, Ossetian, Avar, Kabardian etc.). The outbreak of nationalist movements (and the tensions and ethnic and territorial conflicts that followed) in the North Caucasus after 1991 became a part of the string of events that took place in the whole post-Soviet area (so-called sovereignty parade) and had it not been for the Chechen problem, it would not have crossed purely declarative boundaries. Similarly to Chechnya (at the time known as Chechen-Ingushetia), sovereignty was proclaimed by all republics of North Caucasus, but neither of them openly questioned their belonging to the Russian Federation, nor did they propagate independence, which resulted not only from the fear of Moscow, but also from a certain social feeling (marginal support for aspirations to independence).

Throughout the first decade after the disintegration of the USSR, the Chechen problem concerned almost solely national independence, becoming a part of the European rather than Islamic narrative (the battle of European nations to create their own states, which had begun in the 19<sup>th</sup> century), which was also a result of the region's Sovietisation and its effective separation from the world of Islam. Although in 1991 the power in Chechnya was taken from the hands of local party leadership (as opposed to other North Caucasian republics where there was no change of elites), it landed in the hands of people shaped by the Soviet system, whose nationalistic views were the result of their upbringing in that system rather than the heritage of the previous, pre-Soviet generations. Reduced

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<sup>4</sup> The Soviet nationalistic policy in the 1920s and at the beginning of 1930s assumed maximised participation of the representatives of native nationalities in governing autonomous republics, korenization. Based on: *Советская национальная политика: идеология и практики 1945-1953*, Moscow 2013, pp. 509-519.



to the role of a supplementary element of the ethnic identity and a collection of obscure rituals without any theological sense, Islam did not play any role in the Chechen national liberation movement. Nevertheless, both ideologists and politicians in Chechnya referred to the 19<sup>th</sup> century Caucasian religious leaders (Sheikh Mansur, imam Shamil and others), albeit regarding them as national activists rather than religious leaders, similarly to some symbols and rituals which had been deeply rooted in the Chechen society (particularly the so-called loud dhikr, a collective prayer of the Sufi Kadirija Order, which initially had been a religious rite, but later became something similar to a Chechen war and nationalist dance).

In 1990, Chechnya saw the rise of a national movement, spearheaded by General Dzhokhar Dudayev (although when it comes to ideology and creation of the movement's structure, a greater role was played by other activists, e.g. Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev). From the very beginning, the movement postulated full independence from the Chechen Republic. In 1991 (during the August Putsch in Moscow) the communist rule led by Doku Zavgayev was abolished and Chechnya proclaimed independence. That year, the presidential election took place, and the chosen president was Dudayev. By mutual agreement, Chechen-Ingushetia was divided into two republics, and Ingushetia remained a part of the Russian Federation. In 1992, the republic adopted its own constitution and the federal army left its territory for reasons unknown to this day. The period between 1991 and 1994 was marked by Dudayev's ineffective attempt at creating an independent country (he came into power as a dictator without control over the whole territory of the republic). The main obstacle was a gigantic economic crisis, lack of experience and appropriate staff, lack of possibility to establish relations with abroad and organized crime on a massive scale.<sup>5</sup>

Although ideology-wise the so-called first Chechen independence (1991-1994) was dominated by national independence ideology, a socio-political processes had begun, both in Chechnya and in other North Caucasian republics, which led to the creation of the Caucasus Emirate in the next decade. Similarly to other areas of the former USSR inhabited by Muslims, Caucasus saw a great religious revival (opening or building of mosques, madrasas, increase in religious

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<sup>5</sup> Maciej Falkowski, *Czeczenia a Rosja: znaczenie kwestii czeczeńskiej dla współczesnej Rosji*, OSW, 2003, available at: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace\\_11\\_0.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_11_0.pdf)





practices, interest in religious literature and study of Arabic etc.), which finally turned into a dynamic re-islamisation of the region (rebirth of Islam's key social and often also political role). The second, but also important, phenomenon was Caucasian Muslim's opening to the world of Islam, from which they had been effectively excluded for seventy years. Russian studies on Islam in Caucasus after the decomposition of the USSR mostly emphasize the dimension of an intentional "export" of Islamic ideologies to the Caucasian republics from the world of Islam through Islamic organizations, charity, missionaries etc.<sup>6</sup> In reality, the "import" of these ideologies by the inhabitants of Caucasus themselves was far more significant, as they began to take an interest in Islam on their own (not only in the external manifests of religiousness, but also in theological matters) and mass-travel to Islamic countries to study (Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait). Muslim communities (Sufi Order, Salafist communities, and Muslim communes) also started to appear and emerge from the underground or take up an organized form independent of religious leaders (ecclesiastical administrations of Muslims which appeared in all the republics). This process was particularly dynamic in Dagestan. The first manifestations of the political involvement of Muslims were visible as early as in the last few years of the existence of the USSR, the most important of which was the establishment of the Islamic Revival Party in 1990 at a congress in Astrakhan (its founders included Dagestanis: Ahmad-Kadi Akhtaev and Bagaudin Kebedov; and Chechens: Supyan Abdullayev and Adam Denyev).

The period of the first quasi-independence of Chechnya lasted until December 1994. After failed attempts at a compromise with Dudayev, Moscow spurred a revolution in Chechnya (twice: in 1993 and in the autumn of 1994), however the Putschists failed. Given the above, the Kremlin decided to "restore constitutional order" on the territory of the republic with the use of the federal army. On 11<sup>th</sup> December troops of the Russian army entered Chechnya, thus starting the First Chechen War. After one and a half years the war campaign ended with a military (inability to defeat the popular Chechen guerrilla) and political (lack of support for the war from the Russian society, international criticism) failure of the Russian party, which was sealed with a peace agreement signed in Khasavyurt, Dagestan on 31<sup>st</sup> August 1996. Based on the agreement, the federal army withdrew from the territory of Chechnya and both parties

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. Bimbolat Dzutsev, Abram Pershits, *Вахабиты на Северном Кавказе - религия, политика, социальная практика*, in: *Vestnik Rossiyskoy Akademii Nauk*, 67 (12) 1998.



committed to begin negotiations concerning the regulation of mutual relations (the Chechen party treated the agreement as Moscow's acknowledgement of Chechnya's independence). The status of Chechnya was to be determined by 2001.<sup>7</sup>

The First Chechen War was a classic example of a national independence war. Although Islam was present in the symbolism and propaganda of the militants (green headbands, referring to God and religion in contemporary art, e.g. in the well-known ballads by Timur Mutsurayev), it was less important in comparison to the dominating national ideology (pride of being a Chechen, the country's history, uniqueness and the feeling of superiority over other nations). Nevertheless, the first volunteers from Islamic countries already appeared during the First Chechen War, propagating the idea of militant Islam (of whom the most famous was a Saudi, Chattab, who first fought in Afghanistan and then in Tajikistan).<sup>8</sup> They formed their own armed troops, which gathered many Chechens. At the same time, the population turned to religion and under the influence of the neighbouring Dagestan, which traditionally used to be the ideological centre of North Caucasian Islam, the first, initially small, Salafi communities began to appear. To a certain extent, the Chechen leaders treated references to Islam opportunistically, as it favoured forming relations with Muslim states and organisations, which provided insignificant financial support to militants.

The agreements of Khasavyurt started the second period of actual independence of Chechnya, which lasted until the autumn of 1999. The war damage, mass migration of people, complete decay of economy, development of organized crime as well as impracticality of the Chechen authorities and inability to discipline the leaders of individual troops, resulted in the spread of anarchy in Chechnya between 1996 and 1999. Aslan Maskhadov, who became President in 1997 (Dudayev died in 1996) made attempts to build state structures and control the chaos; however his political position was too weak for his actions to bring measurable results. Despite signing a short Russian-Chechen "peace treaty", which did not specifically describe the status of Chechnya (May 1997), negotiations with Moscow also ended with a fiasco. Grozny wanted to negotiate

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<sup>7</sup> Maciej Falkowski, *Czeczenia a Rosja: znaczenie kwestii czeczeńskiej dla współczesnej Rosji*, OSW, 2003.

<sup>8</sup> For more on Chattab, see: collection of Chattab's diaries, available at: <https://ia601209.us.archive.org/0/items/TheMemoriesOfAmirKhatabTheExperienceOfTheArabAnsarInChechnya/Memories.pdf>



the rules of international relations, but the Russian party, which had not regarded Chechnya as an independent state, wished to negotiate the conditions of the delimitation of authorisations between the federal government and Grozny (based on a similar agreement signed previously with Tatarstan). Maskhadov's government tried to develop international relations, which did not bring any results due to inefficient diplomatic actions of the Russian party and the incompetence of the authorities of Grozny (Chechnya's independence was not acknowledged by any country in the world and the Chechens did not manage to bring in any investors, even to the oil sector).

The interwar period was crucial when it comes to the development of the militant Islam in Chechnya. In the context of a continuous dynamic growth of the social position of Islam, part of those Chechen politicians and leaders who followed ideology or were opportunistic (such as Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and Shamil Basayev) began to refer to Islam directly and advocate the transformation of Chechnya into an Islamic state. Chechnya also became a refuge for some radical Dagestani Salafists (e.g. Bagaudin Kebedov's group), who were threatened by repressions back in Dagestan (they saw emigration as the Hijra, a journey to a territory where sharia is the law).<sup>9</sup> There was also a small group of radicals from Islamic states, directed by Chattab, who closely cooperated with Basayev (he established a training camp for Salafists in Serzhen'-Yurt). Moreover, radical Islam became a convenient cover for many criminal groups (e.g. the Ahmadov brothers from Urus-Martan or Arbi Barayev's group from Alkhan-Kala), involved in kidnappings for ransom and probably connected with the Russian intelligence forces, who tried to discredit the republic and create an excuse for another armed intervention by fuelling the chaos and threat from the militant Islam in Chechnya. This period, especially in the context of the events in Chechnya, was when the term *wahhabi* and *wahhabism* was propagated in the Russian and post-Soviet information space (also in scientific and specialist circles) to describe "bad" Islam from the point of view of the authorities. Although actually Wahhabism is a historical school of Islam in Saudi Arabia and a religious and political movement founded in 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term is used not only to describe all forms of the militant Islam, but also (not necessarily militant) Salafism.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/203107/>

<sup>10</sup> Even by editorial offices and circles independent of the authorities, e.g.:  
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/legacy/russian/northcaucasus/2010/04/post-25.html> or  
<http://www.memo.ru/d/165025.html>



Despite the increase in religiousness of Chechens and the progressing re-islamisation, the calls for transforming Chechnya into an Islamic state and replacing secular law with sharia, and even more so a union with neighbouring Dagestan and creating a single Islamic republic, were not received well by the majority of the Chechen society. Salafism also grew weak roots (even in comparison to Dagestan), with its lack of intellectual backup (indigenous leaders and Salafi preachers). One of the reasons was the inveteracy of Sufism in Chechnya (mainly various local factions of the Kadirija Order, less frequently the Naqshbandi Order) and its coalescence with the ethnic identity. At the same time, the majority of Chechen elites from the national independence movement were against radical Islamists and one of Maskhadov's close collaborators, the then Chechen mufti, Akhmad-Haji Kadyrov, was becoming the main leader of "anti-wahhabists". Nevertheless, Maskhadov, who wanted to neutralise Islamic opposition and gain control over the spreading chaos, decided to introduce sharia in Chechnya in 1999 (he passed a corresponding decree), which was fiction in the face of almost no qualified staff (qadis, alim etc.). Several public executions for the heaviest crimes, which were carried out on the streets of Grozny had a devastating effect on the image of Chechnya, providing Russia with excuses to start armed intervention.<sup>11</sup>

The years 1996 to 1999 were also marked by a stormy rise of Islamic fundamentalism in Dagestan. As opposed to Chechnya, not only militant Islam developed in Dagestan, but also Safi communities, not prepared for an armed conflict (apart from Bagaudin Kebedov's group, which did not fight in Dagestan, but in Chechnya). Several Dagestani politicians also began to refer to fundamentalist Islam, including the then deputy of the State Duma, Nadirshakh Khachilayev (who previously had led a Lak nationalist movement). The growth of Salafi influence resulted in rivalry followed by a violent conflict with Dagestani Sufi orders, which began to strive to delegalize wahhabism. In the described period, the so-called Safi enclave sprang out in Dagestan, consisting of small territories (generally single villages), where Salafists were the majority, establishing their own sharia instead of Russian legislation. The most famous of such enclaves was the so-called Kadari Jamaat (several villages in near Buynak, such as Kadar, Karamakhi, Chabanmakhi, Chankurbe). Although the local Salafists maintained contact with Chechen militants and were armed, their goal

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/183607>



was not to transform the whole Dagestan into an Islamic state. The direct reason for the creation of the enclave was social problems (corruption of the authorities, inability to run businesses by Kadari Salafists, the need of self-protection from the militia etc.). All the more, the local Salafists were presented as a threat to the stability of Dagestan and the Russian authority in Caucasus.<sup>12</sup>

The year 1999 was another turning point in the history of Caucasus. In the summer, the Chechen and Dagestani Islamic radicals organised the so-called 2<sup>nd</sup> Congress of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan (the first one took place a year before) in Grozny, where the main role was played by Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, Shamil Basayev, Movladi Udugov, Adallo Aliyev, Bagautdin Kebedov and Supyan Abdullayev.<sup>13</sup> It was announced that Dagestan would be freed from the Russian authority and a common Dagestani and Chechechen army would be created. The Congress appointed a council (*Majlisul Shura*) and a sharia court, thus providing an ideological foundation for the plans of creating a united Islamic state in Caucasus (visible analogies to the establishment of the North Caucasian Emirate in 1919, which also had been founded as a result of a meeting of priests and Muslim leaders in Andi, Dagestan). Although in 1999 the Islamic proposal in Caucasus lost in confrontation with the Russian army (and in the Dagestani context also with the society, which did not approve of the congressmen's slogans), the role played by the Congress unifying the Chechen and Dagestani supporters of an Islamic state is hard to overrate. The meeting created ideological foundations and initiated the first contemporary attempt at implementing this political concept. The fact that one of the leaders of the Congress was Movladi Udugov, the minister of information in the Chechen government and creator of Kavkazcenter.com, is also significant, as he was probably one of the most important authors of the concept of the Caucasus Emirate.

The raid of Chechen and Dagestani troops on Dagestan (Botlikhsky, Tsumadinsky, Novolaksky and Khasavyurtovsky districts), which began in the turn of summer and autumn 1999, triggered the Second Chechen War.<sup>14</sup> At first, the battles were fought in Dagestan (the federal army launched an attack on Kadari Jamaat and the local Salafists put up armed resistance), and after driving away the militants from this republic, they moved to Chechnya. In September

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/about/bull/b13/7.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/234923/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1834983.html>



1999, a series of terrorist attacks took place in Caucasus and Russia, killing several hundred people (Buynak, Moscow, Volgodonsk). The people who were allegedly responsible for their organisation were "Chechen terrorists", but no convincing evidence was provided (in reality, the attacks were probably organised by the Russian secret service).<sup>15</sup> Acts of terror provided Moscow with a pretext to initiate an "anti-terrorist operation" in Caucasus and to introduce army in Chechnya. As opposed to the First Chechen War, the Second Chechen War enjoyed far greater support of the Russian society, putting its main initiator, Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, to power.

The war campaign initiated in autumn 1999 had a different course than the war of 1994-1996. The Russian army managed to break Chechen troops, eliminate the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and seize the whole territory of Chechnya in a matter of months. The militants were driven underground and started guerilla warfare, some of them (under the command of Ruslan Gelayev) crossed the Georgian border and found refuge in the Pankisi Gorge, inhabited by Georgian Chechens (the Kists). The war resulted in a mass exodus of the Chechen people, especially to Ingushetia. This led to the emigration of Chechen refugees to Europe, which lasts to this day with different intensity.<sup>16</sup>

During the first years after breaking the main forces of the militants the Moscow's policy towards Chechnya can be described as classic occupation. The Russian army, which committed a massive violation of human rights on the civilians and prisoners of war, exercised nearly absolute power in the republic. However, in 2001/2002, the Kremlin changed that policy by breaking the resistance of power structures. It began the implementation of the so-called chechenisation policy: a gradual transfer of power to loyal Chechens, giving them *carte blanche* to manage the internal policy, financing the budget of the republic in turn for stable situation with the use of arbitrary methods. Paradoxically, Moscow did not base its strategy towards Chechnya on traditional pro-Russian politicians (Doku Zavgayev, Ruslan Khasbulatov, Beslan Gantamirov or Aslambek Aslakhonov) but on former separatists who decided to collaborate: mufti Akhmad Kadyrov and the Yamadayev brothers who controlled Gudermes. Apart from pure opportunism, the basis of their

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<sup>15</sup> One of the people who believe this to be true was former FSB officer, Alexander Litvinenko, poisoned by the Russian secret service in 2006 in London. See e.g.: Alexander Litvinenko, Yuri Felshtinsky, *Wysadzić Rosję*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Rebis 2013.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5139cf902.html>



cooperation with Moscow was their opposition to radical Islam (wahhabism). In 2000, Kadyrov was appointed chief of the civil administration and in 2003 he won presidential elections, which were accompanied by massive violations of the voting rights (a referendum had been carried out beforehand, in which the Chechens were to be in favour of the republic's belonging to the Russian federation, and a constitution had been adopted). Kadyrov held the office of President only for a year; he died in a bombing in the Grozny stadium in May 2004.<sup>17</sup> His office was taken by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Alu Alkhanov, who was a puppet in the hands of Kadyrov's son, Ramzan (born in 1976), who, having gained full support from President Vladimir Putin, took the office of deputy prime minister after his father's death, climbed his way up to the office of prime minister and in 2005, having met the age requirements imposed by the Chechen constitution, he became president.

At first, Kadyrovs' reign was weak. They did not enjoy greater support of the society. On the one hand they were restricted by the Russian power structures and on the other by militants, capable of carrying out military actions and terrorist attacks, spearheaded by "the president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria", Aslan Maskhadov. Thanks to the support received from the Kremlin and a skillful compilation of ideological (reliance on the Chechen nationalism and Sufism), political (absolute neutralisation, often physical elimination of opponents and former allies; winning militants over; ostentatious loyalty to President Putin), terrorist (terror towards their own nation with the use of semi-official armed units) and economic (economic revival in Chechnya) methods, Kadyrovs managed to strengthen their authority as well as implement actual dictatorship in Chechnya and stabilise the situation (Kadyrov's actions resulted in the degradation of the Chechen guerrilla militants).<sup>18</sup>

Although the new constitution changed the symbolism of separatists (flag, emblem and hymn), Ramzan Kadyrov cannot be described as a pro-Russian politician. In reality, he is rather an extreme Chechen nationalist, a "systemic separatist", who (either aware or unaware) creates the foundation for the Chechen state. Contemporary Chechnya is hardly similar to Russia, as it has its own, ingrained laws (mixture of the law of the strongest, Chechen Adat, sharia

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<sup>17</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/3160962.stm>

<sup>18</sup> More on this topic in: Maciej Falkowski, "Czeczenia między kaukaskim dżihadem, a „ukrytym” separatyzmem", *Punkt Widzenia OSW*, Warszawa 2007, available at: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/punkt\\_widzenia\\_13.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/punkt_widzenia_13.pdf)



and Russian legislation) and is subject to the process of a fast cultural de-russification, chechenisation and islamisation.

Sufi Islam is an extremely important element of Kadyrov's ideology and a tool for managing the republic (Kadyrov refers almost solely to the heritage of the founder of the Chechen branch of the Kadirija Order, Sheikh Kunta-haji Kishiev, who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century). It is a process that requires a great amount of skill, for the pacifist teaching of Kishshiev, who, as opposed to imam Shamil, encouraged Chechens to cease fighting and come to terms with the Russian authority in order to save the nation, harmonises with Kadyrov's political line (forced to sacrifice independence in the presence of Russian power) and erases the burden of collaborationism.

Based on nationalism and Sufism, the ideology contrasts with wahhabism, represented by militants, which is presented as imported from outside; a concept alien to the Chechen culture, tradition and mentality. Thus, Kadyrov presents himself as a defender of the Chechen identity, which, in his view, is betrayed by the militants. At the same time, Kadyrov extends his contacts with the world of Islam (including economic relationships), talks about international matters concerning Islam (e.g. condemning jihadists in Syria and Iraq), which are in line with the policy of the Kremlin, and aspires to the role of one of the most important leaders of Russian Muslims and the whole world of Islam (he visits Islamic States, finances mosques in the Middle East etc.)

Responding to the social demand, Kadyrov consciously pursues the policy of regular islamisation of the republic, although many of its aspects are explicitly contradictory not only to the politics of the federal authorities, but also to the Russian law (e.g. tolerating or even promoting multiple marriage). At the same time, he is ostentatiously religious, which makes him popular among the Chechen population (especially the youth). The elements of the islamisation of the republic are: support for sharia (especially the fact of adjudicating on civil matters by sharia courts), construction of numerous mosques, madrasas, introduction of non-formal Islamic prohibitions and rules (wearing headscarves, but not wahhabi hijabs, by women, restrictions on the sale of alcohol, gambling games etc.), treating Muslim priests as civil servants who participate in





administering the republic, especially locally (e.g. sharia judges, quadis, in individual regions).<sup>19</sup>

Parallel to chechenisation and strengthening Kadyrov's regime, some dynamic processes took place in the armed underground. When it comes to politics and army, the years 1999-2007 may be seen as the last stage of the Chechen struggle for independence under the aegis of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. As a result of the failure to build an independent Chechen state between 1991-1994 and 1996-1999 and the armed conflict with Russia, the "Ichkerian scheme" lost to Kadyrov's concept (systemic separatism) and to the Islamic scheme. It became a doctrine of political emigrants in the West, who had no influence on Chechnya. The last "Ichkerian" leader of the armed underground in Chechnya was Aslan Maskhadov (his successor, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev, who had been the leader of militants in 2005-2006, referred to Islam more than to Chechen independence). Despite a strong social mandate (winning presidential election in 1997), Maskhadov's authority was short-lived. He did not control most troops of militants and he was not able to prevent regular terrorist attacks and taking hostages by Shamil Basayev and other leaders (e.g. the Moscow theatre hostage crisis in Dubrovka in October 2002 or the Beslan school hostage crisis in September 2004). Further, he was not able to stop the proceeding ideological transformation of the armed underground, which had become the de facto Islamic underground as early as in the first years of the Second Chechen War (supporters of fighting for independence were marginalised and they sided with Kadyrov, as the Ichkerian Minister of Defense, Magomed Khambiyev, or emigrated, like military commander Isa Munayev from Grozny).

The way to the Caucasus Emirate was paved not only by the ideological evolution of the Chechen armed underground, but also by the events that took place in the neighbouring republics of the North Caucasus, especially in Dagestan, Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Putting the troops of Chechen and Dagestani radicals to rout in autumn 1999 began a wave of repressions directed towards Dagestani Salafists, whose legal base was the act on the prohibition of Wahhabi and all examples of extremist propaganda on the territory of the republic, adopted by the local Parliament in September 1999. Kadari Jamaat was eliminated (the villages were almost completely destroyed during the war and the majority of the population emigrated), Salafi mosques

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<sup>19</sup> E.g. <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/chechnya03111webwcover.pdf>



were closed down, activists could not voice their opinions in public and a number of Salafists were repressed (prisons, tortures, arrests). Persecution could be triggered even by external, characteristic attributes, such as a long beard and no moustache, "inappropriate" headdress or  $\frac{3}{4}$  length trousers. The repressions drove Salafists deep underground, but did not prevent the movement from growing.<sup>20</sup> In other republics, Salafi milieux were marginal until the beginning of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In the first half of the 2000s, there was a sudden development of local Salafi communities in Dagestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and to a lesser extent in Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania, Adygea and Stavropol Krai, and their members were prominently young. The most important reasons for the above mentioned phenomenon include: proceeding political, social and economic stagnation; ideological crisis (lack of ideologies attractive to the youth); massive corruption and nepotism of the authorities and of the associated official Islam, and in the case of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, also of Sufi orders; the policy of the Kremlin towards the region (supporting local regimes based on family and mafia, lack of efforts to solve chronic problems in Caucasus and to modernise the region, its integration with the rest of Russia); growth of nationalism and xenophobia in Russia; generational change (the growing generation does not remember the Soviet period).<sup>21</sup> The development of Salafism was also influenced by the return of students, who had left for Islamic countries in the 90s, increasingly stronger relations of Caucasian Muslims with Islam, as well as the actions of a small number of volunteers from North Caucasian republics who had taken part in battles in Chechnya or stayed in Chechnya in the inter-war period (and were trained at the Serzhen-Yurt training camp). The popularity of Salafism among Caucasian youth can be explained by its simplicity and intransigence, as well as its modern aspect (departure from blind obedience to the elderly, rejection of the stifling shackles of tradition). The situation in Ingushetia, where hundreds and then tens of thousands of refugees from Chechnya had found their new home, was slightly different. It was in their surroundings, effectively infiltrated by the militants (control of power structures was smaller than in Chechnya) that the first Salafi

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/73122/> and <http://www.ndelo.ru/politika-5/2721-depressivnyj-dagestan-to-li-eshche-budet>

<sup>21</sup> More on this topic in: Maciej Falkowski, Mariusz Marszewski, *Kaukaskie „terytoria plemienne”*. *Kaukaz Północny – cywilizacyjnie obca enklawa w granicach Rosji*, Prace OSW, 2010. Available at: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace\\_34.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_34.pdf)



circles began to appear. The refugees were also regularly recruited by the militants.

At first, the Salafi communities, which mostly acted locally, were far from engaging in armed conflict and their members focused on religious matters (common religious observances, maximum compliance with the rules of Islam in everyday life, getting to know Islam, learning Arabic etc.), although they tried to be active in the public sphere as well (attempts of establishing non-governmental organisations, publishing newspapers, organising meetings, taking up business). The salafisation of youth in a Soviet society was a cause of many conflicts, first and foremost a fierce conflict of generations, which sometimes divided whole families (converted children versus Soviet parents, who saw religious observances as "uncivilised"). The lack of parental acceptance often led to an even greater radicalisation of young Salafists.

However, what really made Caucasian Salafists join the militant Islam was prosecution by the authorities, often initiated by the official clergy, who considered popular Salafists as a threat to their ideology. A good example of the radicalisation process is Kabardino-Balkaria, where Anzor Astemirov and Musa Mukojev were the leaders of the local Salafist community.<sup>22</sup> By controlling Kabardian and Balkar Salafists, they tried to act legally (e.g. within the framework of the Institute of Islamic Studies in Kabardino-Balkaria, directed by a former KGB officer, Ruslan Nakhushev). Along with the members of the community, they were driven to the path of force and cooperation with Chechen militants by long-lasting repressions on the part of republican power structures (unlawful detentions, murder, battery, mosque raids, frequently accompanied by offending of religious feelings etc.; Nakhushev himself was abducted and probably killed, after his long-lasting attempts at mediating between the authorities and Salafists in order to prevent the radicalisation of the latter). They caused ideological and operational cooperation between Kabardian and Balkar Salafists and Chechen militants (mainly with Basayev), who treated it as a chance to expand the war with Russia to Kabardino-Balkaria. Astemirov and Mukojev descended to the underground, creating Yarmouk, a local armed organisation which engaged in a struggle with the authorities. The height of the radicalisation process was a raid on Nalchik, organised by Chechen militants

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/104855/>



and Yarmouk in October 2005, which lasted for several hours (and took the lives of 140 people).<sup>23</sup>

Similar processes were taking place in other republics, where local armed organisations associated with the Chechens and acknowledging their authority sprang in the first half of the 2000s (e.g. Shariat Jamaat in Dagestan, Khalifat Jamaat in Ingushetia or Kataib al-Khoul Jamaat in North Ossetia-Alania; these formed the so-called Caucasian front). The spread of jihad in the whole Caucasus, which became a fact in ca. 2005, led to a situation in which Chechens, although still the avant-garde of the armed struggle, lost their monopoly on it.

The internationalisation of the Caucasian jihad meant that also in the decision-making aspect the leadership of the Chechens (which lacked experienced leaders due to the deaths of Aslan Maskhadov, Shamil Basayev, Ruslan Gelayev or Abdul-Halim Sadulayev) was no longer dominant and leaders of other nationalities started to play a greater role (e.g. Anzor Astemirov). Although they had little experience, they often overshadowed the Chechens when it comes to the knowledge of Islam. In this situation, the ideological framework of the Chechen independence movement became too narrow for the armed underground, as it had no room for non-Chechens. The Chechen leaders and radical Salafists from other republics who cooperated with them (such as Astemirov and Mukojev from Kabardino-Balkaria) had to face the need of devising a new ideological concept for jihad in Caucasus. It also had to be done for purely operational reasons (weakening of armed underground in Chechnya due to Kadyrov's policy) and ideological changes in the camp of the Chechen militants (salafisation of the militants and the fiasco of the "Ingushetia scheme").

The choice of the ideological concept for the Caucasus Emirate and its proclamation in 2007 by the then leader of the underground, Dokka Umarov (simultaneous with the elimination of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria) was a natural consequence of the above mentioned processes, and at the same time a return to the roots, revival of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century ideology of fighting for the creation of a common Islamic state for all Muslims in the North Caucasus.

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.newsru.com/russia/13oct2005/school.html>



The Caucasus Emirate was officially proclaimed on 7<sup>th</sup> October 2007 by the president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, Dokka Umarov. Referring to "the will of God", Umarov declared, in a short statement, that as an emir of Caucasian mujahidin, he rejected everything that was connected with Evil (*taghut*), all rights of infidels, all political systems established in Caucasus and in the whole world by "infidels". He also stated that all "ethnic, territorial and colonial" political formations that existed in Caucasus (republics of the North Caucasus, states of the South Caucasus etc.) were illegal. Declaring that "the whole Caucasian land on which mujahidin practice jihad" was the territory of the Caucasus Emirate, Umarov stressed that he did not deem it necessary to determine the external borders of the Emirate just yet. He also stated that only he, as the emir of Caucasian mujahedins, was the legal authority on all the territories where jihad was practised.

This proclamation reverberated throughout the whole North Caucasus and among the Chechen diaspora abroad. It was enthusiastically received by the supporters of jihad (including most of the militants) and a large group of Caucasian Salafists. However, the proclamation of the Emirate synonymous with the elimination of the CRI, triggered harsh criticism on the part of the Chechen independence activists in the West (e.g. circles associated with Akhmed Zakayev, Ilyas Akhmadov and others), who considered it a betrayal of the Chechen independence. They did not recognise the Emirate, announcing that Umarov had broken the Chechen constitution and that his actions were illegal. They appointed a Chechen government-in-exile as an alternative to the Emirate, led by Zakayev, and accused Umarov of actions inspired by the FSB (which allegedly strived for discrediting the Chechen independence ideology). This, however, had little influence on the situation in Caucasus and the vast majority of leaders, troops and militants recognised Umarov as the emir and gave him the pledge of allegiance.



## **Chapter 2**

### **The ideology of the Caucasus Emirate**

The Caucasus Emirate is an Islamic terrorist organisation and its ideology is inseparably connected with radical Islam. Religion is fundamental both for the ideology and the general activity of the Caucasus Emirate, which is governed by the Salafī understanding of the Koran law: sharia. Although in reality the radical Salafism of the CE is a derivative of earlier events and processes in Caucasus (mostly the Chechen separatism), it currently constitutes the foundation of the ideology of the Caucasian armed underground. The ultimate goal of the CE is the creation of an Islamic state on the territory of the North Caucasus. As far as propaganda, the Caucasus Emirate is already considered a state, albeit under foreign occupation and run conspiratorially.<sup>24</sup> The Caucasus Emirate is also considered the successor to the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, although the struggle for independence of the Chechens is seen as a certain stage leading to the creation of an Islamic movement in Caucasus. On the other hand, when it comes to the Islamic militants in Chechnya, they treat Vilayat Chechnya (in the emirate terminology, one of the Emirate's provinces) as the legal continuer of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. The creation of the Caucasus Emirate and Vilayat Chechnya in its borders is seen as the culmination of the struggle for independence initiated in the 90s by the Chechens. As a result, the postulate of the Chechen independence is to be implemented not within a secular democratic state, but based on the Koran and the Sunnah of an Islamic state.

The ideological foundation of the Caucasus Emirate is religion (the leaders of the organisation refer directly to Islam as the basic, fundamental set of laws and rules regulating the goals and the whole activity of the CE<sup>25</sup>), and more strictly speaking Salafism, which is a fundamentalist variation of Sunni Islam (see: the table), supported by the members of the CE. Although it declares itself to be an Islamic, rather than Salafī, organisation (most of Salafists simply identify themselves as Muslims), ideological elements of other movements of Sunni Islam are not currently present in the narrative applied by the militants and their

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<sup>24</sup> <http://checheninfo.com/?p=542>

<sup>25</sup> E.g. <http://vdagestan.com/prisyagaem.djihad>



ideologists. Religion and the role played by Islam are also the main factors that distinguish the CE from earlier armed organisations of the North Caucasus. The CE does not refer to ideologies of particular nations centred around national independence (although in Vilayat Chechnya these references are present), but rather to religious rules, based on religious (Islam) and ideological (Salafism) identity rather than ethnicity. The replacement of the Chechen independence ideology with Islamic watchwords allowed the opening of an ideological umbrella over the whole North Caucasus and the extension of armed operations to the majority of North Caucasian republics. As a result, the Chechens ceased to be the driving force of armed struggle, the battles moved to Dagestan and the ranks of CE mostly consist of other nationalities (e.g. the Tatars, Kazakhs and ethnic Russians who converted to Islam).

The ideology adopted by the Caucasus Emirate justifies terrorist operations (even against secular facilities) based on religion; although it needs to be emphasised that the ideology itself was not the reason the Emirate applied this tactic (terrorist methods were employed by militants as early as the First Chechen War). The adoption of fundamentalist, radical Islam by the Caucasus Emirate as an ideology also placed the CE on the map of global Islamic terrorism, although the role of the CE in the "terrorist internationale" is marginal and its cooperation with other Islamic terrorist organisations is minimal. Nevertheless, as a result, the Emirate also adopted anti-western elements of radical Salafism, such as criticism of the US policy towards the Muslim world



and the Middle East, anti-Israeli aspects and negating western values, which is further strengthened by the Soviet and now Russian anti-western propaganda.<sup>26</sup>

The presence of these aspects in the propaganda of the Caucasus Emirate does not influence the activity of the organisation, which heretofore has not executed any attacks on western targets, which probably results from fear of the loss of a secure hideaway for Caucasian refugees, including a large number of former militants.

### **Salafism**

Religious movement calling for the return to "pure" Islam, rejecting elements of local tradition which are not based on Koran and the Sunnah.<sup>27</sup> In its theological aspect, the key element of Salafism is radical monotheism, *tawhid*, understood as the unification and oneness of God. Salafi fundamentalism is not confined to the rejection of tradition; it rejects all activities and the institutions incompatible with Koran and the Sunnah, which are treated as the original and primary source of law. As a doctrine, Salafism is characterized by significant legality; as opposed to mystical Sufism, it emphasizes legal correctness (sharia) of human activity rather than personal and mystical connection to God. The fundamental character of Salafism, which calls itself the only true Islam, underlies a hostile attitude towards other movements and trends within Islam, especially Shia Islam and Sufism, which Salafists believe to be contradicting the radically understood monotheism. Salafists constitute a minority among Muslim communities in Caucasus, although Salafism, due to its simplicity and the encouragement to return to the "pure and true" Islam, is very popular among neophytes and people who return to faith, not only in post-Soviet nations. The ranks of Salafists are dominated by young people. Salafism is not militant, radical Islam; most of Salafists do not recognise the need to practice jihad on the territory of Russia and other post-Soviet states. Salafi communities are present in all states of the former USSR inhabited by Muslims. The strongest center of Salafism in the North Caucasus is Dagestan.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. <http://kavkazjihad.com/ru/stati/analitika-tribuna/neokolonializm-i-eksport-ideologii.html>

<sup>27</sup> Sunnah is an Islamic tradition contained in hadiths, stories about the life of prophet Muhammad, constituting an interpretation of norms and laws contained in Koran.





As a religious ideology, Salafism, also the kind practiced by the Caucasus Emirate, is radical: the only things that are real are the ones which can be credibly justified based on Koran and Sunnah, which are treated as axioms. It is also characterized by a peculiarly understood legalism: all actions have to be theologically and legally justified. This results in the fact that all Salafist terrorist organizations devote a lot of attention to the ideological and theological problems, justifying their actions from the point of view of sharia (although it needs to be emphasized that it is often hard to separate the aspects used as propaganda in order to recruit new members from authentic ideological assumptions). In the case of the CE, these are mostly questions connected with the mere existence of the organization (the occupied country, according to the militants), the armed conflict and the ultimate goal, which is the creation of a multi-ethnic Islamic state in the North Caucasus. Because of Salafist legality, the ideologists of Caucasian militants (especially Ali Abu Mukhammad) focus on the opinions of Muslim scholars, considered to be the spiritual leaders of global jihad (such as Jordanian Sheikhs Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi or Abu Katada al-Filastini).

The Caucasus Emirate justifies its fight with Russia and the local authorities on the grounds of religious orders. In the ideological dimension, the most important question is the need to practice jihad understood not as a political decision of the movement, but as a religious duty applying to all Muslims who live in Russian Caucasus (which is also in fact a justification of the existence of the Emirate itself). This issue is constantly being raised in the propagandist materials of the organization.<sup>28</sup>

The justification of the need to practice jihad expressed by the Caucasus Emirate is the following: Islam distinguishes between two kinds of armed jihad: offensive and defensive. Offensive jihad is directed at the conquest of territories belonging to non-Muslims. It is restricted by a series of rules; first of all, it can be declared only by a caliph, a leader of a widely recognized Islamic state, which means that nowadays it does not apply (a self-proclaimed leader of the Islamic State, Caliph Ibrahim, is not widely recognized). Defensive jihad, on the other

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<sup>28</sup> E.g. <http://vdagestan.com/amir-gs-i-kadij-vd-abu-usman-vrednye-posledstviya-ostavleniya-dzhixada.djihad>



hand, has a lot less restrictions. It is practiced in defense of Muslim territories which are under the control of infidels, who prevent or hinder Muslims from practicing their religion and lead their lives according to the rules of sharia. This type of jihad is the obligation of all Muslims, although the issue concerning the premises that meet the conditions necessary to start a fight is an individual decision each Muslim has to make on their own, based on the opinion of their religious authorities. Evading this obligation is a severe offence and a violation of the rules of sharia: this is agreed on by all Salafists. The pivot of the conflict within the Salafist community in the North Caucasus is the question of whether there are currently any premises that would meet the conditions of defensive jihad. Peaceful Caucasian Salafists (the majority) claim that there are no such conditions, for they can practice their religion according to their own rules and in the case of any restrictions or repressions, they may emigrate to territories where sharia is recognized.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, the Caucasus Emirate and its supporters claim that there are sufficient premises to practice defensive jihad collectively (within the framework of the CE), based on each individual decision on initiating defensive jihad through joining the Emirate in its fight and swearing an oath of allegiance (bay'ah) to the current emir.

The existence of objective (from the Emirate's point of view) circumstances that would require the declaration of defensive jihad in the North Caucasus is a vital issue, as it is the prerequisite for the internal cohesion of the ideological paradigm of the Emirate. Due to the rejection of the national independence ideology by the CE, the basis for such a need is not the mere fact that North Caucasian republics are subject to Russian authorities, but the fact that the Muslims who inhabit them are persecuted by these authorities for obeying the Salafist interpretation of sharia. In its propaganda, the CE refers both to authentic and alleged persecution of Muslims by the local and Russian authorities as a proof of premises for the initiation of defensive jihad.<sup>30</sup> Also the persecution of militants is presented as such evidence, which shows not only inconsistencies in the Emirate's ideology, but most importantly its derivative character towards the ongoing conflict. However, the fact remains that new volunteers often join the ranks of the CE having experienced or witnessed religious persecution for practicing Salafism or for having a real or alleged

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<sup>29</sup> The so-called hijra: emigration from a territory where it is impossible to observe the rules of sharia to territories where sharia is applied, or where its observance is not restricted.

<sup>30</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/amir-imarata-kavkaz-ali-abu-muxammad-prichiny-unizheniya-etoj-ummy-video.djihad>



connections with the armed underground, and having found out about the existence of premises for pursuing defensive jihad. The persecution of peaceful Salafists has also made some Salafist leaders, who had previously not admitted any form of armed conflict, change their attitude towards jihad. One example was Said Buryatsky (Alexander Tikhomirov), a Salafi leader from Buryatia, who had previously criticized jihad, but changed his mind in 2008 and joined the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>31</sup>

The ultimate goal of the Caucasus Emirate, which is more of a highlight than a justification of its struggle, is the creation of an Islamic state in the North Caucasus, which would guarantee the observance of sharia and consequently constitute a systemic solution to the problems diagnosed by the IK (persecution of Muslims which creates the need to initiate jihad). In the militants' terminology, the foundations of this state are already there, in the form of the Caucasus Emirate itself, as well as its leaders and local structures which operate conspiratorially. The Islamic state based on sharia, whose establishment is the goal of the militants in the North Caucasus should not be equated with caliphate (or its part/province), which is a state governed by a Caliph, the ruler of all Muslims. As opposed to many other Islamic terrorist organizations which consider the questions of the ideological foundation of such a state and the adaptation of the contemporary legislation and state administration for the requirements of fundamental Islam,<sup>32</sup> the Caucasian Emirate operates locally, and is not concerned with any matters referring to caliphate. Its state-forming actions are confined to determining the internal administrative boundaries of the future North Caucasian state (for more on this topic see: Chapter 3: The Structure) and to limited attempts at imposing the observance of sharia in selected areas, mostly consisting in attacks on off-licence shops, casinos, brothels, or charlatans.<sup>33</sup> The superficiality of the state ideology of the Emirate and the limited character of operations in that respect shows that even from the ideological point of view there is a visible lack of faith in success in foreseeable

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<sup>31</sup> E.g. earlier lectures: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2R1wRG8EmjA> and <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gutg9DKl8VM>, and subsequent: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xz1YZ9QMKTQ>

<sup>32</sup> E.g. Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, postulating the creation of an Islamic theocratic state in Pakistan: <http://www.jhuf.net/showthread.php?15465-Constituion-Of-Pakistan&highlight=ttp+pakistan+state> or Hizb ut-Tahrir, whose goal is a peaceful reconstruction of caliphate – [http://www.islamic-truth.co.uk/islamicstore/pdf\\_files/24hrs\\_khilafah\\_book.pdf](http://www.islamic-truth.co.uk/islamicstore/pdf_files/24hrs_khilafah_book.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/183638/>;  
[http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/12/24/62994\\_print.html](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/12/24/62994_print.html),  
[http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/03/18/57052\\_print.html](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/03/18/57052_print.html)



future; apart from general statements on the significance of sharia in creating a state, CE leaders are not able to present any positive agenda for the future. It can be concluded, therefore, that despite the declared objective, i.e. the establishment of a state, the actual goal is to pursue jihad, understood as a religious obligation. Apart from the ideological aspect, this also is connected with the factual situation: the Caucasus Emirate, proclaimed in the time when the conflict in Russian North Caucasus had already died out, served as the formalization of the ideological justification of a fight, to which, due to the persecution of former militants, there was no alternative. Given the above, the treatment of the Caucasus Emirate as a certain underground state is unauthorized, as it is not reflected in reality. Regardless of the declaration of its leaders, it is a typical armed terrorist organization.

Another ideological aspect associated with the Salafist character of the Caucasus Emirate is the definition of threats and enemies. The inability to practice religion freely and to fully apply sharia by Caucasian Muslims is seen as the main threat and challenge (rather than the lack of sovereignty of the North Caucasian republics). On the other hand, the enemies are not only Russian forces, "occupying" the Muslim North Caucasus, but rather the local authorities of individual republics. They are called *murtads*, dissenters from the faith, which means that although they refer to Islam (especially in the case of the president of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov), they violate its fundamental dogmas and persecute practicing Muslims (Salafists). Additionally, in the case of the war with Russian forces or terrorist attacks directed at Russians, the religious dimension (war with infidels) is more important than the political one (struggle for national independence against Moscow). The revenge for suffering of Muslims in the North Caucasus is a frequently raised question. This dimension of the current war in Caucasus is almost identical to the 19<sup>th</sup> century muridism. Imam Shamil and the leaders who preceded him also fought for the establishment of sharia in the region, while their greatest enemies were the local authorities and Dagestani aristocracy, cooperating with the Russians. Independence was not their most important and ultimate goal, and Russia was not their main opponent (which is often marginalized or ignored, especially in Poland). It is a historical paradox, however, that Sufism, which nowadays constitutes the basis of ideological war with the armed underground, used to be the platform of resistance at the time.



Due to the Salafi nature of the Caucasus Emirate, apart from the military and terrorist dimension, it takes a defined, much wider place in the North Caucasian ideological and religious matrix. Apart from Russian forces (considered by the CE as infidels) and local authorities (considered to be dissenters from faith), the main points of reference for the CE are Sufi orders and peaceful Salafists.

The attitude of the Caucasus Emirate towards Sufists and Sufism can be determined as hostile. This results from an ideological and theological discrepancy (Salafists do not consider Sufists as Muslims and they accuse them of polytheism, due to the cult of saints and Sheikhs, Sufi religious leaders) and the fact that Sufi orders, connected with the so-called official Islam (this situation concerns Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia), closely cooperate with civil authorities, legitimizing the current political system in Caucasus from the religious point of view. What is more, by perceiving Salafism (both the fighting and peaceful Salafism) as the most important rival in the battle for believers, in many cases (and systemically in Dagestan) they are responsible for the persecution of Salafists by the authorities and they oppose attempts at an agreement. Starting in the second half of the 90s, tensions between the two groups have been a continuous element of the political and religious landscape of the eastern part of the region, often assuming the form of acts of violence (e.g. assassination of Sheikh Said Efendi Chirkeisky by a suicide terrorist in 2012<sup>34</sup>). Although militants are not responsible for all attacks on the representatives of Sufi orders (more often they are a result of rivalry between clans, mafia and economic wars with Sufis), Sufi-Salafist tensions are traditionally used by Russia to carry out local animosity in the name of the imperial rule of *divide et impera* (especially in Dagestan).<sup>35</sup>

The ideological interdependence and differences between peaceful Salafists and the Caucasus Emirate are more complicated. The former constitutes a social basis for the enrolment of new volunteers and they are the ones to whom the Emirate's jihad propaganda is directed in the first place. The Emirate considers them true Muslims, although it criticizes their lack of recognition of the need for armed conflict. Peaceful Salafists are not uniform as a group and their attitude towards the CE is diverse: from favourable attitude (without their own

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.islamdag.info/news/2569>

<sup>35</sup>

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=39807&no\\_cache=1#.VHR\\_M4uG8IA](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=39807&no_cache=1#.VHR_M4uG8IA)



engagement) to the criticism of the armed conflict in Caucasus. Peaceful Salafists do not reject the institution of armed jihad itself, but they either do not acknowledge its necessity in the North Caucasus (in their opinion Emirate's jihad is unlawful from the point of view of sharia), or conclude that if the Caucasus Emirate is doomed to fail, then armed jihad is not an appropriate solution, but rather officiousness.

A serious ideological dispute within the community of Caucasian Salafists (including those connected with the Caucasus Emirate) is triggered by Caucasian volunteers' moving to Syria and Iraq to take part in jihad. This movement is on the increase (the number of volunteers from Caucasus may reach thousands of people) and the unquestionable legitimacy of the Syrian jihad in accordance with sharia, the victorious nature of the former operations and significantly better living conditions for the militants are favourable factors.<sup>36</sup> The Caucasus Emirate opposes trips to Syria, as they significantly reduce the already decreased influx of new volunteers in the ranks of the organisation. Ideologically, the Emirate explains its objection by the priority (according to some hadiths) of jihad in the homeland over the one which takes place in other countries, which does not sound convincing for most of Caucasian Salafists who plan to leave for Syria.<sup>37</sup>

Apart from radical Salafism, the ideology of the Caucasus Emirate currently includes few aspects which have no religious justification or are contrary to the opinion of the majority of Salafi leaders. First and foremost, they are the remainder of the national independence ideology among the militants of Vilayat Chechnya, who continue their struggle for Chechen independence (understood as a struggle for the creation of Vilayat Chechnya within the Caucasus Emirate), although they support Salafi Islam and the idea of establishing an Islamic state in Caucasus. The most recent example of unorthodox elements in the doctrine of the Emirate's militants is the above mentioned resistance against moving to Syria. It is triggered by a drastic decrease in the influx of new recruits to the Caucasus Emirate, meaning it is a political decision, dictated by utilitarian reasons independently of the later attempts at its justification based on sharia. The prohibition of attacks on Russian civilian facilities announced by the former emir Dokka Umarov was also strictly political.<sup>38</sup> It happened during

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<sup>36</sup> For more, see: Chapter 7.

<sup>37</sup> <http://kavkazjihad.com/ru/drugiye-kategorii/otdel-pisem/dzhikhad-v-sirii-i-na-kavkaze.html>

<sup>38</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2012/02/03/88591.shtml>



oppositional protests on Bolotny Square in Moscow in 2012, and Umarov justified the prohibition on the grounds that there was a change of the Russians' attitude towards the authorities (he emphasised that the Russian authorities were the enemies of the militants, not ordinary Russians). This declaration received a great deal of publicity in the media and was used both by the Emirate to demonstrate good will, and by the Russian authorities to discredit opposition. Nonetheless, from the Salafist point of view, the declaration was not justified and it was criticised by radical circles, as it depicted Moscow as a political enemy rather than a religious one and Russians as potential allies rather than infidels, who are enemies by definition.<sup>39</sup> The readiness of the Caucasus Emirate to act in opposition to the Salafist ideology, but favourably towards the organisation, is also noticeable in the case of the members of the Emirate who operate in conspiracy.<sup>40</sup> The organisation persuades them to hide their opinions, even if it means non-observance of certain religious rules,<sup>41</sup> which is dictated by the need of efficient conspiratorial functioning of the organisation, but contrary to the Salafist doctrine.

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<sup>39</sup> <http://hunafa.com/?p=6567>

<sup>40</sup> For more information: see Chapter 3: The Structure

<sup>41</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/legalnaya-zhizn.djihad>



## **Chapter 3**

### **The structure of the Caucasus Emirate**

In the terminology of Caucasian militants, the Caucasus Emirate, proclaimed in 2007, is an Islamic state which covers the whole territory of the North Caucasus, but has no ultimate external borders, even according to mujahedins themselves. The legal system applying on the territory of the Emirate is the Islamic Law called sharia. Its capital is Grozny, called Dzhokhar by the militants (in commemoration of Dzhokhar Dudayev). In reality, the Emirate does not control any territory. It is not even an underground state that tries to administer its own area, but a terrorist organisation mostly dealing with armed and terrorist operations. The propagandist and actual dimensions of the Emirate have a significant influence on its structure, which on the one hand is to manage the territories that theoretically belong to it, and on the other enable the present underground activity of the organisation. As a result, although formally strictly hierarchical, the structure of the organisation is *de facto* network-based and individual groups, although subject to the emir of the CE, function autonomously, enjoying almost complete freedom of action (while observing general guidelines concerning armed conflicts, formulated by the emir of Caucasus).

We can describe the structure of the Caucasus Emirate from the organisational and territorial point of view, the former being a developed hierarchy of institutions and "public" authorities, and the latter consisting in a division into smaller units, ultimately provinces of a new state, which at the moment consist of groups of militants active in a given area.

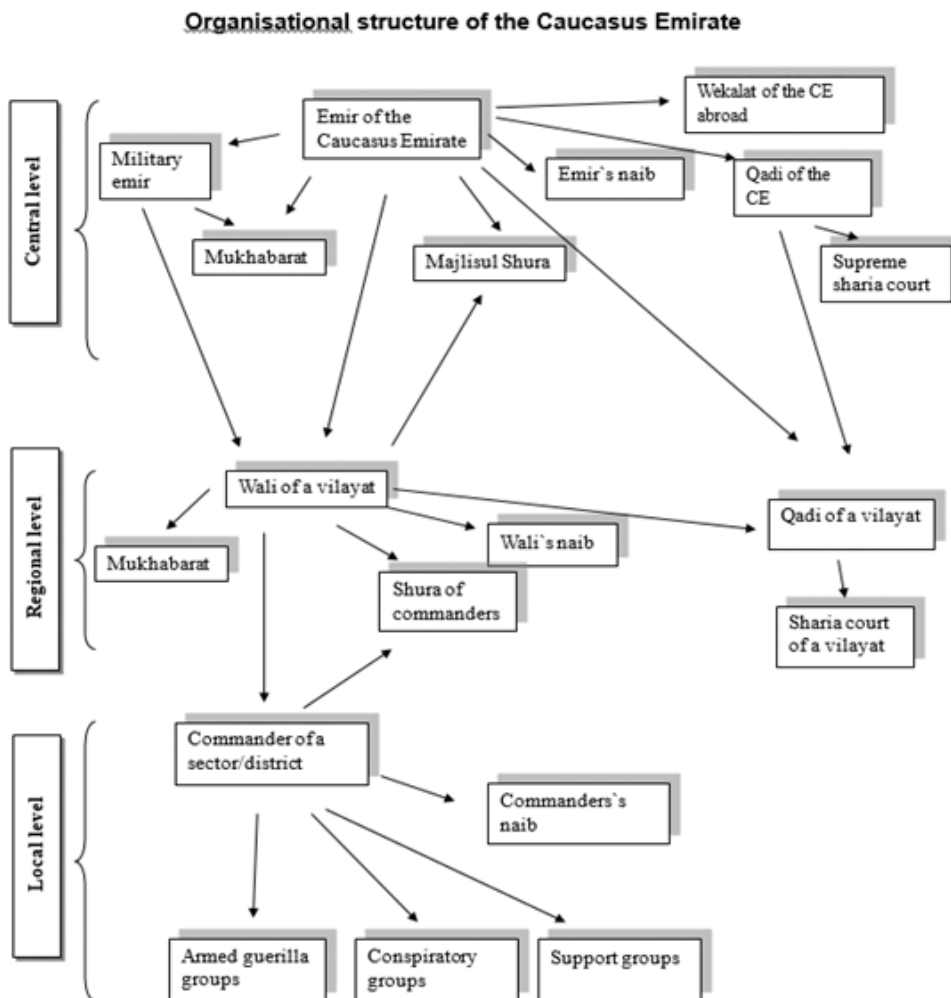
### **Organisational structure**

The organisational structure of the Emirate is developed and based on hierarchy, but it has never been formalised and its shape may be represented only based on materials published by the militants (e.g. declarations of the emir, records published on the Internet and other informative and propagandist materials).





The structure of the organisation can be divided into three levels: central, with the emir of the CE in the forefront, regional, with walis (representing the emir) of vilayats,<sup>42</sup> and local, with the commanding officers of certain sectors/districts. These levels also expand horizontally and cover a range of institutions, such as deputies (naibs), sharia judges (quadis) and others. It needs to be remembered, however, that the actual structure of the Caucasus Emirate is dynamic and subject to continuous changes: new functions are being created and some remain unfilled or are disposed of.



Source: Authors

<sup>42</sup> From Arabic *wilayah*, province, an administrative division of the Caucasus Emirate roughly corresponding to the borders of North Caucasian republics.



The highest organisational level of the Caucasus Emirate is the central level, consisting of the emir and the institutions and people that are directly subject to him. Formally, the emir is the chief of state and the political and military leader of the organisation. The first emir was a Chechen, Dokka Umarov (Dokka Abu Usman), who served in the years 2007-2013, and who currently is succeeded by a Dagestani Aliaskhab Kebekov vel Ali Abu Mukhammad (ethnic Avar). The power of an emir is nearly absolute (restricted only by the necessity to apply sharia); he exercises executive and legislative power and is the commander-in-chief, whose orders and commands have to be fulfilled by all militants. Only the judiciary is theoretically independent of the emir (executed by a quadi).

Formally, the emir exercises his power through issuing decrees (so-called omras) to subordinate structures and in practice he manages the Emirate informally and the fact that his decisions and guidelines reach the militants and commanding officers through public recordings published on the Internet indicates that he probably has no direct contact with them. From the moment the Caucasus Emirate was established, only ten decrees have been issued<sup>43</sup> and none of them specified the structure and the division of power, or the status and entitlements of the emir (this clearly contrasts with the structures of the CRI, which used to issue tens of "presidential" decrees on a regular basis).

The status of an emir is not based on tenures; it is either permanent or lasts until the emir violates sharia (it is not known who settles that matter; however, the oath sworn to the emir by commanders and militants is conditional: they will serve him until he violates sharia). The official method of choosing an emir is not clear: when proclaiming the Emirate, Umarov declared himself its emir and Kebekov became the leader based on an informal decision of the CE's leadership

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<sup>43</sup> Omra no. 1 "On establishment of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 2 "On the imposition of the Shariah Rule on the territories of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 3 "On the establishment of the administrative-territorial unit Vilayat as a constituent of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 4 "On conversion of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria into Vilayat Nohchiyocho (Ichkeria) of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 5 "On an administrative-territorial system of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 6 "On creation of institution of Valis of Vilayat of the Caucasus Emirate"; Omra no. 7 "On the abolition of the institute of President of the CRI"; Omra no. 8 "On the abolition of the Cabinet of Ministers and the Parliament of the former CRI"; Omra no. 9 "On the abolishment of General Mission of former CRI abroad"; Omra no. 10 "On General Mission (the Wekalat) of the Caucasus Emirate abroad". Source: <http://checheninfo.com/?p=542> and <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/12/09/54888.shtml>



(in practice it was probably a result of a compromise between the most important commanders).<sup>44</sup> The power of the emir is legitimised based on an oath of allegiance (so-called *bay'ah*) which is sworn by all members of the Emirate (in this case understood as an armed organisation). The emir appoints his deputies: a naib, the first deputy and proxy (so far this position has been taken by Chechens: Supyan Abdullayev vel Emir Abu Supian and Aslan Byutukayev vel Emir Khamzat; currently it is not filled) and a military emir, responsible for coordinating the military and terrorist activities of the Emirate. In 2007, this position was taken by an Ingush, Ali Taziev (Emir Magas), who was arrested in 2010. Currently it is not filled. The central authorities of the Caucasus Emirate also include a qadi (chief justice) and his supreme sharia court, the so-called *mukhabarat*, the secret service of the CE, and Majlisul Shura, a council of the walis of all vilayats. In the first years of the Emirate, there was also the so-called Wekalat, a representation of the Caucasus Emirate abroad.

The qadi of the Caucasus Emirate is the chief justice of religious court. He arbitrates in civil disputes and sharia violation proceedings (but in practice his jurisdiction is restricted to the militants and does not concern civilians), issues fatwas, i.e. legislative acts presenting interpretations of selected matters in accordance with sharia, allowing or prohibiting certain actions. An example of fatwas may be Kebekov's rulings (in a period when he was only a qadi of the Emirate), condemning the emigration of the volunteers from Caucasus to Syria from the sharia point of view. Apart from the judicial role, a qadi also acts as an ideologist of the movement, a watchman of the faith of the Emirate's militants, who cares for the observance of sharia. The current qadi of the Emirate is a Dagestani, Abdullah (from the village of Kostek) in Khasavyurtovsky District; his real name is unknown). The previous judges were: Aliaskhab Kebekov (2010-2014; for several months in 2014 he performed two functions simultaneously: he was the emir and qadi of the Emirate), Magomedali Vagabov (2010) and Anzor Astemirov (2007-2010).

The institution which is subject to the qadi of the CE is the supreme court of sharia, which theoretically also issues sentences and fatwas, although his competence has never been specified. The composition of the court is unknown as well: theoretically it is composed of the most respectable Islamic scholars in

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/analizy/2014-03-26/nowy-przywodca-polnocnokaukaskich-bojownikow>



the Caucasus Emirate ('alim), but since there is lack thereof, it cannot be ruled out that in fact the sharia court does not function.

The Wekalat of the Caucasus Emirate used to be the representation of the Emirate abroad. It was appointed in 2007, so it was probably a copy of Ichkerian solutions (representation of CRI abroad). It was composed of the leader (wakil), his deputies (for social, operational, propagandist and information policy matters) and an enigmatic information and analytical centre. It was also supposed to have power over the representatives in Europe, Turkey and the Middle East as well as the representatives of individual vilayats (wakils).<sup>45</sup> The Wekalat was to pursue the Emirate's foreign policy, including informational and propagandist policy, and maintain relations with Chechen migrants. Another important aspect of the activity of the Wekalat was discrediting the authorities of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria in exile and other institutions and organisations created by the "Ichkerian" diaspora. The first and only wakil was Shamsudin Batukaev, who had resided in Turkey from the outbreak of the Second Chechen War. In 2010, the Wekalat was removed by Dokka Umarov as a result of internal conflicts and personal animosities between the leaders of the CE and the leadership of the Wekalat.<sup>46</sup> The Wekalat never operated in the structure described above. Its activity was confined to maintaining contacts between the Emirate and the Chechen diaspora, obtaining funds, legitimising former militants etc. It most definitely did not resemble any Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Another central authority of the Caucasus Emirate is its secret service, *mukhabarat*. It is subject to the emir and previously its activity was also influenced by the military emir. Mukhabarat mostly takes care of counterintelligence, which consists in maintaining informational discipline and confidentiality by the members of the CE,<sup>47</sup> revealing and eliminating informers and Russian secret agents as well as internal traitors.<sup>48</sup> The latter seems to be the main task of mukhabarat, which is connected with the high degree of infiltration of the Caucasus Emirate by the Russian secret service and (in the case of Chechnya) by Ramzan Kadyrov's people.

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<sup>45</sup> [http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/03/08/56866\\_print.html](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/03/08/56866_print.html)

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.kavkazchat.com/archive/index.php/t-36085.html>

<sup>47</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/sozdayu-prichiny-zatem-upovayu-na-allaxa.djihad>

<sup>48</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/predatel.djihad>



The last central authority of the Caucasus Emirate is Majlisul Shura, a council of the walis of all the vilayats of the Emirate. It is an advisory body, subject to the emir and acting as a platform for the exchange of opinions and experiences among walis and institutionalising their influence on the general policy and strategy of the Emirate. Additionally, it was to serve as a tool for peaceful, political settlement of internal disputes with the participation of the emir of the CE.<sup>49</sup> Since the proclamation of the Emirate, Majlisul Shura has never been assembled, probably due to the physical inability to execute such an operation. However, shuras of individual vilayats are taking place quite regularly (in practice they are secret meetings of the most important commanders).

At the level of vilayats, the organisational structure of the Emirate consists of local emirs who simultaneously serve as walis (representatives of the emir of the Emirate), managing a given area and its active armed groups.<sup>50</sup> With regard to the organisational infrastructure subject to a wali, a vilayat is a copy of the central level. The following authorities can be distinguished within its structure: naib, wali, qadi and his sharia court, mukhabarat of the vilayat, commanders of individual sectors/divisions and the shuras of those commanders.

The key role is played by a wali (however the militants themselves would rather use the term "emir"), who has a significant impact on the entirety of the Caucasus Emirate in a given area. Walis enjoy great independence. Theoretically they are appointed by the emir of the CE, but they have to have authority within the local structures, which means that the local power balance has a crucial influence on filling this position. In a sense, emirs (walis) of particular vilayats are also responsible for the continuity of power in the Emirate, as they have to give the pledge of allegiance to the new emir after his coming into power.<sup>51</sup>

The remaining structures of the Caucasus Emirate on the level of vilayats correspond to the ones from the central level. The mukhabarat of a vilayat performs the same functions and is focused on counterintelligence, but answers to a wali. The qadi of a vilayat and his sharia court are identical in their function to the qadi of the CE and the supreme sharia court, with the exception that the

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<sup>49</sup> <http://checheninfo.com/?p=267>

<sup>50</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/obrashhenie-amira-vilayata-dagestan-abu-muxammada.djihad>

<sup>51</sup> One example of such dependence was the appointment of Aliaskhab Kebekov as the emir of the IK.



qadi of a vitylat answers to the wali, who is an CE commander in a given area, to the qadi of the Emirate, who is the higher spiritual leader, and the CE emirate, who is the chief of the whole organisation.

The lowest local level of the organisational structure of the Caucasus Emirate consists of the leaders of sectors and districts into which vilayats are divided. The commanders of the sectors are theoretically local deputies of the authorities of the emirate assigned to a given area, but in reality they are commanders of local armed troops, who maintain a great tactical freedom. The commanders of sectors (who are sometimes called the emirs of a sector/district) are superior to their naibs and the members of the CE (as an armed organisation) as well as their assistants.<sup>52</sup>

Further, the members of the CE are divided into so-called illegal and legal members. The illegal members (a.k.a. forest or "burnt" members) are people known to the power structures, often appearing in arrest warrant or suspect registers, which means that they are forced to hide far from towns and cities.<sup>53</sup> They constitute armed guerrilla troops of the Caucasus Emirate. "Legal" members are new members of the CE, who are not yet suspected of being militants by the local authorities, which allows them to act conspiratorially in cities, supporting the CE's operations, serving as liaisons or executing attacks in the cities (after which they often become illegal members).<sup>54</sup> Another circle consists of assistants, i.e. people who hide the members of the Emirate, provide them with food etc. Most often they are relatives or local Salafists who support militants.<sup>55</sup> As opposed to the members of the CE, assistants do not have the obligation to swear an oath to the emir of the CE or to the immediate commander.<sup>56</sup>

Although strictly hierarchical, the structure of the Emirate has a web-like structure. Although he is the leader of the whole organisation, the emir is not able to control it in its present state. This is also true for walis of the vilayats: although they can act freely and decide on the policy and activities of the Caucasus Emirate in the area over which they preside, they are not able to

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<sup>52</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/mudzhaxid-xamza-napominanie-musulmanam-severnogo-sektora.djihad>

<sup>53</sup> <http://hunafa.com/?p=13677>

<sup>54</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/legalnaya-zhizn.djihad>

<sup>55</sup> <http://goloslama.ru/news.php?id=24985>

<sup>56</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/prisyagaem.djihad>



control the commanders of the sectors, who act autonomously. This is due to the need to maintain deep conspiracy as well as due to problems with communication within the organisation, resulting from the actions of the Russian secret service. For this reason the main goal of the militants is survival, followed by the organisation of offensive armed operations, but not territorial management, for the purpose of which the above structure was created. The situation is further complicated by informal, e.g. familial, relations within the Caucasus Emirate, which distort the organisation's hierarchy.

### **Territorial structure**

Apart from the organisational structure, we can also distinguish a territorial structure of the Caucasus Emirate, consisting in the territorial and administrative division of the North Caucasus into provinces of the IK, called vilayats. The Emirate is made up of six vilayats (provinces): Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabarda-Balkaria-Karachay, Nogay Steppe, and Circassia.<sup>57</sup> Each of the vilayats is governed by a wali (representative of the central emir), who is also a military commander (emir of the vilayat). Theoretically, vilayats are administrative units of the Caucasus Emirate, but in practice they only function as groups of militant troops.

There used to be another vilayat, called Vilayat Ossetia (Iryston). In 2009, by a special decree of the emir, it was eliminated and incorporated into Ingushetia.<sup>58</sup> This could be related to the breaking up of a small Ossetian armed group going by the name of Kataib al-Khoul Jamaat and the discontinuation of armed activities on the territory of North Ossetia<sup>59</sup> or (what is more probable) the lobbying of Ingush militants dictated by hatred towards Ossetians, whose source can be found in the long-term conflict between the Ingush and Ossetians over Prigorodny District.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Based on omra no. 5 issued by the emir of the Caucasus Emirate:  
<http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2007/12/10/54917.shtml>

<sup>58</sup> <http://hunafa.com/?p=1358>

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1085334>

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/prigorod/msg/2001/10/m25.htm>



## Territorial division of the Caucasus Emirate



Source: Maciej Falkowski, *Na peryferiach światowego dżihadu. Kaukaz Północny: iluzja stabilizacji*, OSW 2014.

There is also some controversy concerning Vilayat Circassia, which is supposed to include the territory of Adygea and Stavropol Krai (formerly inhabited by Circassian tribes). The vilayat is not included in the official message concerning the territorial and administrative division of the Caucasus Emirate, but it appears in subsequent messages and maps published on websites connected with the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>61</sup> In practice, it is a virtual unit – there have never been any structures of the Emirate in that area, nor were there any armed groups.

<sup>61</sup> <http://www.kavkazchat.com/showthread.php?t=37676>





Similarly to the entities of the Russian Federation, vilayats are also theoretically divided into smaller units, districts (usually overlapping with the Russian administrative divisions). In reality, the division into sectors, which can, but do not have to, overlap with the districts (some sectors in Chechnya include e.g. whole districts, others selected villages) is more important. This division is not a rule, though; some armed groups do not belong to any sector. Moreover, there is an institution called jamaat, which is not a territorial unit of the Emirat, but an armed group that operates in a determined area with which it is loosely connected (particular sectors of the vilayats also call themselves "jamaats", e.g. Khasavyurt jamaat). As a result, there is a total organisational chaos and individual armed groups are often in conflict. Formally, vilayats and the sectors that belong to them were supposed to constitute administrative units of the Caucasus Emirate, but in practice they are a form of the militants' self-organisation.

None of the vilayats of the Emirate take actions directed at managing a given area, concentrating on armed conflict instead. Islamic terrorist organisations that operate in other parts of the world have often made such attempts, creating secret territorial administrations (including a tax system, judiciary etc.) that copy the national administration system in the area of their activity. There are similar institutions in Caucasus (chiefly amicable sharia courts, before which civil disputes are looked into), which enjoy substantial popularity due to the level of corruption in Russian courts, but they are not connected to the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>62</sup>

Occasionally, the militants of the Caucasus Emirate apply alternative names to some districts and towns, but there is chaos and inconsistency in that respect. They call Makhachkala, the capital of Dagestan, Shamilkala (from the name of imam Shamil), Buynaksk – Temir-Khan-Shura (the town's former name from before the revolution), Kizilyurtovsky District is called Rabbanikalinsky (from the name of one of the first leaders of Dagestani militants, Rappani Khalilov) etc. Chechen militants also use alternative names: Grozny is Dzhokhar, Staropromyslovsky District of the capital of Chechnya is Maskhadovsky and Oktyabrsky District (Zavodsky, according to other sources) is Yandarbiyevsky (from the name of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev). The fact that the names of towns

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<sup>62</sup> <http://www.al-azkhar.ru/node/719> and <http://www.baltinfo.ru/2012/04/20/Dagestanskie-obschestvennye-organizatsii-predlozhili-sozdat-shariatskii-sud-273589>



and districts are changed in this manner demonstrates the level of Sovietisation of the militants, who seem to be unable to break free from their Soviet mentality despite their struggle for the Islamic state. The Bolsheviks used to act in the exact same way, changing names of the cities to commemorate their commanders and leaders.

Certain vilayats of the Caucasus Emirate are very differentiated; Vilayat Dagestan, corresponding to the Republic of Dagestan, is the largest when it comes to the number of the militants and the most important when it comes to their activity. Based on the above mentioned criteria, the most important vilayats are: Chechnya, Kabarda-Balkaria-Karachay and Ingushetia. The created vilayats, Circassia and Nogay Steppe (including Stavropol Krai) are purely virtual entities.<sup>63</sup>

### **Vilayat Dagestan**

Vilayat Dagestan includes the whole territory of Dagestan and consists of four sectors: north (areas to the north of Makhachkala along with Khasavyurt and Kizilyurt), central (Makhachkala and its surroundings), mountainous (the western, mountainous part of the republic) and south (Derbent and southern areas, bordering with Azerbaijan). These parts are further divided into smaller districts and sectors, corresponding to individual administrative areas, towns and villages (e.g. Khasavyurtovsky, Kizlarsky, Aukhovsky, Kizilyurtovsky, Gubdensky, Kadari, Gimrynsky etc.)

Vilayat Dagestan is the most active and numerous (when it comes to the number of the militants) of all vilayats of the Caucasus Emirate. Although it is hard to quote specific figures (e.g. due to different models associated with belonging to the Emirate), there are probably several hundred active militants and several thousand assistants in Dagestan. Vilayat Dagestan is also active in the area of propaganda and recruitment: it has its own website, [www.vdagestan.com](http://www.vdagestan.com), on which it uploads propagandist materials, official stances and speeches of the commanders of the vilayat, lectures concerning Salafist Islam and guidelines for the future members of the Emirate. It is also present on social networking websites, such as Facebook<sup>64</sup> and Twitter.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> E.g. Vilayat Nogay Steppe: <http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/01/09/102701.shtml>

<sup>64</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100004940926828>

<sup>65</sup> [https://twitter.com/vdagestan\\_](https://twitter.com/vdagestan_)



The progenitor of Vilayat Dagestan was Jennet (Paradise), created probably in 2002 by Rasul Makasharipov, who was ordered to do so by Rappani Khalilov, a Dagestani who had fought alongside Chechen militants.<sup>66</sup> After a successful series of attacks executed in 2003, Jennet was broken, but that same year Makasharipov created a new group called Shariat Jamaat, which was composed of a small number of frustrated, young Salafists, who were driven underground by harassment, repression and blocking their legal activity by Dagestani authorities and power structures.<sup>67</sup> The ideological leader of Shariat was Makhach (Yaseen) Rasulov, a journalist (e.g. in Dagestani television and *Novoye Dielo* newspaper) and a graduate of the Linguistics Department of the Dagestan State University, cooperating with the Dagestan Scientific Center of the Russian Academy of Sciences. He joined the militants in 2005, after a conflict with the staff of the contemporary Minister of Ethnic Policy, Information and Public Relations, Zagir Arukhov (who died in 2005 in a terrorist attack organised by Rasulov).<sup>68</sup> Rasulov himself was killed during a special operation in Makhachkala in 2006. Makasharipov was head of the jamaat until 2005, when he was replaced by Murad Lakhiyalov (Lak; 2003-2005). The subsequent leaders of the jamaat, which was renamed to "Dagestini front" in 2006 and to Vilayat Dagestan in 2007 (along with the creation of the Caucasus Emirate), were: Rappani Khalilov (2005-2007; Lak), Ilgas Malachiyev (2007-2008; a.k.a. Abdul Madzhid; Tsakhur coming from Azerbaijan; he mainly operated in the south of Dagestan and probably in Azerbaijan), Omar Sheikhulayev (Emir Muaz; 2008-2009; Lak), Umalat Magomedov (Emir Al Bara; 2009; Kumyk), Ibragim Gajidadayev (2009-2010; Avar), Magomed Vagabov (Emir Seyfullah Gubdensky; 2010; Dargin; he was also the qadi of Vilayat Dagestan), Israpil Velijanov (Emir Hassan: 2010-2011, Dargin), Ibragimkhalil Daudov (Emir Salikh; 2011-2012; Dargin),<sup>69</sup> Rustam Asildarov (Emir Abu Muhammad; 2010-2014; Dargin).<sup>70</sup> Currently, the emir of Vilayat Dagestan is an Avar, Said Kharakansky, from the village of Arakany in Untsukul'sky District (real name unknown), appointed by Aliaskhab Kebekov in

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<sup>66</sup> <http://inosmi.ru/russia/20090930/253134.html>

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2008/06/m138409.htm>

<sup>68</sup> <http://www.utro.ru/articles/2006/04/17/540752.shtml>

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/05/13/81518.shtml>

<sup>70</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/abu-muhammad>



December 2014 after Rustam Asildarov's rebellion and his oath to the Islamic State.<sup>71</sup>

It is impossible to provide the names of the current commanders of individual sectors and jamaats, for several reasons: informational chaos in the materials of the militants themselves, Arabic pseudonyms used by the mujahidins (often different than real names) and the fact that they change every few months, dying in terrorist attacks executed by the power structures.

Between 2014 and 2015, Vilayat Dagestan was in the face of a serious internal crisis caused by a rebellion of some of the commanders and their subject troops, who had withdrawn their allegiance to Kebekov and left the Caucasus Emirate, swearing an oath to self-proclaimed Caliph Ibrahim (leader of the Islamic State). They included: the wali of the vilayat Rustam Asildarov (Emir Abu Muhammad) and the emirs of the following sectors: Shamil'kalinsky, (Makhachkala), Abu Muhammad Agachaulsky (from the village of Agachaul),<sup>72</sup> Khasavyurtovsky (Emir Ibrahim),<sup>73</sup> Babayurtovsky, Abdullah,<sup>74</sup> Kizilyurtovsky (personal data unknown), southern sector, Emir Abu Yasir<sup>75</sup> and Tsumadinsky, Emir Abu Muaz.<sup>76</sup> The decision of the above mentioned commanders was harshly criticised by the leaders of the Emirate, e.g. the emir of the mountainous sector, Magomed Suleymanov, the qadi of the Emirate, Abdullah Kosteksky, and Kebekov himself, who called the rebels traitors and stripped them of all their functions.<sup>77</sup> The events in Dagestan constituted an opportunity to engage in a strong argument and even prompted curses exchanged by the supporters of the Caucasus Emirate and the Islamic State, both those who stayed in Caucasus and in the Middle East (e.g. between Abdullah Kosteksky and Abu Jihad),<sup>78</sup> as well as numerous disputes in Caucasian Salafi

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/12/20/107411.shtml>

<sup>72</sup> <http://fisyria.info/?p=14167>

<sup>73</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYEJ73q\\_N4k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bYEJ73q_N4k)

<sup>74</sup> [http://vk.com/video-83135741\\_171192445?list=c758a2af5749ceb89b](http://vk.com/video-83135741_171192445?list=c758a2af5749ceb89b)

<sup>75</sup> <http://fisyria.info/?p=14124>

<sup>76</sup> <http://fisyria.info/?p=14320>

<sup>77</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/poslanie-ot-mudzhaxida-shama-k-mudzhaxidam-imarata-kavkaz.djihad> ; <http://vdagestan.com/razyasnenie-kadiya-dagestana-po-povodu-prisyagi-abu-muxammada-kadarskogo-abu-bakru-al-bagdadi.djihad> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdNqBqhrqws>

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. <http://vdagestan.com/poslanie-ot-mudzhaxida-shama-k-mudzhaxidam-imarata-kavkaz.djihad> ; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zghc96gNGhg> ; <http://fisyria.info/?p=14110>



circles (e.g. on Islamic internet forums). The rebellion of militants in Dagestan (and also in Chechnya, more below) probably means a permanent split in the Caucasus Emirate.

## **Vilayat Chechnya**

This vilayat covers the territory of Chechnya and is divided into the eastern and western sector (yet another inconsistency in the terminology of the militants and another copy of Ichkerian solutions; in other vilayats the sectors are smaller units), which in turn are composed of districts/sectors (Urus-Martanovsky, Gudermessky, Kurchaloevsky, Vedensky, Nozhay-Yurtovsky, Centoroevsky etc.). The vilayat is an ideological and organisational successor to the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which it believes it is.

The first wali of the vilayat was Dokka Umarov (2007-2013; with a short break in 2010, when Khuseyn Gakayev was the wali).<sup>79</sup> Currently, its wali is Emir Khamzat (Aslan Byutukayev), who also controls the western sector.<sup>80</sup> The qadi of the vilayat is Beslan Makhauri (Emir Muhammad) who is also the emir of the Sunzha sector. The position of the naib and military emir is vacant. For a number of years Chechnya was divided into two main zones with regard to the activity of the militants, corresponding to so-called eastern and western fronts. In recent years, the control over militants in the west (Achkhoy-Martan, Urus-Martan, Ingush border) was exercised by Umarov, and the east was dominated by such commanders as Aslambek Vadalov and Khuseyn Gakayev. Tarkhan Gaziyeu, a commander from south Chechnya, had also played a significant role before he left for Syria in 2013, similarly to Makhran Saidov, operating in the eastern part of the republic until he swore an oath to Caliph Ibrahim in December 2014.<sup>81</sup>

Currently, the most important commanders are Aslan Byutukayev, Beslan Makhauri (Sunzha sector), Emir Abdurrahman (Gudermessky sector), Emir Mukhtar (Achkhoy-Martanovsky District) and probably Aslambek Vadalov. The remaining commanders of individual sectors are known only by their Arabic soubriquets and we know little about them (e.g. the emir of Urus-Martan is one Emir Islam, Kurchaloevsky District is managed by Iman and so on<sup>82</sup>).

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<sup>79</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/191428/>

<sup>80</sup> <http://checheninfo.com/?p=267>

<sup>81</sup> <http://www.radiomarsho.com/content/article/25478839.html>

<sup>82</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A0mDggeV12I>



The activity of Vilayat Chechnya is sporadic and concentrated on the physical survival of the few militants who remain in Chechnya. All the same, the operation in Grozny executed by the militants between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014 (raid which resulted in the death of 14 representatives of the Chechen power structures and nearly 40 injured victims) shows that it is still capable of organising attacks, albeit of a suicidal nature (all of the 11 participating mujahedins died in the attack). In the territorial dimension, their presence and activity is confined to the south-western and south-eastern parts of Chechnya (mountainous and forested part of the republic). They probably have no facilities or structures in Grozny, nor in central and north Chechnya.

Following Byutukayev's assumption of command, the propagandist and informational activity of the vilayat has been visibly intensified. The main propaganda body is [www.checheninfo.com](http://www.checheninfo.com). As opposed to other vilayats, Chechnya also has its own representative abroad, who is Dokka Umarov's brother, Akhmad Umarov (Khamza).<sup>83</sup>

In the second half of December, certain events took place in Chechnya, which may have a significant influence on the fate of Vilayat Chechnya. Following the example of some Dagestani mujahedins, several Chechen commanders and their troops renounced their allegiance to the leadership of the Caucasus Emirate and swore an oath to the leader of the Islamic State, Caliph Ibrahim. The group included: the commander of the so-called eastern sector, Makhran Saidov (Emir Yakup) and the emirs of the Vedeno sector, Usam, and Itum-Kalinsky District, Hamzat,<sup>84</sup> as well as a heretofore unknown jamaat, Taiifa al-Mansoura, directed by Emir Abu Omar.<sup>85</sup> The renouncement of allegiance to the emir indicates a split and the most serious crisis in the vilayat (and in the whole Caucasus Emirate) since 2010, resulting in its significant weakening and possibly influencing its fate. As of the beginning of January 2015, the emir of the vilayat, Aslan Byutukayev, had yet to take a position on the rebellion.

## **Vilayat Ingushetia**

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<sup>83</sup> <http://checheninfo.com/?p=668>

<sup>84</sup> <http://fisyria.info/?p=14164>

<sup>85</sup> [https://ia902700.us.archive.org/20/items/qazwsxedc\\_85/001.mp3](https://ia902700.us.archive.org/20/items/qazwsxedc_85/001.mp3)



Vilayat Ingushetia covers the territory of Ingushetia and North Ossetia (from 2009), the future capital of the vilayat is to be Vladikavkaz, called Buro by the militants (Ingush name of the town). In the first years of the Second Chechen War, the militants tried not to undertake any armed operations on the territory of Ingushetia, which was in their own interest: the republic was a haven for hundreds of thousands of Chechen refugees, among whom the militants could hide, and from whom they recruited volunteers. The fact that from 2011 Ingushetia was ruled by a charismatic president, Ruslan Aushev, who was revered not only by the Ingush people but also the Chechens, including the militants, was also significant.<sup>86</sup> They appreciated the long-standing good relations between Aushev and the leaders of the Chechen independence movement (e.g. Dudayev or Maskhadov). Aushev also tackled unpunished repressive actions of the federal power structures on the territory of Ingushetia. The situation became to change after the removal of Aushev and the appointment of incompetent Murat Zyazikov by the Kremlin. As an FSB general, Zyazikov was submissive towards the Kremlin and the Russian power structures and he lacked authority. It was during his presidency that regular mopping up operations began to take place in the camps of Chechen refugees in Ingushetia and in Ingush villages. This resulted in the radicalisation of the refugees and the Ingush people themselves, as well as in the militants' decision to expand their armed operations to the territory of Ingushetia. The high of the exacerbated situation was the raid of militants under the command of Shamil Basayev on Nazran in June 2004 (the militants seized a part of the republic's territory for several hours, killing several dozen officers of the power structures) and the Beslan school siege (September 2004) organised on the territory of Ingushetia. From that moment on, the republic was one of the most unstable areas in Caucasus.

In 2004, an Ingush battalion "Caliphate" was established, under the command of Ilyas Gorchkhanov, who was succeeded by Ali Taziev (Emir Magas), one of the most influential commanders in the whole CE, in 2005.<sup>87</sup> In 2007, the battalion was transformed into Vilayat Ingushetia. Taziev was the first wali of the vilayat (2007-2010), and after his arrest the Ingush militants were controlled by: Ilez Gardanov (2010), Isa Khashagulgov (2010; detained and sentenced to life imprisonment), Adam Tsyzdov (2010-2012), Jamaleil Mutaliev (Emir

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<sup>86</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/11566/>

<sup>87</sup> <http://hunafa.com/?p=16316>



Adam, 2012-2013), Arthur Getagazhev (Emir Abdullah; 2013-2014; he was also the qadi of the vilayat).<sup>88</sup>

Currently, the positions of the wali and qadi are not filled. Few remaining militants in Ingushetia undertake occasional attacks on the power structures and pursue propagandist activities (through a website, [www.hunafa.com](http://www.hunafa.com)), but their operations are incomparable with their former activity (when the republic was one of the most unstable areas in the region). The significance of the vilayat in the structure of the Caucasus Emirate is currently minimal; the armed underground in Ingushetia has never risen from the blow which was Ali Taziev's arrest. It was weakened not only by successful special operations of the power structures, but also by an effective amnesty and adaptation policy towards the militants, implemented by the president of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, appointed to that position in 2008.

### **Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai**

The Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai (KBK), also known as the United Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai, covers the republics of Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia. It is unclear whether the militants want the future capital city of Vilayat KBK to be Nalchik (the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria) or Cherkessk (the capital of Karachay-Cherkessia). It is also not known exactly how the vilayat is divided into districts/sectors.

The first wali of the vilayat was Anzor Astemirov (Emir Sayfullah) from Kabardin, a very important persona not only in the Kabardino-Balkar underground, but also in the whole Emirate (one of its ideological creators, closely connected with Basayev).<sup>89</sup> Astemirov died in 2010, in an accidental shoot-out with the representatives of power structures.<sup>90</sup> His successors were: Asker Jappuyev (2010-2011), Alim Zankishev (2011-2012), Timur Tatchayev (2012), Ruslan Batyrbekov (2012), Khasanbi Fakov (2012-2014), Tengiz Guketlov (2013-2014) and Astemir Berkhamov (Emir Al Bara; March-May 2014, killed in May 2014). At present, the position is taken by Zalim Shebzukhov (Emir Salim).<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> <http://hunafa.com/?p=13882>

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/09/29/61307.shtml>

<sup>90</sup> <http://nohchipress.info/2010/03/1703>

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.islamdin.com/video/1805-baygat.html> and  
<https://07.mvd.ru/cit/Rozisk/item/2265874/>





In the case of Kabardino-Balkaria, the progenitor of the vilayat was the "Yarmouk Battalion", which had been formed in 2004 as a result of Kabardin and Balkar Salafists being driven underground due to mass repressions on the part of the local power structures (they joined the ranks of a small number of radical Salafists, who had previously fought in Chechnya). Its first leaders were Muslim Atayev (he previously stayed in the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, in Ruslan Gelayev's division), Artur Mukojev and Adam Semenov, and its ideological leaders were Anzor Astemirov (Emir Sayfullah) and Musa Mukojev.<sup>92</sup> The battalion was disbanded in 2007, and incorporated into the structures of the Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachay.

Although currently the armed underground in the neighbouring Karachay-Cherkessia is significantly weaker than in Kabardino-Balkaria, the activity of Karachay militants has a longer history. The community of radical Salafists was created in the town of Uchkeken as early as 1995 (according to some data it was established by Ramazan Borlakov, who had previously stayed in Arabian countries). As early as in the years 1996-1999, the jamaat already made connections with Chechen separatists (e.g. with Basayev and Chattab), which resulted in several of its members staying at Chattab's training camp. At the time the leader of the Karachay radical Salafists was Achemez Gochiyayev. The jamaat became active at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, taking part in the organisation of terrorist attacks and armed operations not only in Karachay-Cherkessia, but also in Russia "proper". According to official data, the Karachay jamaat organised the 1999 terrorist attacks in Moscow and Volgograd (according to the information provided by Alexander Litvinenko, it was merely used by the Russian secret service), a series of attacks in Stavropol Krai in 2000-2001 and attacks in the Russian underground in 2004. After Gochiyayev's escape in 2000 (he is probably staying in Turkey), the jamaat was managed by Ruslan Khubiyev, who became the emir of the Karachayan sector after the creation of Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai. However, by 2009 Khubiyev's group was totally broken and the emir himself was killed. From that time on, the jamaat practically did not function.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xdo8fm\\_сейфуллах-анзор-астемиров-о-таухиде\\_shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xdo8fm_сейфуллах-анзор-астемиров-о-таухиде_shortfilms)

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.rg.ru/2009/12/10/reg-kuban/hubiev-anons.html>



For many years from the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, the Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai was one of the most active vilayats. This was connected with a large number of the organised armed operations as well as the high authority of Anzor Astemirov. Nevertheless, the effective activity and brutal repression on the side of the Russian power structures in Kabardino-Balkaria led to a serious weakening of the CE structures in this republic. Although clashes still occur today, most of them take place as a result of anti-terrorist operations during which the militants are decimated. The vilayat operates in deep conspiracy and is focused on survival. It probably has a very limited contact with the leadership of the whole organisation. As opposed to Chechnya and Dagestan, the Kabardian and Balkar militants and volunteers do not leave for Syria and Iraq to pursue jihad in great masses.

The situation is even more peaceful in Karachay-Cherkessia, where there is practically no armed underground, although there are Salafist communities (currently peaceful). The relative stability of Karachay-Cherkessia partly results from the policy of the local authorities and power structures, which do not use mass repression towards Salafists.

Similarly to the Dagestani, Chechen and Ingush militants, the Vilayat of Kbardiya, Balkariya and Karachai also has its own website: [www.islamdin.com](http://www.islamdin.com). Its creators publish many (much more than the websites of other vilayats) materials dedicated to issues connected with sharia and Islamic theology, and a lot less of those pertaining to the vilayat itself.<sup>94</sup> This testifies to the decay of activity in this part of the Caucasus Emirate.

### **Vilayat Nogay Steppe**

Currently, this vilayat exists only virtually. There is no armed underground in the area of Stavropol Krai, not to mention any structures of the Caucasus Emirate. Its creation is connected with the activity of the so-called “Nogai” battalion in the borderland of Dagestan, Stavropol Krai (Neftekamskiy District) and Chechnya, which organised a number of armed operations in the area in the years 2003-2007/2008. It mostly consists of radical Salafists of Nogai nationality, who were driven underground due to persecution. The battalion was broken down some years later and today it is probably non-existent.

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<sup>94</sup> E.g. <http://www.islamdin.com/articles/19-ibada/1500-2013-02-20-10-25-39.html>



## Chapter 4

### Methods of action of the Caucasus Emirate

The activity of the Caucasus Emirate may be divided into three categories: activities directed at the survival of the militants, armed and terrorist activity (both on the territory of the North Caucasus and in other parts of Russia), and propagandist activity.

The most important, although often disregarded aspect of the activity of the Caucasus Emirate is the mere fact that the militants who fight in its ranks manage to survive. Due to different models of belonging to the Emirate, the methods of operating in that sphere are differentiated, but in all cases most of the activities are focused on hiding from the Russian power structures constituting the main threat to the militants, members and sympathisers of the Caucasus Emirate. The methods of action in that respect are different in every group inside of the CE. The militants from guerrilla divisions hide in forests and mountainous regions, they place great emphasis on limiting the number of people who know their location (most often the liaisons with the external world are the naibs of individual commanders),<sup>95</sup> masking their presence in a given area by building sophisticated bunkers, hard to detect from air (Russian forces use helicopters with thermal imaging apparatus to track down groups of militants), and obtaining financial resources for the purposes of their own activity, supplies and armament (which requires a great amount of time due to the conspiracy).<sup>96</sup> In the case of the members of the CE who act conspiratorially in the cities, the emphasis is placed on strict observance of conspiratorial discipline, non-disclosure of their membership in the Caucasus Emirate (e.g. refraining from growing beards) and cautious communication within the organisation, especially when using mobile phones, which are the most frequent cause of deconspiration by power structures.<sup>97</sup> For guerrilla groups operating on uninhabited territories, obtaining food and medicine is a serious problem, as they have to stay in touch with the people from neighbouring villages, even

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.vdagestan.com/legalnaya-zhizn.djihad>

<sup>96</sup> Instruction for a militant from Vilayat Dagestan of the Caucasus Emirate, concerning the construction of a bunker and its significance: <http://www.islamdin.com/podpolye/45-guerrilla/1779--7-.html>

<sup>97</sup> <http://www.vdagestan.com/o-dopustivosti-lzhi-kak-vo-vremya-vojny-tak-i-vne-ee-predelov.djihad>



though these communities contain a great number of informers. In this respect, the key role is played by assistants and sympathisers of the Emirate, whose main task is to secretly provide food and drugs to the militants. These people are also forced to abide by the rules of conspiracy, as provisioning militants is treated as assisting terrorists and can lead to the disclosure of a whole division of the CE.<sup>98</sup> Obtaining financial resources is a very important element of the activity of militants. It is an existential task, without which the implementation of the Emirate would be impossible. The main source of income is forced tribute, mainly obtained from local entrepreneurs and officials, which is referred to as "jihad tax". The "procedure" most often begins with sending a message (mostly on a flash drive). The message contains a call to pay the tribute and a threat in case of the lack of payment. In fear of the consequences (murder, blowing up a store, the seat of the company etc.), entrepreneurs usually accept the "tax". The forced tribute is the main source of income for the militants. This form of dealings is particularly widespread in Dagestan. Sources are also provided willingly, for ideological reasons. This method of acquiring funds is so profitable that it is also applied by criminal groups who impersonate militants. On the other hand, representatives of power structures obtain forced tribute from entrepreneurs as well – for protection.

The *raison d'être* for the activity of the CE is armed struggle, although from the point of view of the time devoted to that end, it is not the most important aspect.

The methods employed by the underground have undergone a significant change: initially, the militants attacked power structures, but later on, as the capability of the organisation weakened in that respect, the number of attacks began to drop. This is shown in the statistics of those killed in the North Caucasus, which take into consideration the victims on the side of the militants, officials and soldiers as well as civilians. Although they do not show the activity of the Emirate, they allow us to estimate the general measure of violence in Caucasus. In 2010 there were 749 killed (including 349 militants, 225 soldiers and officials), in 2011 there were 750 killed (384 militants, 190 soldiers and officials), in 2012 there were 700 killed (404 militants, 209 soldiers and officials), in 2013 there were 529 killed (298 militants, 127 soldiers and officials) and in 2014 there were 363 killed, of which 265 were militants of the

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<sup>98</sup> <http://www.vdagestan.com/beregites-licemeriya-i-licemerov-o-lyudi-dzhixada.djihad>



Caucasus Emirate, 59 were soldiers and officials, and the remaining 39 were civilians.<sup>99</sup>

The strictly combative activities of the Caucasus Emirate mainly consist in organising ambushes on the convoys and patrols conducted by the power structures as well as few attacks on outposts, checkpoints (most often on the roads) and infrastructure. Large assault operations with the participation of hundreds of militants holding the area (e.g. Shamil Basayev's raids on Nazran in 2004 or the attack on Nalchik in 2005) are now a thing of the past. Some examples of such operations, albeit on an incomparably smaller scale, are: attack on police headquarters in Benoy-Vedeno (Chechnya) in June 2008,<sup>100</sup> attack on the delegacy of the Ministry of the Interior and FSB in Nalchik in February 2011,<sup>101</sup> assault on a mobile transceiver station in Dagestan in May 2011<sup>102</sup> or an attack in Grozny on the night of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014. Limiting such operations by the CE is a result of a visible decrease in its capabilities: smaller and smaller number of militants, lack of experienced commanders, problems with supplies and small effectiveness.

Other combative activities of the Caucasus Emirate consist in individual terror: attacks on police officers and representatives of other power structures as well as assassination of people regarded as particularly harmful. Today, it is the main form of the combative activity of the Caucasus Emirate. Some examples of such actions are: the assassination of Sheikh Said Efendi Chirkeisky in August 2012<sup>103</sup> or detonation of a truck with police employees in Kizilyurtovsky District in Dagestan in January 2012.<sup>104</sup> The aim of such actions is marking the group's presence, power demonstration, intimidation of officials and often revenge on specific people. This type of actions is particularly widespread in Dagestan, although not every assault or assassination of a civil servant is committed by the militants. Violence, including homicide, is a common phenomenon in the political and business life of the republic. Gang wars often

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<sup>99</sup> In: Maciej Falkowski, *Na peryferiach światowego dżihadu. Kaukaz Północny: iluzja stabilizacji*, OSW 2014. Available at:

[http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw\\_46\\_pl\\_kaukaz-polnocny\\_net.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_46_pl_kaukaz-polnocny_net.pdf) oraz statystyki ofiar z drugiej połowy 2014 r. publikowane na stronie [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru)

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/137882/> and

<http://kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2008/06/13/58861.shtml>

<sup>101</sup> <http://ria.ru/incidents/20110225/338968433.html>

<sup>102</sup> <http://news.bigmir.net/world/277654>

<sup>103</sup> <http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/2012/8/28/141613>

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=1190556&cid=8>



take place in some particularly unstable districts of Dagestan (e.g. Khasavyurtovsky, Kizilyurtovsky, Buynaksky), where local groups of militants wage war on the local division of the FSB or the police, in which both parties employ all available means (assassination, assault, persecution of relatives etc.). This sort of struggle often becomes a private war between the emir and e.g. the chief of the local FSB.

The Caucasus Emirate also takes up strictly terrorist actions, including suicide bombings. These, however, are not the complicated terrorist attacks involving hostages which were committed in the past by the Chechen militants (mainly under the command of Shamil Basayev), such as the Nord-Ost siege in Moscow in October 2002 (173 killed), the Beslan school siege in 2004 (334 killed) or the Russian aircraft bombings of 24<sup>th</sup> August 2004 (89 killed).<sup>105</sup> Most terrorist attacks organised by the IK have taken place in the North Caucasus and their targets were officials of the local power structures. Some examples of these attacks are: suicide bombing of police headquarters in Nazran in August 2009 (25 killed, 136 injured),<sup>106</sup> the Kizlyar bombings directed at police officers in March 2010 (12 killed, 29 injured),<sup>107</sup> bombing in a Stavropol park in May 2010 (8 killed, 42 injured),<sup>108</sup> suicide bombing at a market square in Vladikavkaz in September 2010 (19 killed, 202 injured)<sup>109</sup> or suicide bombing at the Ministry of Interior in Makhachkala in September 2011 (5 killed, 60 injured).<sup>110</sup>

The militants of the Caucasus Emirate have also conducted terrorist attacks on civil targets in Russia outside the North Caucasus. These attacks included: bombings in the Moscow underground in March 2010 (41 killed, 88 injured),<sup>111</sup> suicide bombing at the Domodedovo Airport in Moscow on 24<sup>th</sup> January 2011 (37 killed, 170 injured)<sup>112</sup> and a series of three suicide bombings directed at civilian facilities (public transport, railway station) in Volgograd in October and December 2013 (41 killed and 107 injured in total), although the latter was probably organised by a group of militants from Buynaksk rather than the

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<sup>105</sup> The suicide bombers were women. The planes were flying from Sochi to Moscow and from Moscow to Volgograd.

<sup>106</sup> <http://ria.ru/incidents/20090817/181276210.html>

<sup>107</sup> <http://www.svoboda.org/content/article/1998723.html>

<sup>108</sup> <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/54779.html>

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/153803>

<sup>110</sup> <http://kommersant.ru/pda/kommersant.html?id=1873721>

<sup>111</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/129857>

<sup>112</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2011/02/07/78967.shtml> oraz <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=422882>



leaders of the Emirate (Umarov was already dead at the time, and Kebekov had not been elected yet).<sup>113</sup>

Terrorist attacks are generally committed by the members of the Caucasus Emirate who work in conspiracy, not by militants from guerrilla groups. The element of revenge is often present: the terrorists themselves are either persecuted for their Salafi views, their true or alleged membership in the IK, or their friends and relatives are victims of the power structures. In the past, suicide bombers were often women – wives of the killed militants. The terrorist activity directed at Russian civilians was prohibited by Dokka Umarov in connection with the oppositional protests against Vladimir Putin at the Bolotny Square, Moscow, in 2011.<sup>114</sup> Later on, however, in connection with the approaching Olympic Games in Sochi, he cancelled the moratorium. Umarov's successor once again prohibited terrorist attacks on Russian civilian facilities, as well as the participation of women in bombings and armed operations.<sup>115</sup>

Nonetheless, propaganda is a very important element of the activity of the Caucasus Emirate. The CE is strongly present in the information space, using social media,<sup>116</sup> its own websites<sup>117</sup> as well as multimedia propaganda materials. The expanded propagandist activity is to serve several purposes at the same time. Firstly, it is directed at the radicalisation of Salafi communities in the North Caucasus, convincing them that there are conditions which justify defensive jihad and the necessity to pursue this type of jihad based on sharia.<sup>118</sup> The result of this radicalisation is the creation of a social ground for further activities, which may involve recruitment of new volunteers to the ranks of the Caucasus Emirate or obtaining new assistants for the structures which are already in existence.

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<sup>113</sup> <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/12/31/terakt/>; <http://vdagestan.com/15340.djihad> and <http://vdagestan.com/obrashhenie-mudzhaxidov-cumadinskogo-dzhamaata-gs-vd.djihad>

<sup>114</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2012/02/03/88591.shtml>

<sup>115</sup> Aliaskhab Kebekov's speech available at: [https://archive.org/details/emir\\_ke\\_abu\\_muh\\_ques\\_answe\\_2014](https://archive.org/details/emir_ke_abu_muh_ques_answe_2014)

<sup>116</sup> Including Twitter (np. [https://twitter.com/vdagestan\\_](https://twitter.com/vdagestan_)), Facebook (np. <https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100004940926828>) and Youtube (np. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WEsy6YV4mrg>). Although the Emirate does not use Russian social media, such as VKontakte, Odnoklassniki or Moy Mir, its propaganda is still present there.

<sup>117</sup> Primarily: <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/>, <http://hunafa.com/>, <http://checheninfo.com/>, <http://www.vdagestan.com/> and <http://www.islamdin.com/>

<sup>118</sup> E.g. <http://www.islamdin.com/video/1786-salim.html>



An additional aspect of propaganda in the Caucasus Emirate are instruction materials explaining the rules of conspiracy,<sup>119</sup> methods of guerrilla warfare,<sup>120</sup> organisation of terrorist attacks, handling weapons and home production of explosives.<sup>121</sup> The goal of these materials is not only to prepare future militants or train individual terrorists (hard to detect by the power structures due to the lack of direct connections with the Caucasus Emirate), but also to promote the CE. They depict jihad as an adventure, a chance to challenge oneself, they refer to the prototype of a warrior, deeply rooted in the tradition and culture of North Caucasian nations, as well as to the cult of violence, and as a result they contribute to an increase in interest in jihad and the Caucasus Emirate among the youth of the North Caucasian republics. Undoubtedly, the side effect of this propaganda is the interest in jihad as a whole, which often ends with a decision to leave for Syria. The criticism of this migration is visible in the Emirate's propaganda, and the leaders of the CE justify it on the grounds of religious demands: they say that from the point of view of sharia, local jihad is not only compulsory for the inhabitants of the North Caucasus, but it is also more important than jihad in Syria.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> E.g. <http://vdagestan.com/bezopasnoe-slezhenie-ch-1-celi-slezheniya>,  
<http://vdagestan.com/bezopasnoe-slezhenie-ch-2-metody-i-vidy-slezheniya> or  
<http://vdagestan.com/bezopasnoe-slezhenie-ch-3-zaklyuchitelnaya-planirovanie-slezheniya>

<sup>120</sup> E.g. [http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2012/12/22/95089\\_print.html](http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2012/12/22/95089_print.html)

<sup>121</sup> E.g. <http://vdagestan.com/sovety-mudzhaxidam-ansaram.djihad>

<sup>122</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/amir-ik-ali-abu-muxammad-poslanie-s-sovetom-mudzhaxidam-shama-stenogramma.djihad> and <http://vdagestan.com/amir-gs-i-kadij-vd-abu-usman-vrednye-posledstviya-ostavleniya-dzhixada.djihad>





## Chapter 5

### **Most significant leaders of the Caucasian militants and people connected with radical Islam in the North Caucasus**

**Israil Akhmednabiyev:** one of the most important leaders and ideologists in the North Caucasus; born in 1980 in the village of Novosaitli, Khasavyurtovsky District (Dagestan); an Avar; his family comes from Tsumadinsky District, Sasitli village; after graduating from high school, he studied in a madrasa in his home village; in 2000 he left for Syria, where he studied at the Abu Nour Institute; then, he studied at the Al-Azhar University in Egypt; he obtained his PhD under the direction of a well-known theologian, Sheikh Mustafa Bughha; according to other sources, he also studied in Lebanon; after returning to Dagestan, he established a new madrasa in Novosaitli, became a well-known preacher and leader of the Novosaitli Salafists; he also founded an Islamic non-governmental organisation; people ask for his opinion with regard to their family matters, asked him to settle disputes according to sharia; one can find dozens of his sermons on the Internet; Akhmednabiyev's views were extremely radical, he actually called for not recognising the authority of infidels, although he did not support armed struggle openly; after the outbreak of the civil war in Syria, he collected funds for humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees, visited Syria and Turkey several times; he also delivered sermons in which he indirectly encouraged jihad; in 2014, fearful of being apprehended, he left for Istanbul, where he continued his preaching activity among the local Caucasian diaspora and on the Internet; in November 2014, he was arrested by the Turkish authorities.

**Rustam Asildarov (Emir Abu Muhammad):** former wali of Vilayat Dagestan and emir of the Dagestani militants; born in 1981 in Kalmykia (his family comes from Kadari jamaat in Buynaksky District), Dargin; in armed underground since



2006/2007; close to Aliaskhab Kebekov; it was probably him who organised the assassination of Said Efendi Chirkeisky in August 2012; in December 2014, along with the commander of the militants from Makhachkala, Abu Muhammad Agachaulsky, he renounced his obedience to Kebekov and gave a pledge of allegiance to Ibrahim, a self-proclaimed leader of the Islamic State; his example was followed by many Dagestani and Chechen commanders; several days later, he was pronounced a traitor and deprived of his functions of a wali and emir of Dagestan by Kebekov; Asildarov is mostly active around Buynaksk.

**Islam Atabiyev (Abu Jihad Shishani)**, born on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1983 in the village of Ust-Jeguta in Karachay-Cherkessia; assistant of Omar ash-Shishani; despite his pseudonym, "Shishani" he is an ethnic Karachay; in the years 2003-2006 he studied at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo; after returning to the country he became an underground member of the Caucasus Emirate; arrested in 2009 and sentenced to a year of imprisonment in 2010; in 2011 he went to Turkey and then to Syria, where he became an assistant of Omar ash-Shishani and propagated Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar; at the beginning of 2014 he transferred to ISIS together with Omar ash-Shishani, where he continues to be his assistant and is responsible for Russian propaganda, harshly criticising the representatives of the Caucasus Emirate; it was probably Abu Jihad who triggered a schism in the ranks of the Emirate in December 2014.

**Omar ash-Shishani (a.k.a. Tarkhan Batirashvili)**: one of the leading commanders in the Islamic State leading the IS militants on the territory of Syria; born in 1980 in Birkiani (Pankisi Gorge, Georgia); father – Georgian, mother – Kist (Georgian Chechen); he graduated from the local school; in the years 1999-2002 he was in touch with Ruslan Gelayev's militants who were stationed in Pankisi (according to some sources he took part in some of their operations); in 2006 he was called up to the Georgian army, where he was directed to reconnaissance units due to his skills and excellent service; he participated in trainings conducted by American advisers; he served in the army during the Russo-Georgian War in August 2008 (he gathered intelligence information on the movement of the Russian army); after the war he was dismissed from the army due to tuberculosis; he returned to Pankisi, but could not find a job; in 2010 he was imprisoned for illegal possession of a weapon; he probably converted in prison and became a Salafist; he left early in 2011 and went to Turkey and then to Syria, where he soon found himself at the forefront of a group of Caucasian mujahedins, the Army of Emigrants and Supporters



(cooperating with the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda, the al-Nusra Front, which recognised the supremacy of the Caycasian emir); in November 2014, together with a group of supporters, he joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, having entered into conflict with Nura and the Army of Emigrants; he commands in several important operations, mainly near Aleppo; thanks to his talent and skills he became one of the leading commanders in the Islamic State; Omar has two older brothers, who took part in the Chechen wars (one died; the second one also fights in Syria; according to some sources, it is him, not Omar, who is the commanding officer); according to some opinions, ash-Shishani, similarly to Abu Jihad, cooperates with the Russian secret service.

**Shamsudin Batukaev:** Islamic scholar, long-standing representative of the Emirate abroad; born in 1956 in Kazakhstan; in 1960 his family came back to Chechnya; after graduating from a mainstream school, he studied in the Mir Arab medres in Bukhara, and then in Tashkent; in 1991 he joined the Chechen independence movement; in the inter-war period (1996-1998) he was the chairman of the Sharia Court of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria; from the beginning of the Second Chechen War he stayed in Turkey; in the years 2006-2007 he was the "vice-president" of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and in the years 2008-2010 he was a representative of the Emirate abroad (wakil); later on he commenced negotiations with Kadyrov concerning his return to Chechnya; in 2010 Umarov decided on the discontinuation of the function of the wakil; in October 2011, Batukaev was a target of assassination, which turned out to be a failure (according to different sources, the assassination was organised by the Russian secret service or the former Chechen commander, Uveys Akhmadov, who lived in Turkey); ultimately Batukaev never returned to Chechnya, but he did not cooperate with the emirate any more.

**Aslan Byutukayev** (Emir Khamzat): emir of Vilayat Chechnya after the death of Dokka Umanov; born on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 1974 in Achkhoy-Martan, his home village is Katyr-Yurt; close collaborator of Umarov, his group always operated in south Chechnya; until 2010 he was not a well-known commander; in the summer of 2010 he explicitly supported Umarov during the rebellion of the most influential commanders (Vadalov, Gakayev, Gaziyev, Muhammad); after that event he increased his rank, became a commander of the militants in west Chechnya and finally Umarov's successor; he organised a terrorist attack at the Domodedovo Airport in Moscow in January 2011 (executed by a suicide bomber) and the assassination of Yuri Budanov (June 2011); from July 2011,



he was Umarov's naib in Vilayat Chechnya, and then he replaced him as a wali; he was probably the organiser of the armed operation in Grozny which took place between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> December 2014.

**Tarkhan Gaziyeu:** former commander of the south-western front and the head of the mukhabarat (security service of the Caucasus Emirate); born on 11.11.1965 in the village of Pozh-Poroy, Itum-Kale District; at the beginning of the Second Chechen War he operated in Shatoysky District, and then in Urus-Martanovsky; close collaborator of Umarov; in August 2010, together with several other commanders, he temporarily renounced his allegiance to the emir, but then acknowledged his leadership once again; he served in the structures of the Caucasus Emirate until 2010; in 2013, he probably left for Syria, but there are no details of his whereabouts.

**Bagautdin Kebedov** (Bagaudin Magomedov; Bagaudin Mahomet ad-Dagestani): one of the most prominent Salafi leaders in Dagestan; born in 1942 or 1945 in Vedeno, to which his family had been resettled from Dagestan after the deportation of Chechens; after their return from exile, Kebedov's family settled in Kizilyurtovsky District, Dagestan; he organised religion and Arabic lessons already in the Soviet times; from 1989 him and his brother Abbas Kebedov, organised an Aslamic community in Kyzyl-Yurt, one of the first Salafi communities in the USSR; they co-organised the meeting and appointment of the Islamic Revival Party (1990); the Kebedovs became the most important Salafi leaders in Dagestan after Ahmad-Kadi Akhtaev (from the village of Kudali); Bagautdin and his supporters actively participated in the First Chechen War, and Abbas Kebedov stayed in Dagestan; after the end of the war he returned to Kizilyurt, but in 1997 he was forced to settle in Chechnya (according to their theory, the move is called hijra, and it is emigration from the land of infidels to an area where the rules of sharia are observed); Kabadov's community was first based in Gudermes and then in Urus-Martan; Kabadov actively supported the idea of creating an Islamic state in Caucasus, taking part in subsequent Meetings of the Peoples of Chechnya and Dagestan as one of their leaders; in 1999 he supported Basayev and Khattab's attack on Dagestan, in which his people actively participated; after the defeat of the militants, Kebedov emigrated, probably to Turkey; currently he is not an active preacher or leader of the Dagestani Salafists.



**Aliaskhab Kebekov (Ali Abu Muhammad al Dagestani):** second emir of Caucasus; born on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1972 in the village of Teletl (Shamilsky District of Dagestan); Avar nationality; he probably converted late in life; in 1996 he was already sentenced to prison in abeyance for illegal production of alcohol; from the end of the 90s he studied in medreses in Tunisia and Syria; after his return to Dagestan in 2005, he took up teaching in local medreses (first in Tarki near Makhachkala and then in Kizilyurt), he was a supporter of a well-known Salafist leader, Murtaza Magomedov, who was his uncle; after Magomedov's murder in 2009, Kebekov joined the militants; due to his extensive theological knowledge, he soon moved up in the hierarchy, but he never commanded military operations; first, he was the qadi (judge) of Vilayat Dagestan, after the death of Magomed Vagabov he became the qadi of the whole Emirate (2010-2014), and from March 2014 he was the emir of Caucasus; on 28<sup>th</sup> June Kebekov's statement was published, in which he claimed that attacking civilian facilities should not have been taking place; he also encouraged the militants to refrain from suicide attacks and from involving women; he is now hiding on the territory of Dagestan, probably near Buynaksk.

**Abdullah Kosteksky** (his real name is unknown): qadi of the Caucasus Emirate; probably appointed to this position after Kebekov's taking the function of the chief emir; he is a Dagestani from the village of Kostek, Khasavyurtovsky District; lack of detailed information on his person; in December 2014 he published several records in which he engages in a bitter argument with one of the leaders of Caucasian mujahedins who had fought in the Islamic State, Islam Atabiyev (Abu Jihad Shishani), and criticised giving a pledge to the IS by some commanders of the CE.

**Beslan Makhauri** (Emir Muhammad): born in 1988; emir of the Sunzha sector of Vilayat Chechnya; also qadi of Vilayat Chechnya; he comes from the village of Assinovskaya in Chechnya; judging by his surname, his ancestors probably come from the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia.

**Suleyman Magomedov** (Abu Usman): qadi of Vilayat Dagestan and the emir of the mountainous sector (including the mountainous, western part of Dagestan, inhabited mainly by Avars); apart from Ali Abu Muhammad, the most influential ideological leader of the Islamic militants in Caucasus; born in 1976 in the village of Gimry (Untsukul'sky District of Dagestan), he is of the Avar nationality; raised in a very devoted family and village; he was thoroughly



educated in the Muslim spirit, first in Dagestan, then in Syria (where he was the leader of Gimrynsky Salafists); after his return to Dagestan in 2005, he settled down in the family aul, where he occupied himself with spreading Salafi propaganda and organising armed underground; in 2007, he became the qadi of Dagestan and in 2008 the emir of the mountainous sector of the vilayat; he has many videos uploaded on the websites of Dagestani radicals, concerned both with Islam and jihad; he is probably hiding in Gimry or the surrounding areas; during the rebellion of the commanders who swore an oath to Ibrahim (December 2014) he explicitly opted for the Caucasus Emirate.

**Feyzullah Margoshvili** (Salahuddin Shishani): lack of detailed information on his person; he comes from the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia; emir of the Army of Emigrants and Supporters (Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar); he served in the ranks of the Caucasus Emirate in the North Caucasus, then he probably stayed in Turkey; upon his arrival in Syria (probably in 2013), he joined JMA; he opposed incorporating the organisation to ISIS; after the departure of Omar ash-Shishani he became the emir of the group; his position in the ranks of Jabhat al-Nusra is very high; he acknowledges the supremacy of the emir of Caucasus, albeit only symbolically.

**Murad Margoshvili** (Muslim al Shishani): born in 1972 in the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia, later on his family moved to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR; he served in the Soviet Army, in a division stationing in Mongolia; after the dissolution of the Soviet Union he came back to Chechnya; he participated in the First Chechen War, from 1995 he fought under Khattab's command; he cooperated with a number of commanders-volunteers from Muslim countries (e.g. Abu Walid and Abu Jafar); he was also the emir of Vedenov; in 2003 he was captured by the Russians and sent to prison for 3 years; first, he was sentenced for participating in an illegal armed group, but in 2006 he was acquitted by the Supreme Court of Ingushetia; after leaving the prison, Margoshvili left for Pankisi, where he settled down; he tried to contact the militants from Chechnya on numerous occasions, wanting to start fighting again, but he was not trusted (they feared that his release was not coincidental, but recruited him nonetheless); for several months he stayed in Dagestan and it should not be ruled out that he cooperated with the Georgian secret service, which helped some groups of militants get into the North Caucasus (he was probably involved in the incident in the Lopota Gorge in August 2012, where militants fought with Georgian troops); due to the impossibility of going back to Chechnya in 2012,



he left for Syria, where he established his own group, Junud al-Sham, fighting near Aleppo and the Latakia province; cooperating with the Army of Emigrants and Supporters but alienating himself from its conflict with the Islamic State, which he criticises for excessive radicalism and cruelty (including Omar ash-Shishani); he tries to maintain independence; he enjoys great authority among the Chechens, including refugees staying in Europe.

**Makhran Saidov:** born on 22<sup>nd</sup> January 1975 in the village of Centoroy, Chechnya; currently one of the most influential Chechen commanders; he probably served in the troops allocated to Shamil Basayev; he became known for several successful operations, of which the first one was organised in 2007, e.g. near the home village of Centoroy (also the birthplace of Ramzan Kadyrov); in 2010, he supported the splitters against Umarov; in August 2010, together with commandant Zaurbek Avtorkhanov and Emir Abdurrahman, he organised an operation targeting Kadyrov's supporters in the village of Centoroy; around 60 militants took part in the operation; until recently, close to Aslan Byutukayev; in December 2014 he supported the split in the Emirate and together with some emirs, e.g. of Vedenov and Itum-Kale, he swore an oath to the Islamic State.

**Ali Taziev** (Emir Magas): in the years 2007-2010 one of the main leaders of the Caucasus Emirate; born in 1974 in Ingushetia; until 1998 he worked as a security guard of the wife of the adviser of the president of Ingushetia, Valery Fateev; in the autumn of 1998 the woman was kidnapped and Taziev was probably involved; at the time, he became connected with the militants; for many years his real name was unknown and he was falsely referred to as Akhmed (or Magomed) Yevloev (Taziev probably had two passports with the name of Akhmed and Magomed Yevloev); he fought under Abu al-Walid's command, then he started forming the first troops on the territory of Ingushetia; in 2004 he became the commander of the Ingush sector of the armed forces of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and in 2006 he was promoted to the commander of the "Caucasian front"; after the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, he became the military emir of the Emirate, wali and the emir of Vilayat Ingushetia; he held these positions until June 2010, when he was arrested by the FSB in Malgobek (Ingushetia); Taziev's arrest was a serious blow to the Emirate, Umarov even came out with a special statement, imploring mujahedins to not lose their spirit; however, the underground in Ingushetia was so weakened that he could not manage to restore its structures; Taziev organised



or participated in a series of armed operations and terrorist attacks in Caucasus, including the Beslan massacre and the raid on Nazran in 2004; after his arrest he was transported to Lefortovo Prison in Moscow; on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2013 he was sentenced to life imprisonment in a penal colony.

**Movladi Udugov:** one of the ideological fathers of the Caucasus Emirate and from the end of the 90s – supporter of the idea of creating an Islamic state in Caucasus; born in 1962 in Grozny; he belongs to the settlement of Kharachoy; initially his name was Movladi Temishev, but he changed his surname to the maiden surname of his mother sometime in the middle of the 80s; in 1988 he graduated in economy from the Chechen-Ingush State University; after finishing his studies he worked as an editor in an independence newspaper, *Orientir*; since the 80s he has been connected with Yandarbiyev; in 1991 he became a spokesman of president Dzhokhar Dudayev and he took the position of the Minister of Information and Press in the separatist government of Chechnya; in the years 1994-1996 he managed the propaganda machine of the Chechen government, after which he became the deputy Prime Minister of Information policy in the government of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev (from August to December 1996); during the presidential elections in January 1997, in which he participated as a candidate, he opted for transforming Chechnya into an Islamic state; he obtained less than 1% votes; after Maskhadov's triumph in the elections, he became the deputy Prime Minister of the Chechen government and the Minister of Foreign Affairs; he actively discussed the status of Chechnya with Russians (from summer 1996); at the beginning of the Second Chechen War, he emigrated to Turkey (probably settled in İzmir), where he is obtaining financial sources for militants and pursuing information policy (founder and main editor of the [kavkazcenter.com](http://kavkazcenter.com) portal); Udugov is probably the only Chechen politicians to have survived for so long and at the same time maintained his influence on the events.

**Isa Umarov:** brother of Movladi Udugov; close to Basayev and Khattab; opponent of Maskhadov; one of the main Islamic ideologist militants; supporter of encroachment on Dagestan in 1999; in October 2001 he became famous for taking over a TV transmitter in the village of Avtury; he appeared on the local Chechen television (Avtury-10), calling for further resistance; he probably exerted a strong influence on Dokka Umarov (Movladi Udugov's man in Umarov's circles) and contributed to the decision on the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate (in some sources he is even described as the originator of the





concept of the Emirate); several years ago, in unexplained circumstances, he left for Turkey and then for Syria, where he probably stays to this day; he is involved in a personal conflict with Murad Margoshvili; he was often accused of cooperation with the Russian secret service (e.g. by Akhmed Zakayev).

**Aslambek Vadalov:** until recently, one of the leading commanders of the Chechen armed underground; born in 1972 in the village of Ishkhoy-Yurt in Gudermessky District of Chechnya; he participated in the First Chechen War; at the beginning of the Second Chechen War he fought under Khattab's command; first he was the emir of the Gudermessky sector, then a commander of the so-called eastern front; he frequently organised assaults on towns in eastern Chechnya, during which the militants killed police officers and associates of the authorities and burnt their houses; in July 2010, Dokka Umarov appointed Vadalov as the wali of Chechnya in case of his death; in August 2010 (after Umarov's resignation from the function of the emir of Caucasus and its subsequent discontinuation), Vadalov joined the Putschists, who had renounced allegiance to the emir, for which he was deprived of all his functions and addressed to the sharia court; he renewed his pledge to Umarov in July 2011; after Umarov's death Vadalov was one of the candidates for the position of the emir; there has been no data on his whereabouts since the spring of 2014; he is probably hiding in the mountains of eastern Chechnya together with a small group of supporters; in December 2014 the Chechen authorities destroyed a house in the village of Ishkhoy-Yurt, belonging to his relatives.

### **Deceased leaders who contributed to the creation of the Emirate or played a significant role in the first years of its existence**

**Supyan Abdullayev (1952-2011):** one of the most influential commandants in the first years of the Caucasus Emirate; born in Kazakhstan, then his family returned to Vedensky District; he graduated from the Chechen-Ingush State University and became a teacher in Vedensky District; at the same time, he was a sportsman, a wrestler; he was interested in Islam as early as the Soviet times, he learnt it from Chechen mullahs, and later on he taught religion to children himself; in 1990 he was one of the organisers of the founding meeting of the Islamic Revival Party in Astrakhan; he also actively participated in the political events in Chechnya starting in 1990-1991; in the years 1991-1994 he managed the Islamic centre called Ar-Risala in Grozny; he actively fought in the First Chechen War, he was the deputy of the commander of the so-called Islamic



battalion; in the years 1996-1999 he was the deputy Minister of Sharia Security (a kind of sharia secret service); after the outbreak of the Second Chechen War he commanded the so-called Islamic brigade Jundullah; in 2002, Maskhadov appointed him the Minister of Finance and one of the members of the so-called State Defense Committee, Majlisul Shura of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (a council of the most important commandants), appointed by a Chechen leader of a representative government body; at the time, Abdullayev was already one of the most influential political and military leaders; from 2003, he was also a commander of the so-called Shalinsky sector, he actively organised guerrilla activities; after the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate, he became the emir's naib; after abolishing the regime of the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya (spring 2009) he published a recording on the Internet, in which he said that the assurances of the Russian party that the war had ended were lies; he was one of the "founding fathers" of the Caucasus Emirate, he probably had a strong influence on Umarov; he died during a special operation in Sunzha District in March 2011.

**Anzor Astemirov** (1976-2010): leader of the armed underground in Kabardino-Balkaria and one of the main ideologists of the Caucasus Emirate; born in Kremenchuk, Ukraine, where his grandfather, a Kabardin nobleman, had emigrated in the 1930s due to repressions; in the 80s, Astemirov's family returned to Kabardino-Balkaria and stayed in an industrial town called Tyrnyauz (south of the republic); next, the Astemirovs settled in Nalchik; at the beginning of the 90s, Astemirov was sent to study in Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) by the Kabardino-Balkar Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration; having finished his studies, he returned to Kabardino-Balkaria, became a preacher in one of the mosques in the capital; in 1993, he graduated from the Imam Muhammad Ibn Saud Islamic University, created the Islamic Centre in Nalchik, where Salafist views were dominant; at the same time, the so-called Kabardino-Balkar Jamaat, a community of the local Salafists, started to form in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic and quickly came into conflict with the Muslim Ecclesiastical Administration; Astemirov became an unofficial deputy of the jamaat's leader, Musa Mukojev; he was also active in the Islamic Centre; in 1999, the authorities, fearful of the increase in the influence of the Salafists in the republic, renewed the registration centre; in 1999 and then in 2001, Astemirov was arrested (suspected of connection with Chechen separatists), but he was acquitted twice due to the lack of evidence; in 2002, the Kabardino-Balkar Institute of Islamic Studies was founded in Nalchik (directed by Ruslan Nakhushev), associating



Salafi activists; Astemirov became the deputy director of the institute, he frequently delivered speeches, accusing the authorities of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic of persecuting Muslims, he also continued preaching; he participated in the intellectual life of Russian Muslims (e.g. by taking part in conferences in Moscow); in that period, Astemirov probably had already made contact with Shamil Basayev, who strived to expand the struggle to other Caucasian republics; in December 2004, the first major armed operation of the local militants took place in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic: they organised an assault on the Federal Drug Control Service of the Russian Federation, 4 police officers died and the weapon depot was robbed; the authorities accused Astemirov and the leader of the Ingush militants, Ilyas Gorchkhanov, of organising the assault; Astemirov was placed on the wanted list, he began to hide, at the same time creating an armed underground in the Kabardino-Balkar Republic; in 2005 he was one of the organisers of an assault of militants on Nalchik, which was the largest operation of the local armed underground (several hundred people were killed during the struggle, including 90 militants and 35 officers of the power structures); after the attack, the Chechen separatists declared that it had been organised by the "Kabardino-Balkar front", led by Emir Sayfullah (Astemirov); Astemirov's position in the militants' camp in Caucasus was very high at the time, he had a great influence on Basayev, Abdul-Halim Sadulayev and Dokka Umarov; he was one of the "founding fathers" of the Caucasus Emirate; after its proclamation he became the qadi of the Emirate, at the same time functioning as the wali and emir of the Kabardino-Balkar Republic; he was probably hiding in Kabardino-Balkaria all that time; he died in March 2010 during a random operation of the power structures (document control).

**Shamil Basayev** (1965-2006): born in 1965 in the village of Dyshne-Vedeno; he belonged to the Yalkhoroy clan; he served in the Soviet air force; in 1987 he passed the entry exams to the Moscow State University of Agricultural Engineering, but was dismissed a year later; in the years 1989-1990 he studied at the Islamic Institute in Istanbul; at the beginning of 1991 he joined the forming troops of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus; in August 1991 he participated in the defence of the White House in Moscow (on Yeltsin's side); in the autumn of 1991 he participated in the abolishment of the communist rule in Grozny; he was a candidate in presidential elections in Chechnya in October 1991 (Dudayev won); on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1991 he participated in hijacking a passenger plane, TU-154, flying from Mineralnye Vody to Turkey: the hijackers wanted to protest against the introduction of a



state of emergency in Chechnya; between 1991 and 1992 he probably fought in Nagorno-Karabakh Republic on the Azerbaijani side; in 1992 he became the general commander of the troops of the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus; from August that year he participated in the War in Abkhazia on the Abkhazian side, before that he had been trained by the Russian intelligence (GRU); in the summer of 1994 he participated in civil battles in Chechnya on Dudayev's side, he was one of his closest collaborators and the chief of his private security (so-called Abkhaz battalion); just before the initiation of military operations in 1994, 2 thousand militants were under Basayev's command; on 14<sup>th</sup> June 1995 a troop under his command took over a hospital in Budyonnovsk (Stavropol Krai), taking around 1000 hostages; the Chechens demanded ceasefire in Chechnya and the commencement of negotiations with Dudayev; after a failed attempt at retaking the hospital by the Russian anti-terrorist unit, the Russian Prime Minister, Viktor Chernomyrdin, commenced negotiations with Basayev; the militants were allowed to withdraw to Chechnya; after the Budyonnovsk hospital hostage crisis, Basayev's authority in the Chechen society increased significantly; in April 1996 he became the commander of the Chechen military forces; in January 1997 he ran for the chair of the president of Chechnya (he obtained 23% votes); in February he became the leader of the Chechen Republic Freedom Party, and then became the emir of the Congress of the Peoples of Ichkeria and Dagestan, which took place in 1998; in 1997 prime minister (for several months), from June 1998 deputy of the commander-in-chief of the Ichkerian armed forces; in the interwar period Basayev's clan controlled a significant part of the oil extraction business in Chechnya; in 1998 he became involved with radical Islamists, particularly with Khattab from Saudi Arabia; in September 1999, troops of militants under the command of Basayev and Khattab entered Dagestan with a view to create an Islamic state in the North Caucasus; in February 2000 Basayev was seriously injured (lost his foot) during an attempt to break through to Grozny, besieged by Russians; from 2000 he did not execute any greater armed operations against the federal army, but rather hid in the mountains, near Nozhay-Yurt; from the beginning of the Second Chechen War he used his Arabian *nom de guerre*, Shamil Abu-Idris; after Khattab's death in April 2002, he was reconciled with Maskhadov, who appointed him the deputy commander-in-chief of the armed forces of Ichkeria and the emir of the Ichkerian War Council; after taking over the Moscow theatre by Movsar Buharovich Barayev, he admitted he had organised the siege, for which Maskhadov deprived him of all his functions within the underground Chechen authorities; from the Moscow theatre hostage



crisis he admitted to all terrorist attacks in Chechnya and abroad (e.g. the Beslan massacre); he created a special division of suicide bombers for diversionary operations in Russia, called Riyadus-Salikhin; he commanded the attack of the militants on Ingushetia in June 2004; in February 2005 he unexpectedly submitted to Maskhadov's order on one-sided ceasefire; he was one of the initiators of extending the war to outside of Chechnya, he maintained personal contacts with the Islamic underground in other republics, particularly in Kabardino-Balkaria (which he probably visited several times before the attack on Nalchik in 2005); he died in July 2006 in the village of Ali-Yurt in Ingushetia during an explosion of a truck carrying explosive materials, which he was driving himself; the Russian authorities announced that his death was the result of an FSB operation.

**Rappani Khalilov (1969-2007)**: born in 1969 in Buynaksk, Dagestan, he was of the Lak nationality; he served in borderland protection armies on the border with Mongolia; after coming back from the army he established his own bakery in Dagestan; he married Patimat, one of Khattab's sisters-in-law; they lived in the village of Karamakhi (Kadari Jamaat); **Khalilov** took part in Basayev's raid on Dagestan in August 1999; after that, together with his division of ca. 100 militants he went to Nozhay-Yurtovsky District in Chechnya, where he trained Dagestani militants; in March 2011 **Khalilov** supposedly dispatched the first militants to Dagestan; he was suspected of organising a terrorist attack in Kaspiysk, Dagestan, on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2002 (which took the lives of 40 people); **Khalilov's** troops were also active in Chechnya: near the village of Meskety, Galayty and Zamay-Yurt (Nozhay-Yurtovsky District); from ca. 2002 he organised the armed underground in Dagestan, through Rasul Makasharipov, and became its leader in 2005 (he moved from Chechnya to Dagestan); he died on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2007 in the village of Novy Sulak (Kizilyurtovsky District), during an assault on the house in which he was hiding.

**Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev (1952-2003)**: born in 1952 in Kazakhstan; he comes from an old Chechen lineage living in Starye Atagi; in 1981, he graduated from the Chechen-Ingush State University; in 1989, he established a political organisation called Bart and in 1990 he founded the Vaynakh Democratic Party, whose goal was to create an independent democratic state of Chechnya; he was one of the most important Chechen independence activists, whose opinions gradually evolved towards Islam; he actively participated in the sessions of the Chechen National Congress (he was in its administration; the congress was



spearheaded by Dudayev and Soslambekov was his deputy); Yandarbiyev was a member of the first Chechen parliament (1991-1993), broken up by Dudayev in 1993; vice president of Chechnya from April 1993; he mainly dealt with ideological matters within his function; in January 1995 he commanded the defence of the centre of Grozny (his headquarters were located in the underground of the Presidential Palace); in 1995 a warrant was issued for his arrest by the FSB; on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 1996, after Dudayev's death, he assumed the position of the president of Chechnya; on 27<sup>th</sup> May 1996 he signed a Russian-Chechen understanding on ending the hostilities; he participated in negotiation in the Kremlin with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin; in January 1997 he ran for the office of the president of Chechnya, but lost to Maskhadov and was third; after that, he joined the opposition; he was the initiator of the so-called Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (SPIR), headed by Arbi Barayev; after the outbreak of the Second Chechen War, he moved to the Middle East; in November 1999 he was appointed the representative of president Maskhadov in Muslim states; he settled down in Qatar together with his family; he supported the transformation of Chechnya into an Islamic state; after the Moscow theatre hostage crisis Maskhadov stripped him of his representative function in Muslim states; at the beginning of November 2002, Russia asked the Qatar authorities to extradite Yandarbiyev, who was accused of terrorism; he died in 2003 in front of a mosque in Doha (capital of Qatar) as a result of detonation executed by Russian secret agents; Yandarbiyev was one of the most important Chechen leaders, whose views (first the national independence ideology, and then Islamic sentiments) significantly influenced the history of the republic.

**Abdul-Halim Sadulayev** (1967-2006): born in 1967 in Argun; he belonged to the settlement of Ustradoy; he learnt from well-known Chechen ulama, an active participant in the Islamic revival in Chechnya; he studied philology at the Grozny University, but he did not graduate due to the outbreak of war; he had a good knowledge of Arabic; he did not actively participate in the First Chechen War; in the interwar period he was an imam in Argun, and a well-known theologian in Chechnya (he often delivered sermons in the Chechen television); in 1999 Maskhadov included him in the constitution committee, which was to develop a constitution for the republic based on sharia; in 2002 he was appointed president of the Supreme Sharia Court at a meeting of the State Defense Committee; at the time Maskhadov signed a decree according to which Sadulayev would be the president of Chechnya in case of his death; after Maskhadov's death (March 2005) he became the president of the CRI,



recognised by all of the most important commandants; he reorganised the Chechen forces in May 2005; in his published manifestos and recordings he referred to Islam to a much greater extent than Maskhadov had; in his manifesto issued after his coming into power he declared that the aim of partisans was to force Russia to make peace; he warned of attacks on the Russian territory, but he also stipulated that the aim of the militants were not civilian facilities; he died on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2006 in Argun during a fight with Russian forces.

**Khattab (a.k.a. Habib Abdul Rahman; died in 2002):** also known as Black Arab; born in 1963, 1965 or 1970 in Saudi Arabia (his ancestors were refugees from Caucasus); he was a Saudi Arabian citizen; he graduated from the Amman Military Academy, after which he served in the king's "Circassian guard" (personal protection); according to some sources, when he was 17 he already left for war in Afghanistan, where he fought against the Soviet army; then he fought in the civil war in Tajikistan on the side of the Islamic opposition; he was an expert in explosives and sabotage; in 1994, he began his cooperation with the Chechens: he created groups composed of foreign mujahedins, which fought in Chechnya later on; he arrived in the republic in 1994 and fought in the First War; in 1997 he created a training camp for militants near the village of Serzhen'-Yurt, Chechnya, where he also promoted Salafi ideology; in 1998 he began his cooperation with Basayev; their aim was to free the North Caucasus from Russian control and create an Islamic state; he also frequented Kadari Jamaat in Dagestan, from where he took one of his wives; in August 1999, together with Basayev, he spearheaded militants who attacked Dagestan; from the beginning of the Second War he was hiding in eastern Chechnya, directing diversionary combat of the militants (his division belonged to the largest divisions in Chechnya; it could include even 800 people); Khattab obtained the main funds for the militants from abroad; he was killed (poisoned) in April 2002, probably by an agent of the Russian secret service.

**Khuseyn Gakayev (1970-2013):** born on 8<sup>th</sup> July 1970 in the village of Elistanzhi in Vedensky District, Chechnya; one of the most important commanders of the Caucasus Emirate; he commanded the Shalinsky sector during the Second Chechen War, he was also a deputy commander of Aslambek Vadalov's "eastern front"; in the last underground government of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria he held the position of the Minister of the Interior; he took part in a revolt against Umarov in the summer of 2010; he was then chosen to be the emir of the Caucasus Emirate by the mutinous commanders; in 2011 he



was reconciled with Umarov and became the deputy wali of Vilayat Chechnya; he was killed during a special operation in Vedensky District in January 2013.

**Ruslan (Hamzat) Gelayev** (1964-2003): *nom de guerre*: "Angel"; one of the most famous Chechen field commanders, hero of subsequent generations of militants; born in the village of Komsomolskoye (Saadi-Khutor); in the Soviet times he worked in Grozny in an oil plant; in the years 1992-1993 he fought in Abkhazia; during the reign of Dudayev, he commanded a regiment of the Chechen Spetsnaz, which protected refinery facilities in the capital; at that time he was already religious, as opposed to the majority of independence supporters, later on he accepted Salafi ideas; during the First Chechen War he was a field commander in the western districts of Chechnya; after the First Chechen War (1996) Gelayev went on a pilgrimage to Mecca and assumed the name Hamzat; he was in opposition to Maskhadov, he supported Salman Raduyev; from April 1997 he was the deputy prime minister of Chechnya; from January 1998 he was the Minister of Defence; in June 1999 he became the leader of the Sharia Guard; during the Second Chechen War he was the commandant of the north-western front and then the commander of the south-western sector of Grozny defence; finally, he became the commander of the defence of the whole capital; in January 2000 he withdrew from the capital, which was taken over by the Russians; in March 2000 he found himself surrounded by the Russian forces in the village of Komsomolskoye: he lost 800 to 1200 men in the siege, mainly due to the lack of help from Arbi Barayev; Gelayev himself managed to escape with a small group of militants; Gelayev announced bloody revenge on Barayev and their troops continuously clashed (e.g. in Shalazhi in June 2000); at the end of 2000 or the beginning of 2001, Gelayev went to Georgia together with his division and hid in the Pankisi Gorge; since he refused to come back to Chechnya and fight, Maskhadov stripped him of all his functions and degraded him to the rank of a private; in 2000 Gelayev initiated secret talks with Akhmad Kadyrov concerning switching to his side, but they were unsuccessful (Gelayev himself denied ever contacting Kadyrov); he also kept in touch with the Georgian secret service; in the autumn of 2001, Gelayev's division was transferred to the Kodori Gorge in Abkhazia, with help from Georgians, whence he marched on Sukhumi (Gelayev probably thought that he would be able to make a diversion near Sochi); the Abkhaz and Russian forces managed to prevent the siege; in the middle of 2002 part of Gelayev's forces tried to break through to Chechnya, which was a result of the deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations due to the situation in the Pankisi Gorge; hard battles were fought against the federal army, first near Itum-Kale (July) and then in the





Ingush village of Galashky (September); part of the militants managed to get into Chechnya (it is not known if Gelayev was with them) and station near Bamut; his troops operated in the south and west Chechnya (Bamut, Itum-Kale, Sharoy); Gelayev enjoyed support of a significant part of the society and some other commandants (e.g. his cousin, Dokka Umarov); in May 2012 he entered into an agreement with Maskhadov and was appointed commander-in-chief of the Chechen Armed Forces; he also contacted Basayev; in December 2002 Gelayev marched from Chechnya through Dagestan to Georgia, leading a group of several dozen militants; the group fought the Russian army and the forces of the Ministry of the Interior in Tsuntinsky District and Tlyaratinsky District in Dagestan, as a result of which several dozen militants and a dozen or so Russian soldiers were killed; Gelayev himself was killed by Russian borderland soldiers at the beginning of February, when he was trying to cross the Russian-Azerbaijan border in Tlyaratinsky District; they refused to return his body to his family; he was buried in Dagestan, in a nameless grave.

**Ruslan Machalikashvili** (Sayfullakh al-Shishani; died in 2014): there is lack of information on the date of his birth; he comes from the Pankisi Gorge, Georgia; he fought in the Second Chechen War; due to a sustained injury, he had to receive a treatment in Turkey, from which he could not return to Caucasus; he tried to enrol for the fight against American forces in Iraq, to no avail; in Turkey he was involved in the Imkander charity, supporting Chechens' departure to Syria; He arrived in Syria in 2013; at first, he directed an armed faction called Jundu Sham, then he joined the JMA, where he became the deputy of Emir Omar ash-Shishani; he was a very active commander, also in the area of propaganda (he uploaded dozens of recordings of himself on the Internet; he was one of the idols of Caucasian jihadists and recruits); as a result of his conflict with Omar ash-Shishani in the summer of 2013, his group was expelled from the JMA and Machalikashvili started cooperating with Muslim al Shishani; he was killed on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2014 in a mortar attack near Aleppo.

**Emir Muhannad** (1969-2011): real name Khaled Yusuf Muhammad al-Emirate (presumably); the last significant commander of foreign mujahedins in Chechnya; born in 1969 in Saudi Arabia; he graduated from the Islamic Institute in Medina; he stayed in Pankisi from 1999 to 2000 (where he spread Salafist ideas and taught Arabic), attempting to break through to Chechnya, in which he succeeded some time in 2001 or 2002 (aided by famous abductions of the Akhmadov brothers for ransom); he fought in troops under Khattab, Abu al-



Walid and Abu Hafis; after the death of the latter in autumn 2006, he became the main leader of the foreign mujahedins in Chechnya, he maintained contact with Arabian sponsors; he closely collaborated with Umarov after the proclamation of the Emirate and may have had influence on his decisions; nonetheless, Muhannad probably inspired (for reasons unknown) some commanders to rebel against Umarov in the summer of 2010; before the rebellion ended, Muhannad died in a fight with the Russian army near Serzhen'-Yurt (April 2011).

**Said Buryatsky** (Abu Saad Said al-Buriatii; born Alexander Alexandrovitch Tikhomirov; 1982-2010): one of Salafi preachers and leaders in the post-Soviet area, as well as an ideological leader of Caucasian militants in the years 2008-2010; born in Ulan-Ude (Buryatia), his father was Russian and his mother was Buryat; he was raised by his step-father, who was a Chechen; as a teenager, he studied in a Buddhist school (Datsan), but at the age of fifteen he converted to Islam and assumed the name of Said; according to some sources, he converted under the influence of his friends, Chechens; between 1990 and 2000 he was staying in Moscow, where he studied in Madrash Al Rasul Akram, and then in a madrasa in Buguruslan (Orenburg Oblast); in 2002 he left for Egypt and then Kuwait, where he mastered his knowledge of Islam under the direction of the local religious authorities (e.g. at the Al-Azhar University in Cairo); in 2005 he returned to Russia, settled in Moscow and started working in an Islamic publishing house called Umma, he also worked in the main mosque in Moscow; at that time he started recording and uploading his sermons on the Internet, which earned him great popularity among Salafi commanders of the former USSR; he often travelled around Russia and abroad, to post-Soviet countries, delivering sermons for the local Salafi communities; around 2005 he got married and came back to Ulan-Ude, but never gave up preaching; at the beginning of 2008, the militants from the Caucasus Emirate sent him a recording in which they summoned him to take part in jihad in Caucasus; several months later, Buryatsky was transferred to Chechnya, he gave his pledge of allegiance to Umarov and became a militant, announcing that after the proclamation of the Emirate, jihad became a responsibility of all Russian Muslims; his decision on joining jihad caused a fierce discussion among post-Soviet Salafists; he became very popular in Caucasus, his sermons (mainly on jihad) and attitude attracted many volunteers to the armed underground; he participated in a number of armed operations, albeit as an ordinary militant (he was not a commander); in August 2009, there were rumours that Said Buryatsky had taken part in a suicide bombing of the police headquarters in Nazran (in which 25 officers were killed),



but several days later Buryatsky dispelled the rumours; he died on 2<sup>nd</sup> March 2010 during a special operation in the village of Ekazhevo, Ingushetia.

**Abu al-Walid** (1967-2004): real name: Abd Al-Aziz Bin Ali Bin Said Al Said Al-Ghamdi; one of the main commanders in the first years of the Second Chechen War and one of the most important leaders of foreign mujahedins in Chechnya; born in 1967 in Saudi Arabia; from 1986 he fought in Afghanistan, then in Bosnia, Tajikistan; during the First Chechen War he moved to Chechnya together with Khattab, where he organised training camps for militants; he also stayed in Chechnya in the interwar period; he married a Chechen, with whom he had two sons; for years he was playing a significant role in the ranks of militants, but he stayed in Khattab's shadow; his role began to gain significance after 1999; he frequently organised attacks on Russian troops in Chechnya, he was a talented commander; in 2001 president Maskhadov appointed him commander of the eastern front; after Khattab's death in March 2002, he took the lead among foreign mujahedins; he was one of the organisers of financial aid from Arabian states for Caucasian militants and the enrolment of foreign mujahedins; he frequently threatened Russia with terrorist attacks and his recordings with the threats were aired on such TV channels as Al-Jazeera; he was accused of relations with the Saudi secret service and Osama bin Laden; he died in a fight with Special Battalion "East" commanded by Sulim Yamadayev in April 2004 in a village called Tsa-Vedeno, Chechnya; he was succeeded by Abu Hafs al-Urduni.

**Dokka Umarov** (1964-2013): born on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1964 in the village of Kharsenoy (Shatoysky District, Chechnya); founder and first emir of the Caucasus Emirate; he belonged to the Mulkoy settlement; he graduated from the Grozny Petroleum Institute, he worked as an engineer in oil extraction in Tyumen Oblast, at the beginning of the 90s he became involved in criminal activities (racketeering); in 1993 or 1994 he came back to Chechnya and started collaborating with Ruslan Gelayev, who was his cousin; during the First Chechen War he fought in the west of Chechnya; after the war he became brigadier general; in 1997 he was appointed secretary of the Chechen Security Council by Maskhadov, but he was quickly stripped of this function because he occupied himself with kidnapping for ransom and he assaulted the Attorney General of Chechnya; in the interwar period he cooperated with Arbi Barayev (they had a base in the mountains, in the village Kharsenoy, where they kept the victims); from the beginning of the Second Chechen War Umarov's troops



(some of the largest troops in Chechnya) fought in the west of Chechnya, mainly in Achkhoy-Martanovsky District and Sunzha District; he probably had very good contacts in Georgia (where he stayed on several occasions), Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria (where he treated his wounds); after Khattab's death, Maskhadov appointed him commander of the south-western front; in 2004 he was appointed Chechnya's Security Minister and in June 2005 he became the vice president of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria by Abdul-Halim Sadulayev; in June 2006, after Sadulayev's death, Umarov became the president of the CRI; in October 2007 he proclaimed the formation of the Caucasus Emirate and dissolution of the CRI; in the years 2007-2013 he was the emir of Caucasus, but due to the organisation's weakened position and the constant need to hide, his *de facto* control over the organisation was weakening; in August 2010, he uploaded a recording, in which he abandoned the function of the emir; however, he withdrew from his waiver a few days later; Umarov's attitude caused a rebellion of the most important commandants (such as Vadalov, Gakayev, Emir Muhannad, Makhran Saidov); the opponents made up in the spring of 2011 and the mutinous commandants swore an oath to Umarov once again; in 2011, due to opposition protests in Moscow, he ordered his subjects to not attack Russian civilian facilities; in the summer of 2013 he issued a statement in which he urged mujahedins to break off the Winter Olympics in Sochi; in the last years of his life he opposed volunteers' moving from Caucasus to Syria; he died in September 2013, he was probably poisoned; he was buried in secret in the mountains of west Chechnya by militants; the leaders of the Emirate concealed his death until the spring of 2014 (until the election of the new emir, a Dagestani, Aliaskhab Kebekov).



## **Chapter 6**

### **The role of Chechens in the Caucasus Emirate**

The role of Chechens and the Chechen national independence movement in the creation of the Caucasus Emirate is hard to overestimate. Without the idea of Chechen independence and both Chechen wars, the creation of the Emirate would be probably impossible. For a number of years the armed conflict in Caucasus was viewed through the prism of Chechnya, and the events in other republics as well as their Islamic armed factions were treated as an addition to the Chechen guerrilla warfare. Currently, such a view of the conflict in Caucasus is not authorised, both for ideological and operational reasons. Officially, in 2007 (proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate), and factually a lot earlier, the armed conflict in Caucasus was no longer a Chechen war, but jihad, whose purpose was to establish a supranational Islamic state in the region.<sup>123</sup> It was also of great importance that a Dagestani, Aliaskhab Kebekov, took up the post of the emir as the first non-Chechen to have managed the armed underground in Caucasus.<sup>124</sup> Indeed, Kebekov was not only a new quality and testimony to the lost grip on the Islamic armed underground in Chechnya, but also a return to history. During both the 19<sup>th</sup> century Caucasian war and the incidents from the years 1917-1920, the leadership always belonged to the Dagestani, which resulted from the significantly deeper inveteracy of Islam in Dagestan (Dagestan was "Islamised" as early as in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, whereas Chechnya – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) and its intellectual potential (for centuries, Dagestan was the centre of Islam in Caucasus, with hundreds of madrasas, dozens of learned Muslims, it had extensive relations with the world of Islam, whereas Chechen Islam was folk-based, similarly to the extremely egalitarian Chechen society, which had no aristocracy and intelligentsia. Nonetheless, Chechens had always constituted a military vanguard of armed manoeuvres in the east Caucasus (particularly in Shamil's imamate, which would not have survived for so long without their military involvement).<sup>125</sup>

Taking into consideration the situation in Caucasus itself, the diminishing role of the Chechens needs to be elaborated on. This concerns both the leadership in

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<sup>123</sup> <http://www.kavkazcenter.com/russ/content/2014/07/22/105613.shtml>

<sup>124</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/ali-abu-muhammad-2>

<sup>125</sup> M. Gammer, *op.cit.*, p. 246.



the Emirate and the intensity of the conflict in the region. The current leadership is in the hands of Dagestanis and the vast majority of the operations are executed beyond Chechen borders (mainly in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria).<sup>126</sup> The role of the Chechens in the underground has been limited to the territory of the republic, the only place where the militants, who are ethnic Chechens, operate (with the exception of militants around Khasavyurt, who are recruited from among Dagestani Chechen-Akins), without any operations outside of Chechnya and in all probability without logistic involvement in armed operations organised by those armed units. It is a result of an advancing dismemberment of the Emirate in its operational dimension into vilayats which work independently from one another. Paradoxically, this process has been parallel to the internationalisation of the underground in the ideological sphere (fight for the common Islamic state in Caucasus).<sup>127</sup> However, if it intensifies, it cannot be ruled out that the Emirate will be broken up into separate vilayats in the ideological dimension as well.

The chances are that at present the Chechen armed underground operating within Vilayat Chechnya is distancing itself from, or even becoming independent of, Emir Kebekov (while officially acknowledging his authority) and is focusing on its own problems. This is reflected in the vilayat's information policy. After the election of Kebekov to the post of the emir, Abu Khamzat (Aslan Byutukayev), the leader of Chechen militants, decided on the creation of a separate website of the vilayat ([www.checheninfo.com](http://www.checheninfo.com)), which publishes almost only information concerning Chechnya and manifestos of the Chechen emir and other commandants. It is unusually symptomatic that most of the recordings uploaded on the site are only in Chechen, which means they are not understood by militants from other republics or by the emir of Caucasus.<sup>128</sup> Compared to the period of Umarov's leadership, the propaganda pursued by Chechen militants includes more and more materials indicating that they treat the Caucasus Emirate not as an Islamic unitary state, but as a kind of a superstructure, a confederation of individual vilayats. Vilayat Chechnya is presented as a province of the Emirate rather than a state which is its component.

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<sup>126</sup> This is visible in the statistics of those killed as a result of the conflict in Caucasus: in 2013, 341 people died in Dagestan, 92 in Kabardino-Balkaria and only 39 in Chechnya. Quoted in: Maciej Falkowski, *Na peryferiach światowego dżihadu. Kaukaz Północny: iluzja stabilizacji*, OSW 2014.

<sup>127</sup> Visible e.g. in propaganda materials of the Caucasus Emirate, e.g. <http://www.islamdin.com/umma.html>

<sup>128</sup> E.g. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nGj8r1V0f3c>



Surprisingly, it is frequently stressed that it constitutes a continuation of the Chechen statehood starting in 1991. The fact that the alienating policy is pursued by Chechen commanders is also reflected in the Chechen emir appointing his own representatives abroad, who are likely to keep in touch with the Chechen diaspora and gather funds for fighting in Chechnya.<sup>129</sup>

The evolution of the Chechen underground within the Caucasus Emirate over the last few years, especially after the selection of Aliaskhab Kebekov for the position of the emir, reflects certain general tendencies in the organisation, i.e. operational fragmentation of the Emirate. Insofar as ideologically speaking the militants from individual republics (vilayats) fight for a common cause, in the tactical dimension they act on their own. The main reasons of this state of affairs are objective difficulties in maintaining connection and coordination of actions caused by the need of deep conspiracy due to the invigilation of secret service and widespread informing. In the case of Vilayat Chechnya, it seems, however, that there is an additional condition, namely the bitterness caused by electing an inexperienced and young Dagestani to be the emir, caused by traditional aversion and rivalry between Chechens and the Dagestani over superiority in the North Caucasus, going back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century (and still present despite internationalistic ideology), small authority of Kebekov and the high position of Emir Hamzat in the Chechen underground.

However, the loss of control over the Caucasus Emirate and limiting the activity of the Chechens to Chechnya does not entitle anyone to depreciate their role in armed struggle when it comes to propaganda and image. In this sphere they are likely to remain a certain avant garde of jihad in Caucasus. This mainly results from the widespread and deep-rooted image of the Chechens both in Caucasus and former USSR as well as in the world of Islam. Although the attitude to Chechens as people is definitely negative (especially in Caucasus and in post-Soviet states), due to perceiving them as haughty, unpredictable, hermetic, prone to violence and involved in criminal activity, at the same time they are greatly respected, out of admiration rather than fear. The key role in shaping the image of the Chechens was played by modern history: among the nations of the Russian Federation, only Chechens managed to challenge Russia as a whole society, and were ready to bear the consequences of their decision. They are commonly perceived as an extremely dynamic society, which is able to generate

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<sup>129</sup> <http://checheninfo.com/?p=599>



strength and energy despite constant blows, visible e.g. in the armed conflicts outside Caucasus.

The image of a Chechen militant is supported by the events in the Middle East, where the Chechens are distinguished among post-Soviet jihadists and their role in armed factions operating in Iraq and Syria is disproportionate to their number. A Chechen, Omar ash-Shishani, is the commander of the armed forces of the Islamic State in Syria,<sup>130</sup> and the Army of Emigrants and Supporters (Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar), largely composed of ethnic Chechens and directed by a Georgian Chechen, Salahuddin al-Shishani (Feyzullah Margoshvili), plays a significant military and political role within the al-Nusra Front (a branch of al-Qaeda operating in Syria).<sup>131</sup> The significance and perception of Chechens among the mujahedins fighting in Syria can be attested by the fact that the sobriquet "shishani" (from Arabic "Chechen") is often assumed by the representatives of non-Caucasian nations (e.g. Abu Jihad Shishani, who is a Karachay)<sup>132</sup> in order to be more recognisable and respected. Although a similar number of the Dagestani participate in jihad in the Middle East, there is almost no information on their activity in the media as opposed to the Chechens (which can be explained by the effect of the specific perception of the Chechens).

The image of unyielding, courageous, hardy and combative Chechens is also consolidated by Ramzan Kadyrov, who poses as a "true Chechen", although the Russian media play a significant role in that respect, as they devote most of their time presenting him in a positive light.<sup>133</sup> It is also significant that the Chechen military formations and volunteers participate in conflicts in post-Soviet states (the participation of Special Battalion "East" in a war with Georgia in 2008, participation of Kadyrov's supporters on the side of pro-Russian separatists and participation of two pro-Ukrainian Chechen battalions in Donbas). Although they contrast with the image of Chechens fighting for freedom from Russia (with the exception of a small number units which fight on the side of Ukrainians) and present the participants in these conflicts in a negative light (albeit not in the Russian mass media), they contribute to the image of Chechen machos, who thrive in war and violence.

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<sup>130</sup>[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en\\_whos\\_who.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_whos_who.pdf)

<sup>131</sup> <http://eaworldview.com/2013/12/syria-salahuddin-shishani-new-leader-jaish-al-muhajireen-wal-ansar-enmity-isis/>

<sup>132</sup> <https://chechensinsyria.wordpress.com/2014/02/18/syria-umar-shishanis-right-hand-man-slams-jabhat-al-nusra-treachery/> and <http://kavkazpress.ru/archives/67349>

<sup>133</sup> E.g. <http://lifenews.ru/news/128000>





## **Chapter 7**

### **Participation of militants from the North Caucasus in the conflict in Syria and other hotspots in the world**

The militants from the North Caucasus participate in fights outside the borders of the Russian Federation: in Syria, Iraq and Ukraine. Inasmuch as in Syria the ranks of Islamic factions and organisations are filled with Islamic fundamentalists from the North Caucasus (mostly from Dagestan and Chechnya, as well as Chechen refugees from Europe), the conflict in the east of Ukraine is participated by militants from the Chechen units subject to Ramzan Kadyrov. The departure of Caucasian volunteers to Syria have a significant, paradoxically stabilising impact on the situation in the North Caucasus: the export of the most radical units to Syria weakens the Caucasus Emirate, depriving it of new recruits and increasing tensions within radical Salafi circles in Caucasus. Moreover, in December 2014, there was a split in the ranks of Caucasian militants, probably inspired by mujahedins fighting in the Middle East: several influential commanders (mainly from Dagestan and Chechnya) denounced their allegiance to the emir of Caucasus and swore an oath to Caliph Ibrahim, the leader of the Islamic State. This led to a serious crisis in the Caucasus Emirate, which will probably result in its further weakening. The emergence of structures which officially recognise the supremacy of the Islamic State, even though they are independent, may lead to aggravation of the situation in Caucasus when it comes to the region's security.

#### **Caucasian militants in Syria and Iraq**

The mass participation of Caucasians in jihad in Syria and Iraq may be considered a phenomenon, as previously very few inhabitants of the region had been leaving to fight outside of Caucasus,<sup>134</sup> and the Chechens, despite countless speculations on the topic, had never participated in those conflicts.<sup>135</sup> It is hard to quote an exact number of militants in Caucasus, who fight in the

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<sup>134</sup> E.g. individual cases of leaving to fight in the ranks of the Talibans in Afghanistan.

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[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no\\_cache=1&tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=40771#.VIIuczGG9R8](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?no_cache=1&tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=40771#.VIIuczGG9R8)



ranks of Islamic factions in Syria and Iraq. A rough estimate would be 1-2 thousand. They do not constitute a cohesive force: they belong to several factions, mainly to the Islamic State (formerly the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant) and the Army of Emigrants and Supporters (JMA), significantly less frequently to Jabhat al-Nusra and other small groups, such as Junud a-Sham or Junud al-Qawqaz. Although they are not the most numerous group of foreign militants (these are the citizens of Arabian states), they are distinguished among other volunteers and fulfil an important function inside Islamic factions.<sup>136</sup> Militants from the North Caucasus are distinguished by their combative skills (which they have proven in the Battle of Aleppo,<sup>137</sup> at Menagh Air Base<sup>138</sup> and the Siege of Kobani<sup>139</sup> in Syria or Mosul in Iraq)<sup>140</sup> obtained during Caucasian wars. They have the reputation of daring, brave and ruthless, which is why they enjoy widespread recognition and respect among other mujahedins. Due to their high authority and membership in various factions which are in conflict with one another, they sometimes fulfil the role of mediators: e.g. in October 2014 the emir of JMA, Salahuddin al-Shishani, conducted negotiations with the Islamic State on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra, which in turn were represented by Omar ash-Shishani.<sup>141</sup>

The first North Caucasian volunteers fighting in Syria were not militants who had come directly from Caucasus, but the members of local Caucasian diaspora (mainly Dagestani and Chechen). They were mostly recruited from among students of Koranic schools or people who settled down in Syria after graduating from universities. Until the civil war, Syria was regarded as a secular, moderate country, thanks to which the Russian authorities did not hinder departures from the North Caucasus to that country. The appeal of Syria for the inhabitants of the North Caucasus also resulted from the long tradition of relations between Syria and Caucasus: the existence of the old Caucasian diaspora (formed as a result of 19<sup>th</sup> century migration of Caucasian Muslims to the Ottoman Empire

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<sup>136</sup>[http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en\\_whos\\_who.pdf](http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Research/Files/Reports/2014/11/profiling%20islamic%20state%20lister/en_whos_who.pdf)

<sup>137</sup> <http://eaworldview.com/2014/03/syria-reports-nuraddin-az-zinki-jaish-al-muhajireen-wal-ansar-advance/>

<sup>138</sup> [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/09/world/middleeast/as-foreign-militants-flood-syria-fears-of-a-new-extremist-haven.html?pagewanted=all&\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/09/world/middleeast/as-foreign-militants-flood-syria-fears-of-a-new-extremist-haven.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0)

<sup>139</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/under-black-flag-chechen-militants-saving-urds-communism/26688138.html>

<sup>140</sup> <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/ginger-jihadist-mosul-omar-al-shishani-chechen-general-1452232>

<sup>141</sup> <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=22885>



after the Russian conquest of Caucasus), business relations and departures for the Hajj, which, in the case of the North Caucasus after 2003 (inability of transit through Iraq) crossed the territory of Syria.

Along with the escalation of the conflict and the beginning of mass arrivals of foreign jihadists, Caucasian volunteers started to come to Syria: first from other states of the Middle East (mainly from Turkey and Egypt), then from Europe (Chechen refugees), and finally directly from the North Caucasus (including many active militants of the Caucasus Emirate and even commanders, such as Tarkhan Gaziyeu). The reason for mass departures of Caucasian volunteers was the deterioration of jihad in Caucasus and lack of prospects for breaking the deadlock, as well as an effective mass propaganda of jihadists. Caucasian armed formations operating in Syria and Chechen commandants enjoying great authority among the youth (Omar ash-Shishani, Muslim al Shishani et al.) were like a magnet to young recruits. It was also significant that the Russian propaganda of radical Islamic factions presented jihad in Syria as compulsory for each Muslim, taking place in a symbolic region for Islam, called *Sham* (Levant, including not only Syria, but also Palestine, which is very important to Muslims). An additional asset of Syrian jihad was its victorious character, as opposed to the situation in Caucasus.

Similarly to the majority of foreign jihadists, Caucasian volunteers travelled to Syria through Turkey, where it was relatively easy and cheap to get both from Europe and Caucasus (by land or via numerous air links between the North and South Caucasus and Turkey). The departures were further aided by the liberal migration policy of the Turkish authorities (the citizens of post-Soviet states, with the exception of Armenia, do not need visas to go to Turkey) and the lack of restrictions at the Turkish-Syrian border. The recruitment took place mainly on the Internet and through the supporters of jihad in Syria living in Caucasus or in Europe (e.g. some Chechen imams operating in the EU).

At the initial stage, volunteers from the North Caucasus mostly joined Jabhat al-Nusra, which was Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. In 2012, due to animosities between al-Nusra and ISIS, in cooperation with other volunteers from the former USSR, they created an organisation called Jaish al-Muhajireen wal-Ansar (Army of Emigrants and Supporters). Although it cooperated with al-



Nusra, it was not openly hostile towards ISIS.<sup>142</sup> The commanders of the newly created organisation were Georgian Chechens (Kists from the Pankisi Gorge). Initially, the group was led by Tarkhan Batirashvili (Omar ash-Shishani), who was succeeded by Feyzullah Margoshvili (Salahuddin Shishani). The majority of its members were emigrants from the North Caucasus, although the group also gathered mujahedins from outside Caucasus, and even from other Muslim states. At the same time, other independent Caucasian groups emerged, the majority of which were led by Chechens. The most important ones are: Junud a-Sham (led by Muslim al Shishani), Džunud al-Kawkaz (which also contains many Middle Eastern Circassians; there is no data on the group's leader), Khalifat Jamaat led by Abdul Hakim Shishani<sup>143</sup> (real name unknown, a Chechen around 30, used to fight in Caucasus), so-called al-Aqsa Brigade (led by Abu Jusuf Shishani and Salahuddin Shishani; currently it recognises the supremacy of the Islamic State, distinguished in the Siege of Kobani), groups led by Tarkhan Gaziyeu and a Dagestani, Abu Hanif (real name unknown; currently member of the Islamic State). A Chechen, Abu Musa Shishani (real name unknown) also leads one of the larger armed groups operating in Latakia District, called Ansar al-Sham (mostly composed of Syrians as well as jihadists from various countries).

The first divisions and conflicts among Caucasian jihadists began in 2013 and quickly escalated to fratricidal fighting. The most serious conflict was triggered by the departure of Omar ash-Shishani and part of the militants from JMA to join ISIS (November 2013).<sup>144</sup> Batirashvili swore a pledge of allegiance (*bay'at*) to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the later self-proclaimed caliph of the Islamic State (June 2014), which triggered controversy both among Caucasian volunteers in Syria and radical circles in the North Caucasus (it was harshly criticised by Aliaskhab Kebekov and gave rise to a public debate between him and Omar ash-Shishani's group). Previously, the militants from the North Caucasus fighting in Syria had been officially under oath to the emir of the Caucasus Emirate (up to now, JMA expresses its loyalty to the Emirate, although it does not have a greater practical significance, particularly in the aspect of armed struggle),<sup>145</sup> and they justified their participation in jihad in the Middle East on the grounds of the inability to fight in the war in Caucasus. From that perspective, Omar

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<sup>142</sup> <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=7564>

<sup>143</sup> <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=22950>

<sup>144</sup> [http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/muhajireen\\_army\\_swea.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2013/11/muhajireen_army_swea.php)

<sup>145</sup> <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?p=9351#more-9351>



ash-Shishani's joining ISIS, where he soon advanced in the organisation's hierarchy, constituted a new quality. It paved the way to the Islamic State for subsequent Caucasian militants under oath to the emir of Caucasus. From the point of view of the Caucasus Emirate, it was treason and a very dangerous trend, as it undermined the rightfulness of jihad in Caucasus.

The division caused by the departure of Omar Shishani and his supporters was not the only conflict among Caucasian jihadists. At the beginning of 2013, JMA expelled a group of one Abu Banat (former Dagestani policeman from the Darginian village of Khadzhalmakhi, Magomed Abdurakhmanov) responsible for the manslaughter of Christian priests in Syria through public decapitation (Omar ash-Shishani, who was leading the group at the time, considered the act a manifestation of needless cruelty; Abu Banat left for Turkey, where he was probably arrested).<sup>146</sup> On the other hand, in August 2013, JMA expelled a group led by a very popular commander, Sayfullakh al-Shishani (Ruslan Machalikashvili from Pankisi), who had been accused of takfirism (groundless accusation of other Muslims of apostasy; in reality the reason for the expulsion were probably personal animosities between Sayfullakh and Omar ash-Shishani). Following the expulsion, Sayfullakh's division started cooperating with the group led by Murad Margoshvili, but it dispersed after Machalikashvili's death in February 2014.<sup>147</sup> In all probability, the conflicts between and within individual divisions of Caucasian mujahedins will be recurring.

## **Impact on Caucasus**

For the Caucasus Emirate, the departure of Caucasian volunteers to Syria is a serious, existential threat. It deprives the CE of recruits and limits the possibility of obtaining financial resources (which are directed to Syria), which in turn causes further decrease in the organisation's operational capability. The leaders of the CE actively oppose the departures, justifying their criticism on the grounds of the responsibility to pursue jihad in Caucasus. Dokka Umarov used to explicitly forbid leaving for Syria, while Aliaskhab Kebekov liberalised his attitude, granting permission to those volunteers who could not become

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<sup>146</sup> <http://www.chechensinsyria.com/?tag=abu-banat>

<sup>147</sup> <http://eaworldview.com/2014/02/syria-family-man-shahid-sayfullakh-shishanis-story-pictures/>



involved in jihad in Caucasus (i.e. mainly refugees who stayed in Europe and Turkey). However, he still forbade the inhabitants of Caucasus to leave.<sup>148</sup> This, however, has not stopped the wave of departures from the region (mainly from Chechnya and Dagestan), which are becoming more and more popular among North Caucasian Islamic extremists.

From the point of view of the Russian authorities, the departures of volunteers from the North Caucasus to Syria are no threat and even, despite the official alarmist rhetoric, they are a stabilising element when it comes to the situation in the region. Irrespectively of the success of the Russian power structures in combating the Caucasus Emirate and the weakness of the latter, there are tensions in the North Caucasus connected with the growing number of Salafists and their radicalisation. In this context, the departures to Syria do more than just weaken the CE. Thanks to them, the Russian authorities dispose of the most active and extreme individuals, who otherwise may cause problems for the local authorities or execute terrorist attacks in Russia.

The return of Caucasian militants from Syria would probably pose a threat. The Russian authorities are aware of the danger, which can be attested not only by the statements of their representatives, but also an intensified control of the inhabitants of the North Caucasus who return from Islamic countries and arresting the few militants who (mainly for personal reasons or due to their disillusion with jihad) have decided to return.<sup>149</sup> Nonetheless, the prospect of a mass return of Caucasian militants from the Middle East is not probable. Firstly, these people (for various reasons) have chosen jihad in Syria over fighting in Caucasus, which means that they do not recognise Caucasian jihad as their priority, to say the least. Secondly, by involving themselves in jihad, the volunteers migrate to a territory ruled by sharia (they commit the so-called hijra, often bringing their families along with them), which means that a return would be inconsistent with the Salafist interpretation of Islam. Thirdly, they are aware of legal and preterlegal repercussions that await them after their return to the country. In all probability, the majority of militants from the North Caucasus will remain in Syria and Iraq (especially that the war will probably last in these states), turning into international jihadists, similarly to what happened to the

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<sup>148</sup> <http://vdagestan.com/interyu-amira-imarata-kavkaz-shejxa-ali-abu-muxammada-video.djihad>

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.rferl.org/content/russia-convicts-chechnya-man-syria-fighting-jihadists/26685700.html>



members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, who settled in Afghanistan and Pakistan permanently after leaving Central Asia at the end of the 90s. Moving to new hotspots in the Islamic world similarly to foreign mujahedins fighting against the Soviet Army in Afghanistan in the 80s seems to be more likely than a return to Caucasus.<sup>150</sup> This situation may change only in the case of a serious political and economic crisis in Russia (comparable to the dissolution of the Soviet Union), as a result of which the Russian authority in Caucasus (including military presence) would be severely weakened.

At the end of 2014, the situation in Syria and Iraq directly translated into incidents in Caucasus, including the Caucasus Emirate. As a result of the incidents in the Middle East, the ranks of the CE were broken up in November and December. This consisted in the denouncement of allegiance to the emir of Caucasus by a number of commanders from Dagestan and Chechnya (see p. 42-45) and their allegiance to Caliph Ibrahim, the leader of the Islamic State. To a certain extent, the crisis resembled the incidents from the summer of 2010, when the first conflict flared up within the Emirate: a dozen or so Chechen commanders (e.g. Aslambek Vadalov, Khuseyn Gakayev, Tarkhan Gaziyev, Emir Muhammad from Saudi Arabia) denounced their allegiance to Umarov, who had announced his resignation but changed his mind later on. After long negotiations, the conflict was obviated. However, the current crisis seems to be much more serious, for it is of a systemic and ideological nature and it is not limited to a leadership crisis like the previous one.

Although the friction between the CE leaders and Caucasian jihadists fighting within the Islamic State had long existed and the popularity of caliphate among militants in Caucasus was actually increasing, it cannot be ruled out that the break was initiated by the Russian secret service. The chain of pledges of allegiance to the caliph was triggered by a recording of Suleyman Zaynalabidov's pledge (leader of the Aukh jamaat gathering Dagestani Chechens and operating south to Khasavyurt), which had probably been fabricated by the secret service (several days earlier Zaynalabidov had been

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<sup>150</sup> More on this topic in: Maciej Falkowski, *Na peryferiach światowego dżihadu. Kaukaz Północny: iluzja stabilizacji*, OSW 2014. Available at: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw\\_46\\_pl\\_kaukaz-polnocny\\_net.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/pw_46_pl_kaukaz-polnocny_net.pdf)



arrested by the Russians and he read the text of the allegiance from a sheet of paper with a frail voice, surrounded by a group of armed men in uniforms).<sup>151</sup> The actions of the splitters met with harsh criticism from the leaders of the CE (Kebekov, the qadi of the Emirate Abdullah Kosteksky, the qadi of Vilayat Dagestan Suleyman Magomedov) and those commanders and militants who remained faithful to the Emirate. In their criticism directed towards the splitters, the leaders of the Emirate based on the opinion of a number of Muslim scholars, who had not considered the proclamation of the caliphate in line with sharia. The supreme emir stripped them of all functions and called them traitors, summoning them to withdraw from their decision. A wave of accusations and turbulent discussions concerning the submission to the Islamic State followed on the Internet.

From the point of view of the CE, the most significant result of the split will be serious weakening of its structures that might even result in its marginalisation, as well as likely conflicts with the divisions which denounced their allegiance to the emir (primarily, the rivalry may involve sources of income, the so-called tributes obtained from entrepreneurs and officials). From the Russian point of view, the emergence of groups that acknowledge the supremacy of the Islamic State in Caucasus is a threat, which nonetheless creates a range of tactical and geopolitical benefits. Although the Islamic State has no interest in attacking Russia and executing armed operations in Caucasus, the Caucasian mujahedins who work within it may strive towards strengthening their position through intensification of armed and terrorist operations in Caucasus. Hence, it cannot be ruled out that they will provide financial aid to those armed groups which have sworn the pledge of allegiance to the caliph and encourage them to organise terrorist attacks in Russia. There is also a risk that the above mentioned groups will strive to prove themselves in the eyes of the Islamic State, even through brutalising their own actions in imitation of those undertaken by Middle Eastern jihadists (taking hostages, cruel executions etc.).

The above described situation increases the risk of terrorist attacks in Russia and is a threat primarily to Russian civilians and the inhabitants of Caucasian republics. On the other hand, it creates a number of opportunities for the authorities: it weakens the Caucasus Emirate, allows combating the competing

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<sup>151</sup>[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43151&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=9fb9677e61ac014e26507c5641db2f94#.VI15XjGG9R-](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43151&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=9fb9677e61ac014e26507c5641db2f94#.VI15XjGG9R-)





groups of militants and facilitates operational work for the security service. The increased threat of attacks executed by Islamic terrorists may also be used by the Kremlin for pacifying the public feeling in the time of economic crisis as well as overcoming the isolation of multinational Russia through the creation of an impression that Russia is the West's ally in fighting the threat coming from the Islamic State.

## **Chechens fighting in Ukraine**

An interesting phenomenon, although marginal from the point of view of Caucasus, is the participation of Chechens on both sides of the conflict in the east of Ukraine. Since June 2014, several hundred Chechens from various armed units subject to Ramzan Kadyrov or self-proclaimed groups have fought on the side of pro-Russian separatists (some voluntarily, others were directed by mother units). Their participation in this armed conflict results from a wider strategy of the Russian Federation towards Ukraine (sending the highest number of national minorities possible to minimise losses among ethnic Russians in order to weaken the negative public feeling) and Kadyrov's political game (manifesting his loyalty to President Putin), so they do not directly translate into the situation in Caucasus, especially in the context of the Caucasus Emirate. Moreover, it is not the first case of using Chechen units by Moscow outside the country (Chechen divisions have already taken part in the 2008 war with Georgia).<sup>152</sup>

A small number of Chechens is also fighting on the Ukrainian side. There are two Chechen "battalions" operating in Donbas (in reality much smaller units, although it is hard to define their number directly), which take part in fighting against the separatists in the east of the country. These are "Caucasus" battalions<sup>153</sup> and the so-called Dzhokhar Dudayev's battalion.<sup>154</sup> They are composed of Chechen refugees staying in Ukraine and Chechens from Europe. Dudayev's battalion is led by a former Chechen field commandant, Isa Munayev, who previously stayed in Denmark as a refugee (in the first years of the Second Chechen War he had been Grozny's commandant, supporter of the

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<sup>152</sup> Battalion "East" led by Sulim Yamadayev.

<sup>153</sup> Battalion's website: <https://www.facebook.com/kavkazbattalion?fref=ts>

<sup>154</sup> Battalion's website:

<https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100007067627111&ref=ts&fref=ts>



national independence idea and opponent of the Caucasian Emirate).<sup>155</sup> The battalion is mainly composed of the Second Chechen War veterans.<sup>156</sup> We know less about battalion "Caucasus", composed of Islamic fundamentalists and referring to Islam in its actions. Both of these units emphasise the anti-Russian and anti-Kadyrov dimension of their participation in the armed conflict. There is mutual animosity and rivalry between the two units, caused by different opinions on the matters connected with Chechnya and the role of Islam, as well as personal animosity. Although the "battalions" enjoy great publicity in the media, especially in Ukraine, they do not constitute a serious power, nor do they represent the attitude of Chechens staying in Europe, who are a lot more eager to leave for Syria.

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<sup>155</sup><http://www.unian.net/politics/994351-lichnyiy-vrag-putina-isa-munaev-chechentsyi-i-ukrainsyi-nikogda-ne-byili-i-ne-budut-pod-tsarem.html>

<sup>156</sup>[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43062&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=874e412f82b9c7d20847a13c3db59166#.VIluxDGG9R8](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43062&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=7&cHash=874e412f82b9c7d20847a13c3db59166#.VIluxDGG9R8)



## **Chapter 8**

### **Emirate's activity versus security of civilians in Caucasus**

The existence of the Caucasus Emirate and the activity of the militants in the North Caucasus largely influence the situation of the civilian population. They are also the reason of mass human rights violations in the region, although in most of the cases this influence is indirect, as it is caused mostly by security structures that deal with terrorism. The threat to the civilian population from the militants themselves is either indirect or direct. In the first case, we are dealing mainly with the exposure of civilians to the results of operations executed by mujahedins. Although they seldom target random people (only during terrorist attacks on civilian facilities, which have been rather scarce in Caucasus of late), it sometimes happens that passers-by die in attacks organised by militants. Armed operations or hiding in particular towns or their surroundings also exposes local inhabitants to retaliatory actions on the part of security structures and poses a threat to the health, life and property during special operations. Civilian facilities or civilians are a frequent target of militants. Those attacks are rarely coincidental. Mujahedins kill owners of alcohol shops, fortune-tellers, quacks, Sufi leaders, owners and customers of public houses, prostitutes etc. Entrepreneurs, and civil servants are also endangered, as they are terrorised by the militants as part of racketeering activities (jihad tax, according to the terminology of the underground), which is a widespread phenomenon, particularly in Dagestan (in other republics, including Chechnya, these dealings are not common).<sup>157</sup>

Nonetheless, the scale of violating human rights by militants is incomparably smaller than the repercussions of actions undertaken by power structures within their fight against terrorism. Since the beginning of the Second Chechen War (1999), there is mass violation of basic human rights in the North Caucasus and in recent years this situation has been notably exacerbated regardless of the

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<sup>157</sup> See e.g.:

[http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43126&tx\\_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=228#.VHdNB4uG-98](http://www.jamestown.org/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43126&tx_ttnews%5BbackPid%5D=228#.VHdNB4uG-98)



observed partial stabilisation of the political situation in the region.<sup>158</sup> This is related to the developments in the whole Russia: Moscow's conflict with the West, strengthened authoritarianism and rule of the representatives of power structures (spearheaded by secret service), persecution of all independent milieux (including human rights supporters and organisations such as Memorial), lack of reforms, self-isolation of Russia in the world, mass propaganda directed at the "enemies of Russia": the West, third sector, Muslims, emigrants from Caucasus and Central Asia, "hostile" states of the former USSR (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldavia, Poland etc.). Another source of repression in Caucasus is perceiving the region as some kind of "internal abroad", "russianless Russia", and its inhabitants as second-class citizens without the full set of civil rights, or even enemies striving to detach from Russia or to destroy it. The perception of Caucasus and its civilizational otherness that is deepening as a result of dynamic processes and the policy of the Kremlin (reluctance to solve Caucasian problems, "colonial" approach to Caucasus, lack of efforts to modernise and integrate the region with the rest of Russia) are the root causes of preference for violent solutions in order to stabilise the situation in the region.<sup>159</sup> The marked deterioration in the security of civilians due to the activity of power structures came a few months before the Winter Olympics in Sochi (January 2014). In fear of terrorist attacks, *siloviki* undertook wide-scale anti-terrorist operations, which led to quieting the situation in Caucasus (due to the elimination of hundreds of militants and breaking many divisions). However, the result of the above mentioned operations was also a increase in human rights violation.<sup>160</sup>

The root of mass persecutions in Caucasus is the war against terrorism which has been continuous since the beginning of the Second Chechen War. Within this war, anti-terrorist legislation is becoming more and more strict: the National Anti-terrorism Committee of Russia was introduced in 2006 and there is a legal possibility to announce the regime of anti-terrorist operations in selected territories, which allows a temporary suspension of selected civil rights, responsibility of militants' relatives for their crimes (more on this below) and making lists of terrorists and extremists by the relevant authorities. Punishment

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<sup>158</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/world-report/2014/country-chapters/russia>

<sup>159</sup> More on this topic in: Maciej Falkowski, Mariusz Marszewski, *Kaukaskie „terytoria plemienne”*. *Kaukaz Północny – cywilizacyjnie obca enklawa w granicach Rosji*, Prace OSW, 2010. Available at: [http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace\\_34.pdf](http://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/prace_34.pdf)

<sup>160</sup> [http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/russia0608\\_1.pdf](http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/russia0608_1.pdf)



for terrorism is also systematically intensified. In 2014, new amendments to the criminal code were introduced, excluding suspended sentence for people accused of terrorism (e.g. those who voluntarily surrender). In September 2014, amendments to the criminal code were also registered, allowing the law enforcement agency to use all available methods of restraint (apart from those laid down by law) in case of a behaviour of an arrestee or prisoner classified as "malicious insubordination".<sup>161</sup>

The fact that power structures have *carte blanche* to fight terrorism results in their actual, and to a certain extent also formal, impunity in fighting against terrorism. Insofar as militants or people suspected of terrorism are *de facto* outlawed, *siloviki* are above the law, not bearing any responsibility for law violation. In the Caucasian context, even the authorities of individual republics do not have control over power structures and their impact on their actions is almost non-existent. The power structures, however, act as if they were on an occupied territory inhabited by hostile population. The problem is further deepened by the business of delegating units to fight terrorism in central Russia, whose members are scornful towards Caucasians, their attitude reflecting the widespread caucasophobia and islamophobia in the Russian society. Courts also do not uphold the law. Judges either belong to the repression apparatus or they adjudicate sentences under pressure or intimidation from power structures. Vakhid Abubakarov is the only judge to have resigned from his function due to the pressure from the executive power (Chechen deputy minister of the interior, Aпти Alaudinov), in Chechnya, in November 2013.<sup>162</sup> The widespread corruption of judges is also a problem. It is common that barristers' work is hindered and they are harassed (at the beginning of 2013 barristers from Kabardino-Balkaria declared strike for that reason),<sup>163</sup> they have no access to detainees etc. As a result, the people treat law enforcement agencies as a threat, which translates into the overall lack of trust in the state and the law. It sometimes happens that because of *siloviki*, as a last resort, people organise spontaneous street protests, road blockades, hunger strikes, they write desperate letters to President Putin, which normally does not bring any results.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/pytki\\_za\\_namaz-9264/](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/pytki_za_namaz-9264/)

<sup>162</sup> [http://expert.ru/russian\\_reporter/2014/06/bezrassudnyie-postupki-sudi-abubakarova/](http://expert.ru/russian_reporter/2014/06/bezrassudnyie-postupki-sudi-abubakarova/)

<sup>163</sup> <http://ria.ru/incidents/20130417/933194955.html>

<sup>164</sup> Examples of such actions are protests of inhabitants of a Dagestani housing estate called Vremiennyi, inhabitants of Cherkessk or Ingushetia.



The current situation in the area of human rights in Caucasus is dramatic. News of mass repressions are reliable, as they are reported not only by non-governmental organisations and human rights supporters, but also pro-Putin, anti-western media, such as [www.kavpolit.com](http://www.kavpolit.com) (Caucasian Policy) directed by a well-known Russian journalist, Maksim Shevchenko, who represents pro-government and pro-empire sentiments in many instances (e.g. he supports Russian involvement in Donbas or the annexation of Crimea). Today, the situation in Caucasus resembles the incidents in Chechnya in the years 1999-2001/2002, when the republic was under actual occupation of the federal army, which committed mass crimes on the Chechen civil population. The most difficult situation (when it comes to the frequency and nature of the repressions) is in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya, Ingushetia is slightly better in that respect and, as usually, Karachay-Cherkessia, North Ossetia-Alania and Adygea are the most peaceful. The relatively better situation in Chechnya (compared to previous years) is partly the result of the actual stabilisation of the republic in the reign of Ramzan Kadyrov. The fragmentation and degradation of the Chechen guerrilla warfare, pacification of independent groups and intimidation of the people have led to a situation where mass repressions are not needed any more. However, the smaller number of human rights violations than in the previous years is also a result of the republic's isolation from news and various hindrances which human rights protectors and journalists writing about Chechnya have to face. The Memorial organisation, which for years was the best informed and the most reliable source of information on Chechnya, openly admits that currently there are great restrictions in the republic when it comes to collecting information and providing help for the victims.<sup>165</sup> However, it needs to be taken into account that the situation in Chechnya will be probably evolving in a negative direction due to the raid of militants in Grozny, which took place at the beginning of December 2014 (and consisted of a several-hour battle between the militants and the Chechen power structures, as a result of which 11 militants and 14 representatives of the Chechen security structures were killed). After the incident, Ramzan Kadyrov announced that he would apply collective responsibility to the relatives of militants (destroying their houses and expulsion from the republic). The first incidents of brutal repressions directed at the relatives of militants took place in the second half of December 2014 (around 15 houses belonging to the relatives were destroyed, including the

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<sup>165</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/>



families of Aslan Byutukayev's Chechen militants, living in Katyr-Yurt, Achkhoy-Martanovsky District).

When considering the situation of the members of the armed underground, it needs to be emphasised that every person living in the North Caucasus who is aware of its reality is also aware of the consequences that person and their family have to bear in case their relative joins the militants. Despite their low legal consciousness, Caucasians know that by taking this step, they will have to face the consequences stipulated in the Criminal Code of the Russian Republic, as well as serious unlawful consequences, i.e. repressions.

The members of the Islamic armed underground are not subject to the law or they are subject to it to a limited extent and cannot expect to be treated in line with the applying procedures in case of arrest: fair trial, just sentence and legal treatment during investigation or serving the sentence. In view of the methods applied by the government bodies of the Russian Federation waging war with terrorism (secret service, structures belonging to the Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence, Public Prosecutor's Office) to the people who belong to armed groups, arrestees and sentenced, it can be stated that the accused of terrorist operations are outlawed or that the law is applied selectively in their cases. The vast majority of militants are not arrested, because they are usually killed in special operations. This has been proved by the information available in the media as well as statistics of the victims of the armed conflict in Caucasus: despite the fact that the number of fatalities is decreasing, the number of killed militants stays the same year after year (they are also seldom arrested, as they are usually killed on the spot).<sup>166</sup> Fearful of the degrading treatment and tortures in case of imprisonment, many militants choose suicide in a situation when they cannot escape encircling. They kill themselves (often taking their wives with them) by detonating explosives in their possession.

In case of arrest as a result of the actions of the law enforcement agencies or, extremely rarely, voluntary report to the police, a person involved in the armed Islamic underground will not be treated according to procedures. These people are commonly humiliated (during arrest, trial, serving the sentence, transport)

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<sup>166</sup> See: Maciej Falkowski, *Na peryferiach światowego dżihadu*. "Kaukaz Północny: iluzja stabilizacji", *Punkt Widzenia* OSW November 2014;  
<http://www.osw.waw.pl/pl/publikacje/punkt-widzenia/2014-11-14/na-peryferiach-swiatowego-dzihadu-kaukaz-polnocny-iluzja>



and physically abused, including torture.<sup>167</sup> Trials also abide in breach of procedure and the judges frequently adjudge under pressure from the authorities or are blackmailed by power structures. The arrestees and prisoners are refused or hindered from benefiting from their rights: contact with a barrister and family, correspondence, religious practice etc. The inhumane conditions in most of Russian penitentiaries and detention facilities are also a problem.<sup>168</sup>

Caucasian emigrants who are serving their sentence in prison (often in colonies or penitentiaries situated in Siberia or other remote parts of the Russian Federation) have to expect exceptionally bad treatment (both on the part of wardens and fellow prisoners). There have been many cases of unlawful, humiliating treatment of such people, including actions aimed at prolonging their stay in prison, especially if they submit official complaints to superior court or inform journalists or protectors of human rights of their situation.<sup>169</sup> A phenomenon that reflects the negative attitude of Russian inhabitants towards emigrants from Caucasus is the fact that the protection of the persecuted (including prisoners) is provided almost always by the inhabitants of Caucasus (barristers, human rights protectors, journalists) rather than ethnic Russians, who often do not take up Caucasian cases.

When considering the situation concerning the cases of persecution of emigrants from Caucasus in other parts of Russia (not only in penitentiaries but also in the army or other institutions or situations), it needs to be pointed out that the problems which they face often result from different mentality, perception of dignity and its violation (honour). The reason for many conflicts is actual insubordination of the emigrants from that part of Russia, their tendency to organise national, regional or religious gangs, resisting officers, disrespectful attitude towards other ethnic groups and non-Muslims, imposing their rules on others.<sup>170</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/legacy/background/eca/chechnya1106/chechnya1106web.pdf>

<sup>168</sup> <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/220536.pdf>

<sup>169</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/237036/> and

[http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/svetlana\\_gannushkina\\_presledovanie\\_v\\_tjurmah\\_vyhod-786/](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/svetlana_gannushkina_presledovanie_v_tjurmah_vyhod-786/)

<sup>170</sup> E.g. in the army: <http://www.army-info.ru/исследование-взаимоотношений-в-российской-армии/часть-iv-дедовщина-уставщина-и-прочие-проявления-социального-статуса/землячества-среди-выходцев-с-кавказ/>





Apart from the militants themselves, the group which is the most exposed to prosecutions are people who are not directly involved in armed activity, but who provide assistance to mujahedins (hiding, logistics, provisions etc.). These people can be faced with practically the same consequences as the militants (including long-term punishments and equally brutal treatment in case of arrest).<sup>171</sup> A similarly threatened group are the relatives of the militants (who often belong to the previous group). The responsibility of the relatives of people involved in terrorist activities results directly from the Russian Criminal Code, to which amendments have been constantly introduced, increasing responsibility for terrorist activity since 1999. According to the Russian law, relatives may be held liable for terrorist activity of a member of their family, e.g. financially (possibility of imposing payments for the victims of terrorist attacks or placing on a list of terrorists and extremists kept by the Federal Financial Monitoring Service of the Russian Federation, preventing them from taking out loans, withdraw money from banks etc.; they can be put on the list on application of a whole range of authorities, even if they are only accused).<sup>172</sup>

Additionally, after a raid of the militants on Grozny in December 2014, the Chechen Parliament proposed a legislative initiative to introduce amendments to the Criminal Code that would allow punishing parents and other relatives of terrorists (including confiscation of property) increase punishments for terrorist activity.<sup>173</sup>

However, the responsibility of relatives is much greater due to a groundless but common practice. Particularly drastic forms of persecuting militants' family members were applied several years ago in Chechnya, where they were taken hostage to force the militants (often commanders) to surrender. Currently, this practice is not commonly used, but the persecution of relatives has taken up a different form: threats, kidnapping, battery, fabricating criminal cases, murder, torture, destruction of property (e.g. detonating houses) <sup>174</sup>. The most widespread repressions of the relatives of militants take place in Dagestan, where both men and women were threatened, as well as in Chechnya (where

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<sup>171</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/news/2008/06/24/russia-stop-dirty-war-tactics-ingushetia>

<sup>172</sup> <http://goloslama.com/news.php?id=21921>, and

[http://kavpolit.com/articles/tajnyj\\_dozor\\_i\\_imitatsija\\_borby\\_s\\_terrorizmom-950/](http://kavpolit.com/articles/tajnyj_dozor_i_imitatsija_borby_s_terrorizmom-950/)

<sup>173</sup>

[http://tvrain.ru/articles/parlament\\_chechni\\_vnes\\_v\\_gosdumu\\_popravku\\_o\\_rodstvennikah\\_terroristov-380475/](http://tvrain.ru/articles/parlament_chechni_vnes_v_gosdumu_popravku_o_rodstvennikah_terroristov-380475/)

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/chechnya0709web.pdf>



they were intensified once again at the end of 2014 on the initiative of President Ramzan Kadyrov).

Being a relative of a militant or being suspected of helping the underground does not usually mean initiation of lawful procedures (sanction for arrest, arrest, trial, sentence), but rather repressions. After obtaining information on the suspect, the representatives of power structures do not usually initiate proceedings (even in the form of collecting evidence), but assassinate a given person, announcing that they resisted apprehension, or they kidnap or arrest them (often after planting narcotics or firearms) and then fabricate evidence.<sup>175</sup>

A group that is particularly exposed to persecution are also representatives of Salafist communities. This concerns all republics of the region, although Karachay-Cherkessia and Adygeya are the least threatened. After the initiation of the Second Chechen War, Salafists had to hide, as even a wahhabi look (beard without moustache,  $\frac{3}{4}$  leg trouser etc.) was enough to trigger repressions, especially in Dagestan. Currently, the situation has changed. Salafists are tolerated, they can function in the public space (also in communities), but they are still likely to be repressed equally to the relatives and suspected supporters of militants (under the pretext of aiding militants). The changes in the intensity of repressions in different periods of time are characteristic of the authorities' attitude towards Salafists. In the years 2011-2013, the intensity of repressions significantly dropped, which was linked to a Sufi-Salafist dialogue inspired by the then leader of the republic, Magomedislam Magomedov, and the activity of the so-called militants' adaptation commission, who had decided to reveal themselves. However, a new wave of persecution was initiated around the middle of 2013 in connection with the forthcoming Winter Olympics in Sochi (the mildest form of repressions was warning Salafists, e.g. in Buynaksk, Dagestan, to not leave their places of residence until the end of the games).

Apart from individual persecution, the power structures also apply the method of collective responsibility in the case of Salafists. There are frequent raids on Salafi mosques (e.g. in Makhachkala), during which the faithful are massively arrested (which is frequently accompanied by battery).<sup>176</sup> The principle of collective responsibility is applied in the so-called Salafi villages in Dagestan,

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<sup>175</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/eto\\_izdevatelstvo\\_nad\\_pravom\\_i\\_gosudarstvom-11254/](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/eto_izdevatelstvo_nad_pravom_i_gosudarstvom-11254/)

<sup>176</sup> <http://www.moidagestan.ru/blogs/51424/47787>



such as Gimry, Vremiennyi or Gubden.<sup>177</sup> It has assumed a particularly drastic size in case of the first two. From 2008, they have been systematically surrounded and blocked by the federal power structures. Soldiers organise mopping up operations, associated by detentions, battery, using people as human shields, plunder, humiliating treatment. In the autumn of 2014, the army surrounded Vremiennyi using a barbed wire and the inhabitants were stamped with special filter numbers in order to facilitate their identification. Several weeks later, all inhabitants were removed from the village and they were not allowed to take their property with them. Currently, they are living with their families or in Makhachkala, demanding at least temporary accommodation. Their appeals and protests do not show any effects. Hiding and supporting militants by the inhabitants is an excuse for conducting special operations in the aforementioned villages.<sup>178</sup>

The persecution of actual or alleged members of an Islamic organisation called Hizb ut-Tahrir, which is considered to be radical by the Russian authorities, is a Russian-wide problem. It sometimes happens that the repressions afflict emigrants from Caucasus who live in other parts of Russia.<sup>179</sup> There is lack of information on the persecution of Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Caucasus, where the popularity of the organisation is small (it operates only in Dagestan, albeit on a small scale).

The repressions also afflict people who are socially active, especially if their activity consists in revealing cases of persecution, criticising power structures and the authorities or undertaking actions for the benefit of repression victims. The victims of the persecution include:

- journalists, e.g. Akhmednabi Akhmednabiyev (*Novoye Delo* newspaper; killed in 2013)<sup>180</sup> and Khajimurad Kamalov (*Chernovik* newspaper; killed in 2011) from Dagestan<sup>181</sup> or Timur Kuashev from Kabardino-Balkaria (kidnapped and killed in 2014);<sup>182</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> <http://www.ndelo.ru/politika-5/2721-depressivnyj-dagestan-to-li-eshche-budet>

<sup>178</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/222956/>

<sup>179</sup> Such people are considered political prisoners by the Russian Memorial:  
<http://www.memo.ru/d/214537.html>

<sup>180</sup> <http://cpj.org/ru/2013/07/post-36.php>

<sup>181</sup> <http://www.rg.ru/2011/12/16/reg-ufo/kamalov.html>

<sup>182</sup> <http://www.newsru.com/arch/russia/01aug2014/kuashev.html>



- human rights defenders, e.g. Zarema Bagautdinova, member of the Dagestani Regional Public Organization Pravozaschita, sentenced to 5 years in prison in May 2014 for allegedly persuading young people to join the armed underground;<sup>183</sup>
- social activists, e.g. Ruslan Kutayev from Chechnya, the president of the Assembly of Peoples of the Caucasus, arrested in February 2014 for drug possession (the drugs were probably planted) and tortured during investigation, subsequently sentenced to 4 years in prison; the real reason for his detention was the organisation of a conference concerning the deportation of Chechens in 1944; Ramzan Kadyrov opposed the conference);<sup>184</sup>
- active Muslim leaders whose policy is inconsistent with official clergy (mostly Salafist leaders and preachers), e.g. Nadir Abu Khalid Medetov from Dagestan arrested for alleged drug possession in October 2014.<sup>185</sup>

Due to the scale and nature of the repressions in the North Caucasus, their victims are often random people. The greatest number of actions aimed at persecution is taken during anti-terrorist operations, which often result in the death of random people. After an operation, power structures announce that they have eliminated "terrorists" (lately it is often said that the killed people attempted to leave for Syria to pursue jihad), and that their bodies will be provided to the relatives if the latter declare that they will not take the case to the court. Random people also fall pray to intentional individual assassinations or abductions, which often end with fabricated evidence of alleged terrorist activity. It sometimes happens that the victims of repressions are even officials involved in a fight with radical Islam or representatives of low-level power structures. In October 2014, in the village of Akka (Tabasaransky District in Dagestan), Ramis Mirzakhanov, a Deputy of the district's Assembly of Dagestan who had actively fought against Salafists, was accidentally shot.<sup>186</sup> In the same month, in Kalininaul, Kazbekovsky (Nogay District, Dagestan), a police officer, Eradil Asanov, was murdered, provoking a mass protest of several thousand inhabitants in the capital of the region, Terekli-Mekteb village.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/233834/>

<sup>184</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2014/02/140226\\_chechnya\\_kutayev\\_case](http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/russia/2014/02/140226_chechnya_kutayev_case)

<sup>185</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/250605/>

<sup>186</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/maga\\_ty\\_ne\\_togo\\_ubil-10556/](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/maga_ty_ne_togo_ubil-10556/)

<sup>187</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/ubijstvo\\_v\\_politsii\\_terekli\\_mekteba\\_problema\\_v\\_sis-](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/ubijstvo_v_politsii_terekli_mekteba_problema_v_sis-)



It is common practice to apply torture and psychological abuse in order to extort confession from the suspect (these methods are also extensively used in prisons, which is admitted even by the representatives of the highest Russian authorities).<sup>188</sup> In many cases, the reason for using torture is the opportunity to use the so-called special criminal proceedings: if the defendant pleads guilty and assents to this type of proceedings, the court may pass a sentence without a trial under normal proceedings (i.e. without investigation, witnesses, evaluation of evidence etc.). Influenced by torture, the arrestees plead guilty and agree to the special proceedings, which happens particularly often in Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>189</sup> An example of using torture on a massive scale is the so-called "Trial of the 58", also in Kabardino-Balkaria: the 58 are people accused of taking part in a raid of militants on Nalchik in October 2005, whose trial took seven years (in December 2014 the Supreme Court of Kabardino-Balkaria sentenced most of them to many years in prison and five were given life imprisonment).<sup>190</sup> Human rights defenders repeatedly informed of tortures applied in order to force them to plead guilty as well as numerous cases of procedural violations during the investigation and trial.<sup>191</sup>

Another common practice is planting firearms or drugs in order to prove alleged guilt of a given person. This method is applied both to normal people (planting drugs during arrest or hiding firearms in houses) and inconvenient activists (e.g. Ruslan Kutayev of the imam of a mosque in Kislovodsk, Kurman-Ali Baichorov, who was to be eliminated for opposing the local authorities which were blocking a construction of a mosque in the city).<sup>192</sup> Additionally, evidence is often fabricated based on false testimony of power structures, and the testimony of others, which would benefit the defendant, is ignored.

A common form of repressions is destruction of property during anti-terrorist and individual operations. It is most common to detonate, set fire to or demolish houses of militants' relatives with the use of bulldozers as part of reprisals or

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<sup>188</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/359913>

<sup>189</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/nado\\_vernut\\_obschestvu\\_chestnogo\\_politsejskogo-](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/nado_vernut_obschestvu_chestnogo_politsejskogo-10382/)

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<sup>190</sup> <http://top.rbc.ru/politics/23/12/2014/549953b69a794766bfa0235f>

<sup>191</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/antigosudarstvennoe\\_obvinenie-478/](http://www.kavpolit.com/articles/antigosudarstvennoe_obvinenie-478/)

<sup>192</sup> <http://www.regnum.ru/news/society/1860615.html>



threatening. The representatives of power structures "find" explosives in the house, which allegedly cannot be removed otherwise than through detonation, as a result of which the whole building is destroyed.<sup>193</sup> Plundering is also a phenomenon which occurs during special operations. The practice of destroying houses has been long applied in Dagestan and recently also in Chechnya, as personally instructed by Ramzan Kadyrov.<sup>194</sup> After the operation of militants in Georgia in December 2014, the Chechen President also announced that the relatives of the militants would be deported from the republic without the right to return.<sup>195</sup>

Information on rape is scarce, which may be due to the victims' fear of being dishonoured if they reported the crime. The most famous case was the kidnapping and rape of a 24-year-old female Dagestani, committed by an officer of the Dagestan's Centre for Anti-extremist Activities, Gabibula Aliyev (August 2014). Despite substantial social resonance triggered by this incident in Dagestan, the perpetrator was unpunished.<sup>196</sup>

Other tools of repressions are official and unofficial lists of terrorists and people suspected of terrorist activities, made by various bodies of Russian authorities. Apart from warrants of arrest adopted around the world and the aforementioned list of extremists and terrorists, there is also a list of people who cannot go abroad. The procedure used for selecting individuals to be placed on the list is not clear, nor is it public (the person entered on the list is informed of this fact at the border). There are informal, unlawful lists of terrorists made by the local power structures in almost all republics. Moreover, on the Internet there are lists of people suspected of belonging to the underground, assisting militants, lists of alleged participants in jihad in the Middle East or people recruiting volunteers (with photos and personal data, including addresses).<sup>197</sup> They are published on anti-wahhabi websites, probably run by the secret service (e.g. [www.kavkazpress.ru](http://www.kavkazpress.ru), [www.dagpress.ru](http://www.dagpress.ru)). On the basis of the above lists, power structures (including the so-called death squadrons eliminating suspects) apply repressions.

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<sup>193</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/186177.html>

<sup>194</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/253822/>

<sup>195</sup> <http://www.newsru.com/russia/05dec2014/kadyrov.html>

<sup>196</sup> <http://mehkkhel.org/v-dagestane-vozmushhenie-politsejskim-b/>

<sup>197</sup> E.g. <http://kavkazpress.ru/archives/67101> or <http://kavkazpress.ru/archives/60593>



## Chapter 9

### Media in Caucasus

The North Caucasus is not a region in the case of which we are dealing with informational blockade. For those people who monitor the situation in the region, the problem is not the lack of information, but its excess, which results in the inability to process all the available data and at the same time assess its credibility. A circumstance that facilitates this monitoring is the fact that the vast majority of the information is available in Russian, which is the official language of all North Caucasian republics and the *lingua franca* in Caucasus and the whole post-Soviet area. Despite the fact that 25 years have passed since the dissolution of the USSR, the importance of the Russian language as a tool for interethnic communication is not decreasing in the area, and Russian is used even by post-Soviet mujahedins fighting in Syria and Iraq. One of the reasons why the Russian language is dominant in the North Caucasian information space is the fact that the local languages (Chechen, Ingush, Ossetian, Avar or Cherkessian) are *de facto* spoken languages. Most of the inhabitants of Caucasus know their national languages and use them in everyday life, although their inability to write in these languages properly forces them to use Russian for writing. This situation applies even to the Chechens; this is testified by their common use of Russian instead of Chechen, e.g. on Internet forums and as the actual official language of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and Vilayat Chechnya. Some exceptions are recordings with declarations of Chechen militants published on the Internet. Most of them are in Chechen (in such situations there is no natural transition to Russian, as it happens when one needs to write something down).

When it comes to the news from the region, only two sources can be relied upon: Russian and Islamic-Caucasian (emirian). Western and Ichkerian media (web portals of Chechen emigrants staying abroad, such as [daymohk.org](http://daymohk.org), [thechechenpress.org](http://thechechenpress.org)) cannot be treated as primary sources because they do not have first-hand information, but rather copy and comment on the news provided by the first two sources. The Russian media are the most diversified. They can be divided into national and Caucasian. The national media include news



agencies (e.g. Interfax, Itar-Tass, Regnum.ru et al.), central TV channels, radio stations (e.g. Russkoe Radio, Radio Liberty), newspapers (e.g. *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, *Kommersant*, *Novaya Gazeta*, *Moskovskiye Novosti* et al.), national web portals (e.g. gazeta.ru, vesti.ru, newsru.com, lenta.ru), websites specialising in Caucasian matters (e.g. www.kavpolit.com, www.kavkaz-uzel.ru, www.vestnikkavkaza.net etc.), Islamic sources published in Russia (e.g. islam.ru). The Caucasian sources are countless (often limited to one republic) news portals, local newspapers, Internet forums, republican TV and radio stations.

When it comes to Emirian sources, one official medium of the Caucasian Emirate cannot be indicated. Most of the vilayats have their own web portals with news on their own republics and they copy information about other vilayats from their respective portals. Thus, the "official" website of Vilayat Chechnya is checheninfo.com, Vilayat Dagestan: vdagestan.com, Vilayat Ingushetia: hunafa.org, and Vilayat KBK: islamdin.com. The remaining vilayats do not have their own web portals. Some vilayats (e.g. Dagestan) also have their profiles on Twitter and Facebook. Contrary to the popular belief, the main medium of the Emirate is not kavkazcenter.com, the most popular website of Caucasian militants for years. Although it fully supports the concept of the Emirate and the founders of the portal (most importantly Movladi Udugov) have contributed to the creation of ideological grounds for its proclamation, it is not the official medium of the Emirate. Paradoxically, it is Youtube: a channel on which all declarations of the emir of Caucasus are initially published, before they are copied by the web portals of the militants.

The fundamental problem with news from the North Caucasus is its low credibility resulting both from the involvement in one of the sides of the conflict as well as the lack of professionalism and journalist ethics. The lack of credibility may result from either non-intentional actions caused by small professionalism and basing on unreliable, unverified sources, or intentional actions, i.e. information manipulation. This manipulation concerns all emirian sources which need to be treated as propagandist rather than informative, and a significant amount of Russian sources (most importantly national TV stations, news agencies and official Chechen media). Despite the lack of credibility and the propagandist character of emirian web portals, their observation seems to be important. After all, they constitute an alternative, albeit hardly credible first-hand source. Additionally, due to the primitive form of broadcast, it is easy to





distinguish between pure propaganda and actual information. Due to the high number of uploaded videos, the web portals of the militants are also an invaluable source of information on themselves, the way they think, their behaviour and perception of the world. It is similar when it comes to official Chechen sources: republican TV or web portals such as [chechnyatoday.com](http://chechnyatoday.com) or [grozny-inform.ru](http://grozny-inform.ru). Because of the lack of professionalism and small knowledge of the outside world, both the militants and pro-Kadyrov media unintentionally disclose information which may aid the analysis of the situation in Chechnya. A similar situation is visible in the case of the media controlled and moderated by the Russian secret service, including its branches in individual regions (e.g. [kavkazpress.ru](http://kavkazpress.ru) or [dagpress.ru](http://dagpress.ru)). They are vehemently anti-wahhabist, the materials published in those media contain primitive, vulgar epithets towards militants, it is also very hard to separate the truth from blatant falsehood spread for propagandist reasons. However, it is possible to attempt to verify the information provided by militants or to learn about the method of perception of the Caucasus Emirate by the Russian power structures based on these sources.

The value of so-called Ichkerian sources of information ([thechechenpress.org](http://thechechenpress.org), [ichkeria.info](http://ichkeria.info), [daymohk.net](http://daymohk.net)) does not lie in their credibility or possibility of obtaining unique information from the region. Most of the creators of these web portals have emigrated and they do not obtain information first-hand; instead, there is a great deal of information concerning the current international events (e.g. the war in Syria, Ukrainian conflict) rather than news about Caucasus. These sources are useful for observing divisions and conflicts inside Chechnya. Mutual criticism often reveals information on individual people, events etc., which may be useful when analysing the situation in the region. Other significant sources of information are Internet forums, particularly those which have been created by Chechen refugees, e.g. the extensive [adamalla.com](http://adamalla.com). One can find not only valuable information on said forum, but also opinions of its users, topics which interest the Chechen diaspora etc.

The most credible sources of information about Caucasus are some Russian sources, such as *Kavkazskiy Uzel*, [kavpolit.com](http://kavpolit.com), Radio Liberty or *Novaya Gazeta*, however the articles written by authors from Caucasus are particularly worth noticing (especially those concerning human rights violation). However, due to the worsening situation of independent media, human rights defenders and non-governmental organisations in Russia, the credibility and level of awareness of the aforementioned sources is questionable, as it is harder and



harder for them to operate. The authorities treat such organisations as Memorial (editor of Kavkazskiy Uzel, which is highly esteemed in the West and has been supported by grants for years) as the western fifth column, so they hinder their activity by pressuring them, limiting their power to obtain information in problematic regions etc. Memorial already has a difficult access to Chechnya and the comparison of materials published on [www.kavkaz-uzel.ru](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru) to those from previous years allows us to conclude that its credibility has decreased and self-censorship has appeared. Nonetheless, the aforementioned media are still the most credible source of information about the region.

### **Websites helpful in monitoring the Caucasus Emirate**

<b>Official websites of the Caucasus Emirate</b>	
<a href="http://www.checheninfo.com">www.checheninfo.com</a>	Official website of Vilayat Chechnya
<a href="http://www.vdagestan.com">www.vdagestan.com</a>	Official website of Vilayat Dagestan
<a href="http://www.hunafa.com">www.hunafa.com</a>	Official website of Vilayat Ingushetia
<a href="http://www.islamdin.com">www.islamdin.com</a>	Official website of Vilayat KBK
<b>Websites associated with the Caucasus Emirate</b>	
<a href="http://www.kavkazcenter.com">www.kavkazcenter.com</a>	Associated with the CE, directed towards the western and Russian reader (language versions: Russian, English, Arabian and Turkish)
<a href="http://www.kavkazchat.com">www.kavkazchat.com</a>	Popular forum associated with KavkazCenter website
<a href="http://www.ummanews.com">www.ummanews.com</a>	Radical Salafist news portal, supporting the CE
<a href="http://www.khilafa.org">www.khilafa.org</a>	Radical Salafist news portal, supporting the CE



<b>Caucasian and Salafist Internet forums</b>	
<a href="http://www.islam-forum.ws">www.islam-forum.ws</a>	Internet forum of post-Soviet Salafists
<a href="http://www.salaf-forum.com">www.salaf-forum.com</a>	Internet forum of post-Soviet Salafists
<a href="http://www.adamalla.com">www.adamalla.com</a>	Chachen Internet forum
<a href="http://www.strana-gor.org">www.strana-gor.org</a>	Dagestani Internet forum
<a href="http://www.forum.dgu.ru">www.forum.dgu.ru</a>	Dagestani Internet forum
<a href="http://www.dagforum.ru">www.dagforum.ru</a>	Dagestani Internet forum

Among the Russian sources it is worth mentioning national and general post-Soviet Islamic portals (such as [islam.ru](http://islam.ru), [ansar.ru](http://ansar.ru)), containing a host of information from Caucasus, which is the most islamised region of the Russian Federation and hence it attracts their attention. It is also significant that the above portals employ many journalists from Caucasus (mainly Dagestani), who are often well-informed and involved in the situation in the region. An important source of information may also be Salafi portals, both those which support armed struggle in Caucasus (e.g. [khilafa.org](http://khilafa.org)), and those which distance themselves from it (e.g. [salyaf.ru](http://salyaf.ru)). Local (republican) media and portals devoted to the situation of individual ethnic groups in Caucasus are equally important, as they contain a great deal of detailed information concerning Caucasian regions (e.g. Lezgian portal [flnka.ru](http://flnka.ru), Ossetian region [region15.ru](http://region15.ru), Ingush [ingushetiyaru.com](http://ingushetiyaru.com) or Cherkessian [aheku.org](http://aheku.org) et al.). Particularly rich sources of information are the media in Dagestan, where, despite many cases of journalist assassinations and pressure on the media placed by the authorities, the level of freedom of speech and opinion is the highest in the North Caucasus (which results from the political situation). A number of media (such as *Novoye Delo* and *Chernovik* newspapers) openly criticise republican authorities, power structures, Moscow policy and at the same time inform their readers of the cases of human rights violation.

When it comes to the western media (e.g. [jamestown.org](http://jamestown.org), an American website of the Jamestown Foundation which employs Caucasian emigrants and extensively writes about the North Caucasus), they cannot be treated as the primary source of information (they mostly base on news from Russian and emirian media). However, they have a great analytic value. In this respect, the materials and reports published by the International Crisis Group, which is



relatively active in the North Caucasus, and the Russian Memorial are also valuable.<sup>198</sup>

In view of the multitude of information from the North Caucasus derived from different sources with a simultaneous lack of certainty as to their reliability and credibility, the only way is to observe as many of them as possible and to conduct critical comparative analyses.

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<sup>198</sup> Reports of the International Crisis Group are available at:  
<http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/europe/north-caucasus.aspx>



## **Conclusions**

For the last two or three years we can observe significant weakening of the Caucasus Emirate when it comes to its organisation and tactics, and in the last few months also in its ideological aspect (competition with the Islamic State). Militants' operations are on a smaller and smaller scale and are also less frequent. This particularly concerns Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Karachay-Cherkessia and Sevastopol Krai. Currently, the militants carry out offensive armed operations only in Dagestan and, on a much smaller scale, in Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya. However, even there most of the armed clashes come about as a result of operations conducted by security structures, which decimate the hiding militants. The most symptomatic situation is the one in Chechnya, which until recently constituted the main “supply base” of the Caucasus Emirate. Nowadays, the armed underground in this republic is broken and it undertakes almost no armed operations, concentrating on surviving (one exception was a suicidal action in Grozny executed at night on 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2014). The deep conspiracy in which the Chechen militants function results in the fact that young people who want to join the guerrilla have serious problems with contacting and reaching the militants (this partly results from their fear of underground infiltration by Russian secret service). The symptom of a serious crisis of the Emirate is also the fact that its structure is beginning to decay: a host of positions have remained unfilled for months (central naib, vilayat naibs, all walis apart from Dagestani and Chechen vilayats), and militants from individual republics (and often within those republics) maintain practically no contacts. Shuras (councils) are also more and more sporadic. What is more, the split which took place at the end of 2014 means that the Emirate is threatened with marginalisation and fratricidal conflicts within the Islamic armed underground.

There are many reasons for the crisis of the Caucasus Emirate. It is a result of many years of a destructive armed conflict which took the lives of the most experienced leaders and commanders of mujahedins (e.g. Shamil Basayev, Ruslan Gelayev, Anzor Astemirov, Ali Taziev, Dokka Umarov, Supyan Abdullayev, Akhmed Avdorkhanov). As a result, there are practically no commanders who remember the First Chechen War, and the private militants are dominated by young people, who joined jihad only some years ago. Another



problem that weakens the armed underground is the lack of authority of the current leader of the Emirate, who enjoys respect only of some Dagestanis (mainly Avars) and Kabardino-Balkaria, but not as a military commander (Kebekov does not have military experience), but as a learned Muslim of moderate importance. The split in the Emirate is undoubtedly the effect of brutal actions taken by Russian power structures, which do not take captives and eliminate or arrest anyone who is even slightly suspicious when it comes to helping guerrilla militants. The Russian policy towards Chechnya also has its effects, stabilising the situation in the republic (focusing on former separatists, repressions of the armed underground with simultaneous economic revival of the republic and granting internal autonomy to Chechnya in the reign of Kadyrov etc.).

The changes in the ideological sphere have also contributed to the crisis. Separation from the idea of Chechen independence has driven away a large part of Chechens (including the Ichkerian diaspora in Europe) and introduced deep divisions in the Chechen society. Although the jihadisation of the ideology, whose culmination was the proclamation of the Emirate, has attracted radically disposed youth in all Caucasian republics, it also repelled the local societies, which are largely opposed to the idea of the transformation of Caucasus into an Islamic state and which do not support separatism. Most Caucasian Muslims also find it hard to accept the extremely radical Salafism of the militants, including the rejection of Sufism, deeply rooted in the eastern part of Caucasus. Apart from a small percentage of people who support the Emirate, the only aspect of the fight waged by the militants that enjoys popularity among the population is the idea of social justice (which does not have to equal sharia in the view of the society). The effect of islamisation and jihadisation of the ideology of Caucasian militants was ideological blur of their fight in the world of jihad. Caucasus has become a periphery of the world of jihad, a third-rate front in comparison to the Middle East and other regions. This has resulted in a mass outflow of militants and recruits from Caucasus to the Middle East (including the Islamic State) and a split in the ranks of the Emirate in the context of giving the pledge of allegiance to Caliph Ibrahim.

In the near future, the problem which might weaken the Emirate even further will probably be the deepening conflict between the commanders and groups which remain faithful to the supreme emir and those which gave the pledge of allegiance to the caliph. It is hard to predict if this state of affairs will assume



the form of open clashes, however it cannot be ruled out, similarly to the renouncement of obedience to the emir by subsequent armed groups. This will depend both on the further success of the Islamic State, the fate of Caucasian commandants, who have given a pledge to the caliph, as well as preventive actions taken by Kebekov himself (unless he is more active in the media and takes operational steps in the form of frequent speeches, filling vacant positions in the Emirate and commencement of more active armed operations, he will not be able to prevent the erosion of the CE).

Nothing is indicating that the Caucasus Emirate as a whole will submit to the Islamic State in the near future. This development of incidents would hypothetically arise only in the event of a change of the present leader, who is a determined opponent of the Islamic State. Even before the proclamation of the caliphate, Aliaskhab Kebekov had been involved in a dispute between Caucasian mujahedins fighting in Syria, some of whom (e.g. Omar ash-Shishani) joined the contemporary Islamic State of Iraq and Levant (ISIS), whereas others (particularly the Army of Emigrants and Supporters) continued their cooperation with the Syrian branch of Al-Qaeda', called Jabhat al-Nusra. The latter also remained faithful to the pledge given to the emir of Caucasus. In the above dispute, Kebekov openly supported al-Nusra, which spurred much criticism, but he maintained his opinion after the split in the ranks of the Emirate.

Regardless of the current crisis in the ranks of the militants and a notable decrease in their activity, one should not expect that the idea of creating a united Islamic state in the North Caucasus (either in the form of Caucasus Emirate, caliphate province etc.) will die out. This idea is so deeply rooted in the history and tradition of the North Caucasus that it will always be present, in one way or another, in the political landscape of the region. The possibility of its realisation depends mainly on two factors: the development of the internal situation in Russia and the potential for the Islamic concept in comparison to other political schemes in the region (separatism based on ethnicity, democratic concepts).

The economic and political stability of Russia is a guarantor of maintaining the current situation in the North Caucasus, i.e. controlled, limited imbalance. However, nothing indicates that the region will stabilise permanently and the conflicts will be solved. Nonetheless, in the current conditions Caucasus is unlikely to be deeply destabilised like it was in the 90s (outbreak of an open



armed conflict, the collapse of authority, mass migration of the population). The continuation of the repression policy will generate resistance and provide mujahedins with a permanent influx of recruits. However, nothing indicates that they are able to pave the way to a breakthrough and kindle a mass uprising (they do not have sufficient social support, organisational and logistic facilities, experience or support from outside). This situation may change in case of a serious internal crisis in Russia (e.g. caused by serious economic problems), whose scale is comparable with the dissolution of the Soviet Union. One of the effects of the weakened control of the Kremlin over Caucasus (particularly military presence and stable financing of the region by the Russian budget) would be the revival or recovery of the idea of creating an Islamic state in the region. However, the Islamic scheme would have to compete against alternative geopolitical projects, such as the idea of Chechen independence (secular-nationalistic versus Sufi-nationalistic), the project of a united democratic state in the North Caucasus, the Ossetian scheme (creation of the Great Ossetia which would be a combination of North and South Ossetia), the Cherkessian scheme (unification of western Caucasus into a common state of Cherkessians), the Russian-nationalistic scheme etc. In connection with an economic crisis, the revival of ethnic conflicts and lack of state-forming traditions would lead to chaos on a massive scale (with armed conflicts and mass migration movements).

A similar situation would also arise in case of a hypothetical victory of the Islamic concept (not necessarily under the name of Caucasus Emirate). In that case, the region would be transformed into a black hole providing shelter for international criminal groups and Islamic terrorists.