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**Research Report**

## Russia's internal Abroad: The North Caucasus as an Emergency Zone at the Edge of Europe

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# SWP Research Paper

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik  
German Institute for International  
and Security Affairs

*Uwe Halbach*

## Russia's Internal Abroad

The North Caucasus as an Emergency Zone  
at the Edge of Europe

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**Russia's Internal Abroad**  
**The North Caucasus as an Emergency Zone at the Edge of Europe**

Over the past 15 years, developments in the North Caucasus, which belongs to the Russian Federation, have primarily been viewed within the context of the military conflict in Chechnya. The entire region was understood as being proximate to the war zone and security deficits across the region were interpreted as having emanated from this conflict. After the fighting in Chechnya ceased and was replaced by a reconstruction phase, international interest in the North Caucasus evaporated. Since 2009, however, international attention to the region has returned. In April 2009, Moscow lifted the special designation as an anti-terrorism operation zone, which it had placed ten years earlier on Chechnya. Russia thereby put its stamp of approval on transferring responsibility away from the federal level and putting local authorities in charge of fighting Chechen armed resistance groups and for rebuilding the war-ravaged republic. This cannot, however, be considered to represent regional appeasement. The North Caucasus's appearance as a zone characterised by instability and violence on the periphery of Russia and Europe extends far beyond the borders of Chechnya, and the factors causing instability are no longer solely linked with Chechnya. During his state-of-the-nation address to the Federal Assembly in November 2009, President Medvedev declared that the entire region constituted Russia's primary domestic problem. In a report from June 2010, the Council of Europe also characterised the situation there as the most sensitive within its membership zone.

The continued confrontation between state security forces and armed resistance groups draws into question a proclaimed goal of Vladimir Putin's presidency (2000–2008): long-term peace in the region through the reintegration of Chechnya into Russia's constitutional space. In addition to larger areas of land like the Far East, Russia counts the North Caucasus among its most strategically important territories. It includes seven republics stretching from Adygea near the Black Sea to Dagestan on the Caspian Sea. The region accounts for 6.5% of Russia's entire population and consists mainly of Muslims belonging to dozens of different ethnic groups. Important North-South transportation routes and pipelines extend across this

exposed border region. This is where Russia extends into the greater Caucasus region, the southern half of which contains the three independent states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan and is characterised by unresolved secessionist conflicts and competition among external actors rallying for influence. The border to Russia's "near abroad" runs through a zone in which Russia faces more acute strategic challenges than in any other part of its enormous territory. This context provides the backdrop for the disastrous Russian-Georgian relations, which drew global attention in August 2008. Following the five-day war, Russia instituted protectorate rule across portions of the South Caucasus in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, even though it continues to struggle with security issues on its own state territory in the North Caucasus.

This *Russian Caucasus* is an area of precarious statehood and unfinished decolonisation. Its federal subjects constitute a political crisis zone, which is characterised to a large degree by corruption and bad governance. No other portion of the Russian Federation presents such a harsh collision between the "illusion of Putinism" and reality, namely the idea that the central government can steer politics and society even in the most distant corners of the country. The *vertical of power* which has come to epitomise the Putin era, has thus far affected territories and political bodies in the North Caucasus that had escaped the central government's direct control. The Russian government is therefore now looking for new ways to gain control over this region. In January 2010, the government took fundamental steps towards administrative reform in the region. An independent Caucasian entity was separated off from the larger *Southern Federal District* and was formed into the new *North Caucasus Federal District*. To head this eighth district, the Russian government named Alexander Khloponin, who was once the governor of Krasnoyarsk, a region of Siberia, prior to which he served as the chairman of a commodities company. He is now meant to act as the new "Manager of the Caucasus".

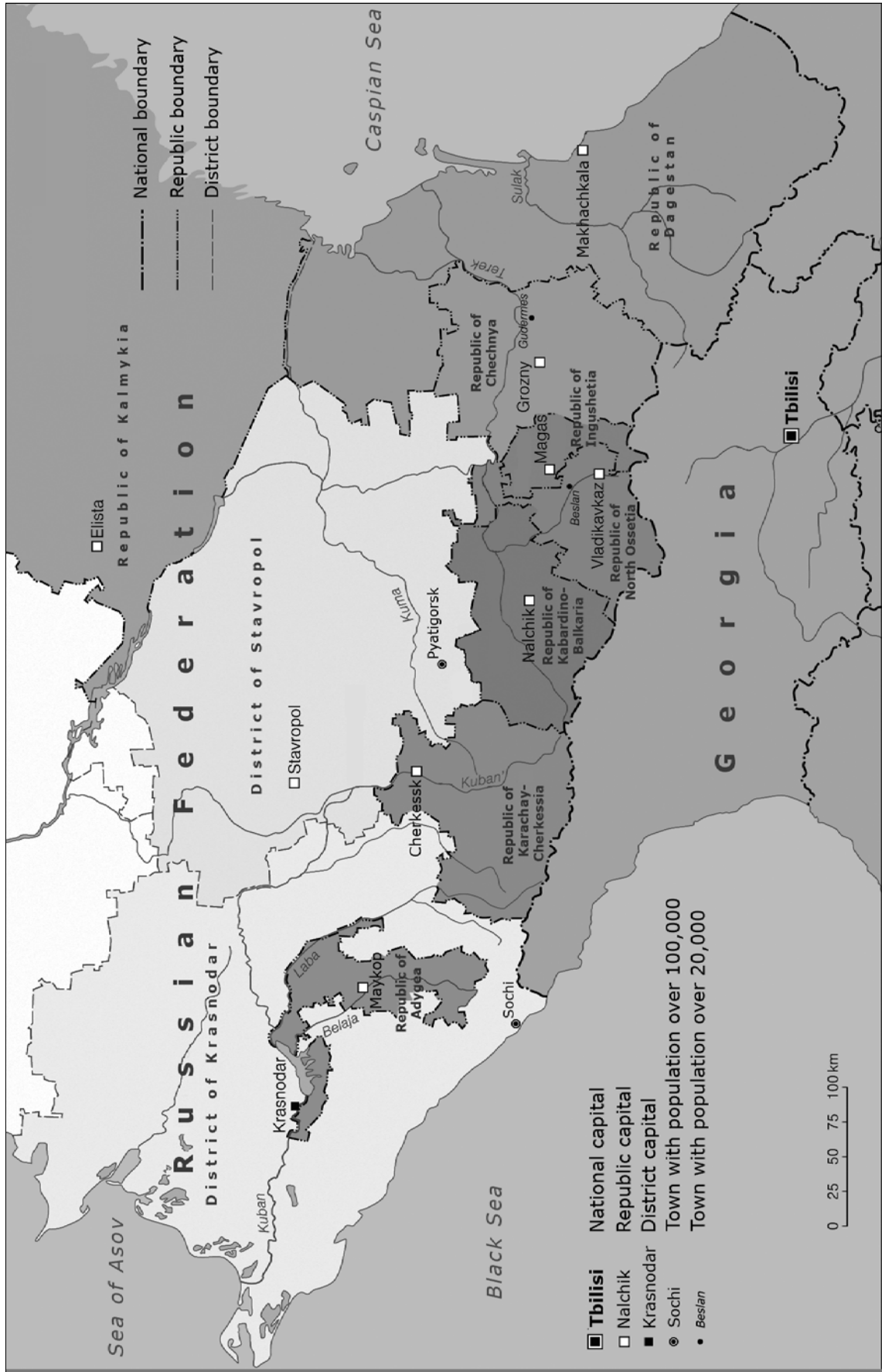
The administrative reform is being accompanied by a new Caucasus strategy based on business and socio-economic development. In light of continued attacks from armed resistance groups, it remains doubtful whether this new path will take the place of the rather counter-productive past strategy of violent crack-downs, and lead instead to sustainable development policies. A split in policies towards the North Caucasus is also possible. Intensified business development could take place in the calmer and more highly devel-

oped western regions and the area surrounding the ambitious projects associated with the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics. At the same time, counter-terrorism would continue to dominate politics in the eastern parts of the region.

In Europe, one should not overlook these developments in Russia's "internal abroad" even if international policy has in the past had scant access to the North Caucasus, in contrast to the South Caucasus. As stated by the Council of Europe, the region is an exposed hot spot on Europe's borders. In two of the post-Soviet space's sub-regions, there has been Islamist mobilisation based on unstable regional structures, namely in the Central Asian areas close to Afghanistan and in the North Caucasus at Europe's back door. If one uses the number of acts of terrorism as a point of reference, the North Caucasus is the more explosive area.

Still, acts of terrorism invoking jihad are not the only decisive factors causing the spiral of violence. Literature on the North Caucasus also presents a series of explanatory paradigms, which pin the blame entirely on Islamic groups or state security bodies; or place absolute blame solely on individual factors like poverty, inter-ethnic conflicts, and corruption. The author of this study, on the other hand, analyses precisely this diverse range of factors, which are responsible for the destabilisation and diffusion of violence in the North Caucasus. The author also deals with developments that have caused large portions of the North Caucasus to become Russia's "internal abroad", analyses the most commonly cited factors causing destabilisation in the region, and assesses the chances for a realignment of Russia's Caucasus policy. Increased European attention for this Russian problem-zone should constitute an element of the partnership for modernisation that President Medvedev wants to establish between Russia and Europe. Berlin and Brussels should support approaches aimed at modernising Russia's Caucasus policy as well as self-criticism for the path pursued in the region in previous years.

Map  
North Caucasus





## Russia's Internal Abroad

The North Caucasus, which is comprised on seven republics<sup>1</sup> and is home to dozens of ethnic groups, constitutes the Islamic southern periphery of the European part of the Russian Federation. The Russian populace increasingly views this periphery as an alien entity and has grown accustomed to violence in the North Caucasus. People are then forcibly shaken out of this inurement to violence when terror attacks impact people within Russia's heartland, as was the case with the bombing of the Moscow Metro on 29 March 2010 and its 40 casualties. Prior to this incident, the Russian people's assessment of the situation in the North Caucasus was split. According to surveys conducted by a leading Russian polling institute, the Levada Centre, 38% of respondents in the summer of 2009 shared the government's opinion that this problematic region had been stabilised and life in peace could now begin. Another 20% of the respondents judged there to be increased tensions, while 29% even indicated that there was an "uninterrupted guerrilla war".<sup>2</sup> One year later, the assessment is even more sceptical: in August 2010, 74% of the respondents believed that the situation in the North Caucasus was "potentially explosive."<sup>3</sup>

During his call for modernisation in front of the Federal Assembly on 12 November 2009, President Medvedev stressed that he sees the situation in the North Caucasus as the most serious domestic problem facing Russia. In the opinion of some Russian experts on the region, the North Caucasus increasingly seems to be an area that Russia is losing.<sup>4</sup> When asked about the Second Chechen War in 1999, 40% of respondents

now say that Russia should have stayed away from the renegade republic. If the pollsters had replaced "Chechnya" with "Caucasus", the response may have been similar.<sup>5</sup> Among the Russian populace, there is not only a growing distance towards this internal abroad, but rather a general mistrust of Caucasian and Muslim population groups within Russia itself.<sup>6</sup> There is an increasing amount of discussion in the Russian media and think tanks about how to deal with the North Caucasus. Some experts have insistently warned against the association "Caucasus–Islam–Terrorism", which would exacerbate the alienation of the region from the rest of Russia, a process that has already reached an advanced stage.<sup>7</sup> Since 2009, President Medvedev has repeatedly commented on the situation in the North Caucasus, stressing socio-economic causes for the violence. Moscow has been making an obvious effort to confound the impression that it is dedicating too little attention to the region's problems. Lightning visits to republics in the Caucasus have been part of the repertoire of top-level Moscow politicians since early 2010.

Taking inspiration from the term "near abroad" coined by Russian diplomats to describe neighbours in the CIS, one can call the North Caucasus Russia's "internal abroad". This terminology has established itself in foreign analysis as well as in the Russian language. The most conspicuous aspect of the internal abroad is the demographic de-Russification.<sup>8</sup> In the largest and most ethnically diverse republic, Dagestan, which is home to 2.7 million people from dozens of ethnic groups, the Russian portion of the population has fallen to around three percent. This process had

1 From West to East: Adygea (447,000 inhabitants, Capital: Maykop), Karachay-Circassia (440,000, Cherkessk), Kabardino-Balkaria (901,000, Nalchik), North Ossetia (710,000, Vladikavkaz), Ingushetia (467,000, Magas), Chechnya (1.1 million, Grozny), Dagestan (2.7 Millionen, Makhachkala).

2 Quoted in: *Nordkaukasus—Russlands inneres Ausland?* [North Caucasus—Russia's Internal Abroad?], 18.12.2009 (Russland-Analysen Nr. 194), p. 22, <[www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen194.pdf](http://www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen194.pdf)>.

3 "Majority of Russians View North Caucasus Situation as 'Explosive'—Poll", *Johnson's Russia List*, (16.8.2010) 155.

4 Aleksej Malašenko, "Kavkaz, kotoryj my terjaem" [The Caucasus that We're Losing], Moscow: Moskovskij Centr Karnegi, August 2009 (Brifing, Bd. 11, Nr. 3).

5 Ivan Suchov, "Naša strana" [Our Country], in: *Vremja novostej*, 20.8.2010.

6 Valery Dzutsev, "Russian Government and Public View North Caucasians with Suspicion", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (15.3.2010) 50.

7 "Russia: Political Correctness Urged when Describing People from North Caucasus", *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 2.4.2010.

8 Vitalij Belozero/Pavel Polian, "De-Russifizierung: aktuelle ethno-demographische Prozesse in Nordkaukasien" [De-Russification: Current Ethno-Demographic Processes in Northern Caucasias], in: *Geographische Rundschau*, Special Issue "Kaukasien", March 2006, p. 18–26.

already begun during Soviet times. Fears have arisen that this part of the North Caucasus may also see a corresponding drop in use of the Russian language. In 2009, Dagestan announced a special government programme for preserving Russian and created a Russian language council led by the Republic's president.<sup>9</sup> The de-Russification of Chechnya was particularly drastic as a result of two wars. The Republic with its purported 1.1 million inhabitants<sup>10</sup> is now the most ethnically homogeneous federal subject in the region, with Chechens making up more than 90% of the population. From an ethno-demographic viewpoint, the two wars have actually led to 'Chechenisation', to use the catchword describing the Kremlin's strategy towards the war zone in the Russian media since 2000. Although Russians still made up a third of the population at the end of the Soviet period, they began emigrating in 1991 as the conflict intensified between the Chechen nationalist movement and Moscow. Those that continued to hold out in Chechnya fled during the military escalation that started in 1994. This process of Chechenisation, however, was hellish for the local civilian population. Figures for the numbers of civilian casualties in both wars cited by Russian and international sources are divergent, but it can be assumed that the Chechen population was seriously decimated. Virtually every family mourned the loss of relatives to the wars or the subsequent acts of violence from Russian troops, local security forces, and the armed resistance groups. Despite all of the apparent normalisation of conditions in Chechnya brought on by the local ruler, Ramzan Kadyrov, these experiences continue to shape the society. They remain the worst instances of violence in post-Soviet history.

The de-Russification, the internal abroad character, and the rampant violence all pertain primarily to the eastern reaches of the North Caucasus—Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. The majority of fighting between security forces and armed resistance groups has long been attributable to this region. In recent years, however, the "quieter" republics in the central and western parts of the region have crept into the headlines due to substantial acts of terrorism. This started in October 2004 when a terrorist commando took numerous hostages in a school in the city of

Beslan. During the "freeing" of the hostages, 336 people died. This event shook the Republic of North Ossetia, which had until then been known as a relatively stable Russian outpost in the Caucasus and boasted the highest levels of industrialisation in the North Caucasus. Then in October 2005, a major offensive by an Islamist terror group named Yarmuk on security forces in the capital, Nalchik, brought the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria into the headlines. These parts of the North Caucasus have also seen an increasing number of Russians emigrating away. A clear Russian majority only remains in the population of the western republic of Adygea.

The Russian government is now working to counter this development. On the one hand, President Medvedev is attempting to carry his modernisation project for Russia over to this region, which suffers from specific development deficits. In this context, he is focusing on the region's socio-economic problems and ambitious reform projects, which should motivate the Russian populations to return. Migration programmes are being developed, which carry a Soviet flavour of "social engineering". This policy is now also shifting focus onto a traditional group, which was already playing an important role in the colonial policies during the Czar's rule: President Medvedev and his new Caucasus appointee, Khloponin, have suggested boosting the Cossack presence in the North Caucasian republics, thereby also strengthening the Russian-speaking population in the region.<sup>11</sup> It is doubtful, however, that an expansion of modern Cossack elements would contribute to calming the situation in the Caucasus. It is more likely that this would lead to a revival of historical antagonism and to land conflicts.

On the other hand, Russia's strategy in the North Caucasus also continues to be determined by traditional forms of action, which include acts of violence and which transform the *siloviki*, representatives of power structures such as the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Ministry of the Interior, into key actors in shaping Caucasus policy. A further characteristic of the internal abroad is the discrepancy between federal and regional legal standards. Throughout post-Soviet development, there has been no other region in Russia where local legal standards have departed so widely from the Federation's constitutional standards as in the North Caucasus. Here, some areas are influenced

<sup>9</sup> RIA Dagestan, 3.11.2009, <[www.riadagestan.ru](http://www.riadagestan.ru)>.

<sup>10</sup> Many experts doubt this figure from a census in 2002. It shows hardly any evidence of the population losses from two wars even if an above-average population growth is calculated for the Republic. The population probably numbers less than a million individuals.

<sup>11</sup> Mairbek Vatchagaev, "Moscow Looks to Cossacks to Deal with North Caucasus Instability", *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (23.4.2010) 79.

by traditional common law (*adat*) while others are characterised by the norms of *Sharia* Law. In this region, for example, the legalisation of polygamy is under discussion and *Sharia* courts command more authority on a local level than the corrupt secular judicial bodies. During the post-Soviet period, a return to traditions and process of re-Islamification has deepened the existing divide with the rest of Russia—particularly in the mountainous areas of Dagestan and Chechnya. The secular intelligentsia with their socialisation rooted in Soviet times were marginalised and have largely emigrated away from these areas.<sup>12</sup>

### Effects for the Near Abroad and Beyond

Developments in this internal abroad radiate beyond Russia's borders. Conversely, Russian sources continually point to destabilising influences from abroad and sometimes give an interpretation of the instability in the North Caucasus, which helps to obscure home-made problems. According to these interpretations, there are apparently malignant external forces at work, global Islamist networks as well as Western players, which seek to destroy Russia and therefore attack the weakest reaches of its periphery. The near abroad in the South Caucasus is impacted first and foremost by developments in the North Caucasus. Admittedly the borders between the two Caucasian regions and between Russia's territory and the neighbouring states of Georgia and Azerbaijan extend for great distances along the high mountain ridges of the Great Caucasus, which forms a geographic partition bridged by a small number of connecting links. One of these is the Roki Tunnel between North and South Ossetia, which garnered global recognition during the August 2008 Russian-Georgian War. This does not mean, however, that a strict analytical demarcation can be drawn between the conflict lands in the two Caucasian regions.

Of the states bordering the North Caucasus, Georgia is the country with the greatest exposure. Breakaway areas like Abkhazia and South Ossetia, or the Pankisi Valley in the region bordering Chechnya, which for a period of time (2000–2002) could not be brought under control, represent critical interfaces between

<sup>12</sup> Maciej Falkowski/Mariusz Marszewski, *The "Tribal Areas" of the Caucasus. The North Caucasus—an Enclave of "Alien Civilisation" within the Russian Federation*, Warsaw: Ośrodek Studiów Wschodnich (OSW)/Centre for Eastern Studies, 14.4.2010 (OSW Studies Nr. 34), p. 67–69.

the South and North Caucasus. Recently high-level Russian security officials accused the Georgian secret service of cooperating with radical Islamist networks to destabilise the North Caucasus. Even though this version of events is characterised even by some Russian Caucasus experts as likely being a groundless conspiracy theory, it remains clear that Georgia has recently reacted more visibly to developments in the North Caucasus than prior to the August 2008 war. There is increased dedication to the North Caucasian ethnic groups and particularly to one topic that has grown more and more contentious for Russia's Caucasus policy: a global Circassian nationalist movement and its demand for the recognition of a "genocide" practiced on what was once the largest ethnic group in the North Caucasus by Russian colonial policies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> The linking of this "Circassian Question" with the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics represents a controversial issue for Russia, which will need to be addressed in greater detail.<sup>14</sup> Alexander Khloponin and other Russian politicians have spoken of an "ideological penetration into the North Caucasus" by Georgia.<sup>15</sup> Moscow became particularly suspicious in October 2010 when the government in Tbilisi removed visa requirements for citizens of the North Caucasian republics. Georgia's relationship with the peoples of the North Caucasus is, however, anything but a historical alliance. There are several ethnic groups in this region with close ethnic ties to the Abkhaz and Ossetians, which have repeatedly supported their secessionist movements by fighting with Georgian troops—most recently in 2008. Accordingly, Georgia probably cannot bet on playing the

<sup>13</sup> In March 2010, a conference on "Hidden Nations, Enduring Crimes: The Circassians and the Peoples of the North Caucasus" took place in the Georgian capital, organised by the Jamestown Foundation in Washington and the Ilia State University in Tbilisi. Members of the Russian State Duma considered this meeting as "aggression against Russia". Cf. "Possible Recognition of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Circassian 'Genocide' Discussed in Georgia", *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 5.5.2010. The Jamestown Foundation followed up with a conference titled "Sochi in 2014: Can an Olympics Take Place at the Site of the Expulsion of the Circassians 150 Years Earlier?", which was held in June 2010 in Washington.

<sup>14</sup> On the issue of Sochi 2014 within the context of Russian-Georgian relations, cf. Stanislav Secieru, "The 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi: Implications for the Caucasus", in: *Caucasus Analytical Digest*, (13.8.2010) 19, p. 4–8.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: Valery Dzutsev, "Russia's Government-Sponsored Expert Community Reaches out to North Caucasus", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (19.4.2010) 75.

“Circassian card” and has far fewer reasons to support radical Islamic forces within the Caucasus.

At the outset of its independence, Azerbaijan was also exposed to ethno-political developments in the North Caucasus, particularly from the Republic of Dagestan. The settlement of the Lesghines, a North Caucasian ethnic group, is split into pieces by borders through Dagestan (Russia) and Azerbaijan, and represents a critical location. In the early 1990s, a nationalist movement sprang up there and pushed for an independent Lesghistan. Although this issue never did become manifest, it did present Azerbaijan with another secessionist problem to add to the existing conflict with Nagorno-Karabakh. Today though, Azerbaijan feels more threatened by Islamist forces than by the ethnic-separatist dynamics of the North Caucasus, and sees itself as caught in the difficult situation of having so-called Wahhabis from the North Caucasus on the one hand, and, on the other hand, Iranian influence on its majority Shia population.

States outside the CIS are also paying attention to developments in the region, as can be seen in the case of Turkey. It maintains close ties with Russia encompassing economic issues and energy policy, as well as foreign relations, which have improved over recent years. Ankara doesn't see the Caucasus as merely a neighbouring region, which happened to gain special prominence for Turkey's foreign policy due to the Georgian crisis in 2008.<sup>16</sup> Turkey is also home to numerous diaspora communities from the Caucasus. These communities include various ethnic groups, which fled or were expelled from their homelands in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Russia conquered the Caucasus. These peoples subsequently settled in the Ottoman Empire. This diaspora, which is estimated to include millions of people, is organised into associations in Turkey.<sup>17</sup> During the wars in Chechnya, these communities hampered Ankara's relations with Russia. During the first war, the Turkish government took no steps to limit the activities of the Caucasian asso-

ciations, which expressed their solidarity with Chechnya. During the second war, however, such steps were taken, as Ankara had to respond to the louder cries for jihad that accompanied this war. It was during this period that Turkey's political relations with the Russian Federation improved.

As terrorist acts in the North Caucasus increased, the Turkish people's solidarity with the Chechen Independence Movement evaporated.<sup>18</sup> Still, the acts of terror by Islamist groups that spread into Russia's interior are a problem that caused irritation in Russian-Turkish relations following the attacks on the Moscow Metro on 29 March 2010. While the Turkish government quickly condemned this terrorist act and expressed its condolences to Russia's leadership, Turkish media outlets saw the roots of this event being connected to the violent acts of Russian security forces in the North Caucasus. Although Russian analyses of the Caucasus also point to this connection, the Turkish position provoked a harsh reaction from the Russian embassy in Ankara.<sup>19</sup>

## Escalating Violence on the Edge of Europe

Despite the great diversity of factors causing regional instability, developments in the North Caucasus are primarily associated with escalating violence. This has been the case since the First Chechen War (1994–1996) and has deeper historical roots. The North Caucasus generated intense anti-colonial resistance and imperial counterviolence not only during the era of Czarist Russia, but also during the Soviet Union. This holds true for the time stretching from when the region was conquered until 1864, for the era of Stalin's Great Terror during which entire ethnic groups were deported to Siberia and Central Asia, and for the period during the First and Second Chechen Wars following the fall of the Soviet Union. Even after the periods of war, hardly a week would go by without reports of violent events in Chechnya or other areas in the region. Ramazan Abdulatipov, a representative of Dagestan in Moscow's power centre once posed the rhetorical question as to why Russia had not dedicated a day of commemoration for the end of the Caucasus

<sup>16</sup> Uwe Halbach, *Ungelöste Regionalkonflikte im Südkaukasus* [Unresolved Regional Conflicts in the South Caucasus], Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, March 2010 (SWP-Studie 8/2010), p. 27–29.

<sup>17</sup> The diaspora groups in Turkey founded an umbrella organisation in 2003 called the *Federation of Caucasian Associations* (Kafkas Federasyonu Derneği, KAFFED). It coordinates the activities of 59 groups. These include the *Caucasian-Abkhazian Solidarity Committee*, which was particularly active following the Russian-Georgian War in 2008, and the *Chechen Solidarity Committee*, which apparently went so far as to send volunteer fighters to Chechnya in the 1990s.

<sup>18</sup> Gareth Winrow, *Turkey, Russia and the Caucasus. Common and Diverging Interests*, London: Chatham House, November 2009 (Chatham House Briefing Paper), p. 13f.

<sup>19</sup> Saban Kardaş, “Suicide Attacks in Moscow Spark Terrorism Debate in Turkey”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (14.4.2010) 72.

War in 1864 as it had done for other “events in the fatherland’s history”. The answer: because the war is still going.<sup>20</sup>

At the same time, it is difficult to determine clear aims or objectives for the actions undertaken by armed resistance groups. The precarious security situation is characterised by a mixture of skirmishes between security forces and resistance fighters, ethnic or clan disputes among local power elites, extralegal violence by official security bodies, and competitive struggles between mafia elements. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), which has published regular summaries of violent acts in the North Caucasus (with the exception of the western republics of Adygea and Karachay-Cherkessia), listed 1100 “incidents of violence” in 2009, up from 795 the previous year. This category includes kidnappings, bombings, rebel attacks, and police/military operations against suspected terrorists.<sup>21</sup> According to Moscow’s Prosecutor’s Office, just in 2009, special operations in the North Caucasus resulted in the deaths of 316 resistance fighters, 2.5 tons of explosives and over 500 automatic weapons were seized, and 260 bases and weapon caches were destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

In 2009, the number of suicide attacks was almost four times as high as in the previous year. Many of these attacks occurred in Chechnya, even following the lifting of its status as a counter-terrorism operation zone.<sup>23</sup> On 16 April 2010, the Chechen government celebrated the one-year anniversary of the end of this status. The number of casualties as a result of violence in Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia, however, was much higher in the year following the lifting of the status than for the year before.<sup>24</sup> While this special designation as an “anti-terrorism operation zone” no longer applies to Chechnya as a whole, it is still applied again and again at the local level, particularly in individual districts of Dagestan and Ingushetia.

The attacks are targeted primarily at the property and members of local security structures.<sup>25</sup> Represent-

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in: Dzutsev, “Russia’s Government-Sponsored Expert Community” [same as Fn. 15].

<sup>21</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), *Violence in the North Caucasus. 2009: A Bloody Year*, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 4, <[http://csis.org/files/publication/100114\\_Violence\\_NorthCaucasus\\_2009optimize.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/100114_Violence_NorthCaucasus_2009optimize.pdf)>.

<sup>22</sup> ITAR-TASS, 25.2.2010.

<sup>23</sup> CSIS, *Violence in the North Caucasus. 2009: A Bloody Year* [same as Fn. 21], p. 4.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> The most spectacular event in this connection was the murder of Dagestan’s Minister of the Interior, who fell victim

atives of the official clergy are also at risk, that is, the local muftis who can be considered to be loyal to the state and are therefore seen by radical Islamists as falling into the category of “munafiq” (hypocrites). Railroad lines, trains and other infrastructural elements are common targets. The Russian government has presented a new strategic plan for the North Caucasus running to the year 2025, which focuses on energy, transportation infrastructure and tourism. Insurgents responded on 21 July 2010 with a terror attack on a hydroelectric power plant in Kabardino-Balkaria, which provided power for the nearby vacation spots.

There has been a particular rise in suicide attacks on “soft targets” since 2009. This is a sign of radicalisation—the region’s civilian population is no longer seen as a neutral party. An *Ingushetian Jama’a* (jama’a = group, association) expressed this sentiment on 15 April 2010 on the website hunafa.com with an appeal to the civilian population: if the people failed to get the government to “remove their troops from the Caucasian Emirate’s territory, you are no longer civilians to our eyes.” The grand reference to the, as yet indeterminate, “Caucasian Emirate territory” belies the fact, however, that the terrorist elements in the North Caucasus are not equipped to engage in broad military action or to exert control over larger territories. Their resources hardly allow for major military offensives against the republics’ major cities as in October 2005 against Nalchik. These limited resources are, however, certainly sufficient for attacks on security forces in the region and for suicide attacks on “weak targets” within Russia’s interior.

Official Russian sources give differing accounts of the uptick in violence. Estimates also vary for the military strength of the armed resistance groups. In 2010, Russia’s Ministry of the Interior, alone, continued to have 24,000 soldiers stationed in the North Caucasus. Numerous military and ideological leaders of Caucasian guerrilla elements were killed in 2009 and 2010 over the course of many different special operations that combined the forces of the FSB, the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Defence, and local security apparatuses. On 10 June 2010, security forces captured Ali Taziyev, also known as Emir Magas, during a special operation in Ingushetia. This

to a car bomb in June 2009. Shortly thereafter, this was followed by an attempted assassination of the newly seated President of Ingushetia, Yunus-bek Yevkurov, who was badly injured in the incident. The President of Kabardino-Balkaria, Arsen Kanokov, escaped a bombing, which was attempted during a horse race in the Republic’s capital, Nalchik.

marked the first time that a high-ranking military leader of the “Caucasian Emirate” had been captured and not killed on the spot, as had been the practice of the Russian counterinsurgency in dealing with their enemies up until that point. Despite this success, the commander of the Ministry of the Interior’s troops took stock of the situation in a rather sobering fashion: “Unfortunately the total number of illegal armed fighters isn’t falling. It’s almost impossible to assign a figure to their numbers and they move from one (North Caucasian) republic to another. But I can promise you one thing: their numbers are not decreasing.”<sup>26</sup> The strength of the armed resistance groups, whether the number of fighters is in the hundreds or the thousands, is insufficient to change power structures within the region. It is, however, certainly sufficient to ensure a long period of unrest. The elimination of military or ideological leaders has thus far shown little impact on the Caucasian guerrilla’s power.

Ingushetia, the smallest North Caucasian republic in terms of land size, became a real trouble spot in 2009. During this time, there were continuous suicide attacks, kidnappings, street fighting, and attacks on security forces. The council of elders and the Republic’s religious institutions called for President Medvedev to turn his attention to the tense situation and to address the “extermination of the Ingushetian population”, which had been increasing in the past years.<sup>27</sup>

The distinction between terrorist and criminal economic violence is a fluid one. In May 2010, a security forces operation was launched in Kabardino-Balkaria targeting precisely this gray area. One of the leaders of this operation emphasised that the increasing number of attacks on security forces in the North Caucasus was the “work of various forces”, thereby contradicting the one-sided assignations of blame to Islamist terrorists.<sup>28</sup> According to the Russian prosecutor’s office, in 2009 armed crime rose by 92% in Ingushetia, by 65% in Dagestan, and by 43% in Karachay-Cherkessia. Federal law enforcement bodies criticise investigative procedures in the North Caucasus, a large portion of which come to nothing—in Chechnya, around two

thirds of all investigations. Particularly egregious acts of violence are often attributed to deceased resistance fighters.<sup>29</sup> In Dagestan, there are persistent rumours of armed resistance groups participating in ethnic power struggles among power players and of “holy warriors” playing a part in extortion processes and in tyrannising businesspeople.<sup>30</sup>

In his address before the Federal Assembly at the end of 2009, President Medvedev pointed to the growing violence in the North Caucasus as the main negative event of the year in Russia. This statement was confirmed by events in 2010. The year started with a suicide attack in southern Dagestan on 6 January, when Orthodox Christians celebrate Christmas Day, which resulted in the deaths of six policemen.<sup>31</sup> In the first three months of the year, Russia’s security service, the FSB, recorded 47 terrorist attacks in Dagestan alone.<sup>32</sup> Over this same timeframe, the CSIS registered 219 casualties through “incidents of violence” in the North Caucasus (as opposed to 183 casualties in the first quarter of 2009 and 132 in the first quarter of 2008).<sup>33</sup> This series of terrorist acts continued on through the summer and fall, putting 2010 at risk of becoming a record year in regard to violent events in the region.

The most devastating terrorist attack of 2010, however, which occurred outside of the region, was the bombing of the Moscow Metro on 29 March, which left 40 people dead. This attack sent a clear signal to the Russian people that terrorism had returned to Russia’s heartland. Since the suicide bombing of the Moscow Metro by a Chechen woman on 31 August 2004, which killed 11 people, there had been no further major terrorist attacks on the Russian heartland arising from the North Caucasus. This changed with the attack on the Nevsky Express on 27 November 2009. The leader of the “Caucasian Emirate”, Doku Umarov, claimed responsibility for these attacks, which caused the deaths of 26 people. In February 2010, he announced a wave of attacks against targets within Russia’s heart-

<sup>29</sup> Dzutsev, “Russian Government and Public View North Caucasians with Suspicion” [same as Fn. 6].

<sup>30</sup> Michael Ludwig, “Sandsäcke in den Städten, Kämpfer im Wald” [Sandbags in the Cities, Fighters in the Forest], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 7.6.2010, p. 6.

<sup>31</sup> Charles Clover, “Suicide Bomber Kills Five in Russia’s Dagestan”, in: *Financial Times*, 6.1.2010, <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/d465f1de-faa1-11de-a532-00144feab49a.html>>.

<sup>32</sup> Lyubov Pronina/Anastasia Ustinova, “Medvedev Seeks ‘Brutal’ Response to Terror Attacks”, *Bloomberg*, 1.3.2010.

<sup>33</sup> CSIS, *Violence in the North Caucasus. Spring 2010: On the Rise, Again?*, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 11.

<sup>26</sup> “Militants Not Getting Fewer in North Caucasus—Russian Internal Troops Head”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newsline—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 10.6.2010.

<sup>27</sup> <[www.ingushetiyaru.org](http://www.ingushetiyaru.org)>, 19.12.2009.

<sup>28</sup> “Special Operation Launched in Russia’s Kabardino-Balkaria”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newsline—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 28.5.2010.

land.<sup>34</sup> Chechen President Kadyrov had previously declared war on the “Emirate” and signalled that Umarov would be eliminated. These announcements were followed by a series of special operations.

The terrorist act in Moscow also called to mind the phenomenon of the so-called black widows, who had been a focus of Russian terror analyses during the Second Chechen War. The attacks on the metro stations had been carried out by two young women from Dagestan. Promptly thereafter, evidence surfaced in the Russian media of hundreds of women who had been recruited for suicide attacks against Russia. Names of 22 women suspected of terrorist intentions were published in the press.<sup>35</sup> There was speculation as to the motivation and backgrounds of these women just as there had been several years earlier. Was this personal vengeance for male family members, who had fallen victim to special operations by security forces? Or had young women been added to the ranks after being brainwashed with Islamic fundamentalism by foreign terror experts? The CSIS, however, puts this concept of a return of the black widows into perspective: of the 27 registered suicide bombings from between January 2008 and April 2010, only five were carried out by women.<sup>36</sup>

In any case, the bombing of the Moscow Metro brought the issue of terrorism and the fight against it back into the public consciousness. The Russian security service FSB feared that terrorist attacks could increase in connection with the Sochi 2014 Winter Olympics.<sup>37</sup> This Russian prestige project could draw terrorists like moths to a flame.<sup>38</sup> Human rights activists and members of the media have pointed to the danger that addressing these security challenges could carry an added cost of further restricting the already

limited freedom of expression in Russia. Growing segments of the population suspect that the fight against extremism could serve as a pretext for imposing more authoritarian measures.<sup>39</sup>

Voices from within the Russian government have warned of the danger of affixing religious, cultural or ethnic labels to the terms “terrorism” and “banditry”. Terrorism in Russia, indeed, cannot be traced back solely to jihadists from the Caucasus. In 2010, there were a number of incidents in the far eastern, north-western and central regions of Russia, in which security forces came under fire. It is not just in the North Caucasus that law enforcement bodies have seen their arbitrary measures evoke feelings of vigilante justice among desperate peoples and subsequently see themselves confronted by violence. Right-wing extremists and ultra-nationalist Russian groups are also turning on representatives of government bodies. The right-wing extremist violence that has in the past been principally directed against minorities mutated into a form of anti-statist terrorism according to the 2009 annual report of the human rights organisation SOVA.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>34</sup> “Chechen Rebel Leader Threatens to Attack Russian Cities”, *BBC*, 14.2.2010; Gordon M. Hahn, “The Caucasus Emirate Returns to the ‘Far Enemy’? The ‘Nevskii Express’ Bombing”, in: *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report*, (10.12.2009) 4.

<sup>35</sup> In connection with this dubious representation, cf. Tanya Lokshina, “The Black Widows of Dagestan: Media Hype and Genuine Harm”, *openDemocracy*, 17.6.2010, <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/tanya-lokshina/black-widows-of-dagestan-media-hype-and-genuine-harm>>.

<sup>36</sup> CSIS, *Violence in the North Caucasus. Spring 2010* [same as Fn. 33], p. 21.

<sup>37</sup> “Russlands Geheimdienst warnt. ‘Terroristen wollen Olympische Spiele 2014 sprengen’ [Russia’s Secret Service warns. ‘Terrorists Want to Blow Up the 2014 Olympic Games’], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4.6.2010, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Gordon M. Hahn, “The Sochi Olympic Games and the Caucasus Emirate”, in: *Islam, Islamism, and Politics in Eurasia Report*, (7.7.2010) 16.

<sup>39</sup> “Nearly 40% of Russians Worry Authorities May Suppress Criticism Under Guise of Combating Extremism—Poll”, *Johnson’s Russia List*, (29.7.2010) 142.

<sup>40</sup> Andrej Kozenko/Alisa Ivanščika, “Pravozaščitniki opasajutsja beloju vlasti” [Human Rights Activists Afraid of the White Power], in: *Kommersant*, 28.1.2010.

## Factors Causing Instability

Frequently, specific cut-and-dried factors are used to explain the regional instability and spread of violence in the North Caucasus. Such factors include (pseudo) religious violence, inter-ethnic tension, rivalry among clans, the corruption and selfishness of the local powerful elite, and, last but not least, poverty. A more in-depth analysis, however, shows the fallacy of mono-causal interpretations. Human rights organisations justifiably focus on the extralegal use of violence by state authorities. This, however, sometimes causes armed non-state actors to be cast in a positive light, turning hardened and potentially violent Islamic ideologues into “forest brothers” à la Robin Hood, who have taken up arms against brutal state authorities. Since the end of 2009, Russia’s political leaders have frequently pointed to socio-economic problems as being the Federation’s principal challenge in the North Caucasus. Even this is a one-dimensional explanation, which obscures other factors of a historical, cultural, ethnic or religious nature.

Of course the economic measures that are now supposed to be introduced in the North Caucasus will not supersede the *siloviki*’s hold on this region of high insecurity. While economic development and modernisation should be promoted, more investment capital should flow into the region, and tourism in particular should be expanded, at the same time this will be linked with a renewed assault on criminality and terrorism, which will bring with it more rigid control measures.

### Socio-economic Problems and Corruption

In terms of unemployment, subsidies from the federal budget, income polarisation, economic criminality and corruption in the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus is *the* crisis zone. The president’s new special representative to the North Caucasus concluded in May 2010 that the region is currently in a phase characterised by income redistribution and economic power struggles. The entirety of Russia already went through such a phase in the 1990s. In the North Caucasus, this process has manifested itself in the

form of fighting between clans, gang warfare, and ethnic conflicts.<sup>41</sup>

Foreign analysis of the situation, and increasingly Russian analysis, as well, points to systematic corruption as the main factor responsible for the precarious security situation. This corruption is particularly prevalent in the law enforcement bodies and security forces of the Caucasian republics. It represents the greatest hurdle to effectively combating terrorism and insurgencies. Systematic corruption along with state despotism and a “culture of impunity” vis-à-vis extralegal attacks by security forces are perpetuating the spiralling violence in the North Caucasus. All of these factors are contributing to making counter-terrorism efforts provide the ideal conditions for the radicalisation of broad segments of the population and their turn to violence. In addition, local security forces have been suspected of having played a hand in the preparation of terror acts.<sup>42</sup>

In March 2010, the President of Ingushetia specifically pointed to law enforcement bodies within his republic as being responsible for the increase in terrorism. “Since the very first day of my presidency, I have noticed that within the republic’s judiciary a caste has formed, which does as it pleases. For a given price, anyone can purchase a verdict from them.” The judiciary, thus chastened, countered with the warning that the executive branch was attempting to gain control over the judicial branch.<sup>43</sup>

In 2008, Transparency International registered the highest levels of corruption in Russia’s public sector in eight years. A full 29% of citizens indicated that they

<sup>41</sup> “Property Redistributed in Russia’s North Caucasus under Guise of Terrorism”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 27.5.2010.

<sup>42</sup> In 2002, militiamen in Karachay-Cherkessia apparently provided terrorists with falsified personal documents with which they were able to travel undisturbed to Moscow and take nearly one thousand people hostage in a musical theatre. Associated legal investigations were discontinued. Cf. Michael Ludwig, “Terror mit Hilfe korrupter Milizionäre” [Terror with the Assistance of Corrupt Militiamen], in: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2.7.2010, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Conflict Intensifies between Ingushetia’s President and Republican Judiciary”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (29.3.2010) 60.



had been compelled to pay bribes for public services they were already entitled to. According to the public opinion research centre VCIOM, 45% of people surveyed named corruption as Russia's biggest problem. Surveys conducted from December 2008 through May 2009 in six North Caucasian capital cities show that frustration over this state of affairs was far above average values here. In this case, local law enforcement bodies, the public school system and the health system were identified as the structures most eroded by corruption.<sup>44</sup>

Based on the wishes of President Medvedev and his special representative to the North Caucasian Federal District, specific sectors of the economy should be prioritised for reforms. These include first and foremost the tourism sector and the expansion of transportation infrastructure, as well as the agricultural, power generation and educational sectors. New positions should be created in these sectors, in particular for young people. The oligarch Roman Abramovich was pointed to as a shining example of regional economic commitment. As governor of Chukotka in the Russian Federation's most north-easterly reaches, he invested US\$1.3 billion out of his own pocket in his government, which increased economic performance and living conditions in this part of Siberia. In the Dagestani capital, Makhachkala, President Medvedev called for Russian businessmen to follow this example and invest in the North Caucasus.<sup>45</sup> Shortly thereafter, however, a new series of terrorist attacks in Moscow and Dagestan emphasised that past experience with the administration and investment activities in Siberia could hardly be transferred directly into a North Caucasian setting. It also became clear that the growth of tourism in the region would have to first be preceded by the establishment of basic standards of security.

### Jihad, Jama'at, Emirate: Islamist Mobilisation

Looking at the Muslim regions of Russia, or perhaps even the entirety of the post-Soviet region, it is the North Caucasus that has had the greatest exposure to radical Islamic influences during the post-Soviet era.

<sup>44</sup> *Severnyj Kavkaz v zerkale obščestvennogo mnenija. Korruptcija na Severnom Kavkaze* [The North Caucasus Reflected in Public Opinion. Corruption in the North Caucasus], Izdatel'stvo "Medium-Orient", Prague 2009, p. 10.

<sup>45</sup> "Medvedev Says Business Investment Should Normalize Situation in Caucasus", *RIA Novosti*, 1.4.2010.

The North Caucasus thus constitutes Russia's externally vulnerable internal abroad, as well as a region that Europe's security policy cannot risk ignoring due to its entanglement with jihadist networks. Two regions in the post-Soviet space are particularly affected by a radical Islamist mobilisation due to the instability of regional structures: the North Caucasus and areas in Central Asia proximate to Afghanistan. Analysis based on the number of registered acts of jihad-linked terrorism shows that conditions are actually more explosive in the North Caucasus, situated in the greater European region, than in the Central Asian area around Afghanistan.

Since the end of the First Chechen War in 1996, the ideology of armed resistance in the North Caucasus shifted more and more from nationalist struggle for independence to jihad. This development is extending beyond key Muslim areas and includes regions in southern Russia like Astrakhan as well as the Republic of North Ossetia, which has an Orthodox Christian majority and where Muslims make up only a third of the population. The regions which the "Muslim area" covers are interpreted very broadly by Islamists. In March 2010, Doku Umarov, the "Emir of the Caucasus" called for "Muslim lands" to be liberated, with which he expressly meant the regions of Krasnodar, Astrakhan and the Volga Basin with its majority Russian Orthodox population.<sup>46</sup> In determining the extent of Islamist violence, information from official security bodies should be viewed with caution. This is just as true for Central Asia as it is for Russia's republics in the Caucasus. Fighters died in the name of "Islamic terrorism" in both regions when they rose up in revolt against existing power structures. During fighting in 1999 against so-called Wahhabis in North Caucasian republics like Dagestan, the distinction between religiously observant forces and militant forces fell by the wayside. The undifferentiated approach taken by state authorities subsequently led more than ever to the radicalisation of a post-Soviet Islamic "rebirth".

There are diverging views on the organisational patterns of a "Caucasian guerrilla". On the one hand, the loosely structured network and the autonomy of local cells and groups (Jama'at) is evidenced. On the other hand, however, there seems to be a certain dependence on a centralised structure, the "Caucasian

<sup>46</sup> "Russia: Chechen Rebel Leader Vows to 'Liberate' Krasnodar, Volga Basin", *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 6.3.2010.

Emirate”, in addition to connections to globally active jihad groups. “We are facing a tightly knit, very conspirative network,” according to Ingushetian President Yevkurov. He is convinced that North Caucasian terror cells are collaborating with al-Qaida, the Taliban, and the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan*. “Documents found during arrests and executions verify such connections.”<sup>47</sup> Other observers, on the other hand, emphasise the location-specific character of the resistance that is morphing into militant jihad in the North Caucasus. A striking characteristic of this resistance is that it is changing several ways. It is not just that the secular-nationalist reasons for fighting are being replaced more and more by an Islamic ideology. A generational change can also be observed in addition to a certain decentralisation and a lack of concrete political objectives.

While the militant separatism of the “Chechen Revolution” in the 1990s was limited to the Chechen territory, an Islamic ideology for fighting has now spread throughout the entire North Caucasus. The backwards-looking utopia they are striving for is a “Caucasian Emirate” based on Sharia Law, but there is little mention of political objectives or concrete demands on their opponents. When the last Chechen underground President Doku Umarov announced this “Emirate” in October 2007, the transition from a nationalist-separatist Chechen resistance to a diffuse regional jihad was completed. At this point, the project aimed at creating a secular “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria” separate from Russia also ceased to exist. Traces of this failed project live on in the form of a number of Chechen politicians living in exile. The “Emirate” apparently integrates the Caucasian guerrillas into a hierarchical structure. The ideological point of reference for its transnational dimensions, however, is not so much the restoring of an Islamic caliphate as is sought by Islamic movements in Central Asia like Hizb ut-Tahrir. Instead, the “Emirate” leans more on a regional historical precursor, the North Caucasian Islamic state of Imam Shamil that resisted Russia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In its efforts to surmount ethnic divides among the Muslim elements in the Caucasus, however, the “Emirate” has reached beyond the Caucasus to Russia’s heartland.

47 “Wenn einer von zehn Terroristen bekehrt wird, wäre das ein Fortschritt.” [“If one in ten terrorists were converted, that would be an improvement.”] Interview with Yunus-bek Yevkurov, in: *Spiegel Online*, 18.4.2010, <[www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,689429,00.html](http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/0,1518,689429,00.html)>.

A more recent precursor for this expansion from a Chechen resistance to a regional resistance movement can be found in the *Caucasus Front*, which was created by Shamil Basayev during the Second Chechen War and assembled from different regional groups. Local jama’at were integrated into the Front, for example a group named *Sharia* as the main part of a Dagestani front, while *Yarmuk* became the key jihadist element in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria. Shortly after the death of Basayev in 2006, Umarov announced the creation of additional fronts: the Ural and Volga Fronts, which now target Russia’s interior. The next step was the proclamation of the “Emirate” in 2007.

It is hard to discern exactly how many armed fighters this “virtual theocracy” has at its disposal. Sources range from several hundred to at most several thousand across the entire region. Smaller units of the “Emirate’s Army” are present in all of the North Caucasian republics. The body coordinating their actions is a military council (shura) made up of key field commanders and advisors to “Emir” Umarov. The “Emirate” also counts its own secret service (muhabarat) among its other military bodies. Its main legal body is a sharia court. In the summer of 2010, the “Emirate” consisted of a series of so-called national jama’at: al-Garib (Adygea), Nogai Steppe (Stavropol region as well as northern parts of Chechnya and Dagestan), Circassia, Yarmuk (Kabardino-Balkaria), Sharia-Ingushetia, Sharia-Dagestan and Chechnya. At this point, however, there are suggestions of coming power struggles. There is confusing information circulating about a resignation by Umarov, about the dismissal of Movladi Udugov, probably the longest serving ideologue of the “Chechen Revolution”, and about a split between Chechen leaders and other Caucasian leaders within the “Emirate”. Some experts have already predicted the collapse of the “Emirate”.<sup>48</sup> Apparently fights over the ideological direction of the “Emirate” are playing out here between Islamists and Nationalists.<sup>49</sup>

It remains unclear just which territory the “Emirate” has control over and where its leaders are currently located. Its presence is primarily visible on the internet, where it actively spreads propaganda.<sup>50</sup> This is

48 Mairbek Vatchagaev, “‘Palace Coup’ Reveals Split between Umarov and Rebel Commander Aslanbek Vadalov”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (6.8.2010) 152; “Russian Paper Sees Split between Chechen, Other North Caucasus Militants”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newslines—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 17.8.2010.

49 Valery Dzutsev, “Ingushetia’s Islamists Adopt Nationalist Rhetoric”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (7.10.2010) 181.

50 According to the websites hunafa.com and jamaat-

where the “Emirate” has been fighting—and not without success—its ideological battles. Video clips are used to show the actions of militants and the sermons of “martyrs”. Although there is very little goodwill among the local population towards radical Islamists, particularly those who draw inspiration from abroad, these Islamic websites with their heroic calls for action appeal to young Caucasians. Various internet forums are used by young people, who themselves are not involved in the resistance movement, to express their sympathies for the “mujahedeen”.<sup>51</sup>

Instead of operating according to the vertical hierarchy of an “Emirate”, the Caucasian guerrillas in local jama’at have loose horizontal connections and act in a more or less autonomous fashion.<sup>52</sup> Any given group includes, at most, several dozen active fighters. According to Kabardino-Balkaria’s Ministry of the Interior, the core military element of the Yarmuk group active in this Republic totals around 50 individuals.<sup>53</sup> The decentralised character of the Caucasian guerrillas makes them into an amorphous and intangible opponent for the Russian Federation’s security apparatus. A generational change has also taken place. Some of the political and ideological leaders of the

shariat.com.

**51** On the topic of the “Caucasian Emirate”, see Kevin Daniel Leahy, “Reconciling Sharia with Realpolitik: The International Outlook of the Caucasus Emirate”, in: *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 10 (10.12.2008) 24, p. 9–11, <<http://www.cacianalyst.org/files/081210Analyst.pdf>>; *ibid.*, “Umarov’s Caucasus Emirate: Zero-sum or Capable of Compromise?”, in: *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, 10 (15.10.2008) 20, p. 9–11, <<http://cacianalyst.org/files/081015Analyst.pdf>>; Falkowski/Marszewski, *The “Tribal Areas” of the Caucasus* [same as Fn. 12], p. 57–61. On the topic of the power struggle in the “Emirate” since the summer of 2010, see Musa Muradov, “Doku Umarov ostalsja bez čečenskogo krylja” [Doku Umarov Remains Without Chechen Wings], in: *Kommersant*, 22.9.2010. On Doku Umarov as a person and his career, see Kevin Daniel Leahy, “From Racketeer to Emir: A Political Portrait of Doku Umarov, Russia’s Most Wanted Man”, in: *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, 4 (Summer 2010) 3, p. 248–270.

**52** Igor Dobaev, “The Northern Caucasus: Spread of Jihad”, in: *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 55 (2009) 1, p. 49–56; Andrew McGregor, *Military Jama’ats in the North Caucasus: A Continuing Threat*, Washington, D.C.: Jamestown Foundation, 2006, <[http://www.jamestown.org/fileadmin/Recent\\_Reports/Trans\\_amd\\_Speaker\\_NCC09142006/McGregor-14Sep06.pdf](http://www.jamestown.org/fileadmin/Recent_Reports/Trans_amd_Speaker_NCC09142006/McGregor-14Sep06.pdf)>. For the historical background, see Georgi Derlugian, “The Forgotten Complexities of the North Caucasus Jihad”, in: Bruce Grant/Lale Yalcin-Heckmann (Ed.), *Caucasus Paradigms. Anthropologies, Histories and the Making of a World Area*, Berlin 2007, p. 75–92.

**53** “Some 50 Militants Active in Russia’s Kabarda-Balkaria—Deputy Minister”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 14.1.2010.

“Emirate”, such as 46-year old Doku Umarov or Movladi Udugov, the main propagandist for the Chechen National Movement during the first war from 1994 to 1996, arose during the “Chechen Revolution” generation under Dzhokhar Dudayev. Overall, however, the age of members of the Caucasian resistance has dropped considerably.

The 29-year old chairman of an Ingushetian youth organisation estimated that around 15 percent of his classmates had taken “to the wood”, that is, they had joined the underground resistance. Oftentimes, they had left their homes so abruptly that the parents received no warning at all.<sup>54</sup> In some Russian sources, the Islamic networks are also referred to using the term “youth jama-at”. There has been little research conducted concerning the social profile of these people. In February 2006, Kabardino-Balkaria’s Ministry of the Interior presented a social portrait of the 166 terrorists who had been involved in the October 2005 attack on authorities in the capital, Nalchik. Of these, 87% were young men aged 30 or younger, 20% had received advanced schooling or university education, and only 1.2% had failed to finish basic schooling.<sup>55</sup> This information cast doubts on the oft-repeated theory that unemployed and uneducated young adults, which constitute a large portion of the North Caucasian population, serve as the main sources of recruits for the jihad.

Still, when analysing the causes for the crisis in the North Caucasus, an emphasis belongs on the problems faced by the younger portions of the population. Studies by the CSIS provide a particularly in-depth observation of their situation.<sup>56</sup> An opinion poll from 2006 of 1200 young men in three North Caucasian provinces showed that the respondents viewed miserable economic conditions and poor governance as key problems. In terms of the social and political role of Islam and the definition of jihad, there was evidence that only a minority of the young men were inclined towards the radical Islamist ideology.<sup>57</sup> This is particularly true of older population groups, who practiced

**54** Ellen Barry, “In Caucasus, Two Leaders Vie for Loyalty”, in: *New York Times*, 17.4.2010, <<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/04/18/world/europe/18ingushetia.html?ref=europe>>.

**55** Dobaev, “The Northern Caucasus: Spread of Jihad” [same as Fn. 52], p. 53.

**56** According to Theodore E. Gerber/Sarah Mendelson, “Security through Sociology: The North Caucasus and the Global Counterinsurgency Paradigm”, in: *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 32 (September 2009) 9, p. 831–851.

**57** *Ibid.*, p. 838.

Islam during Soviet times as a traditional custom, but tend to reject religious purism.

Nevertheless, Islamists in the North Caucasus advocate a radical ideology encompassing all areas of life, including religion, politics, and social life. The jihad has spawned Islamist careers, whose lists include Russian names. Religious converts become especially active as propagandists for the “Caucasian Emirate”. A new generation of military and ideological leaders holds up the names of two men in particular, who were killed during a special operation by security forces in March 2010: Alexander Tikhomirov and Anzor Astemirov. Tikhomirov was born to a Russian-Buryati family and grew up in Buryatia, an eastern Siberian republic with Buddhist titular nationality. As a child, he lived in a Buddhist monastery, but subsequently converted to Islam. He then studied in religious schools in Egypt and joined the jihad in the North Caucasus in the summer of 2008. Using the name Sheikh Said Buryatsky, he became the most effective recruiter of the “Emirate”.<sup>58</sup> Russian authorities blamed him for the attack on the Nevsky Express in November 2009 in addition to other terrorist actions. Anzor Astemirov of Kabardino-Balkaria rose to a position of Islamic prominence under the name Emir Saifullah. The attacks by *Yarmuk* against security structures within his native republic have been attributed to him. He has been credited as one of the people who inspired the proclamation of the “Emirate”. Following the elimination of these young guerrilla leaders, Russian security forces claimed that their deaths provoked the subsequent terror attacks on the Moscow Metro. Doubts have been raised, however, due to the time required for planning such a mission.

## The External Dimension of North Caucasian Jihadism

Allusions within the Russian media to al-Qaida raise the question about the extend of connections between the Caucasian guerrillas and the global jihad. In recent times, Russia has paid much closer attention to the poor security situation in Afghanistan. Within this context, the North Caucasus is also more tightly linked with global security issues, with Russia complaining in particular about the transportation of

drugs from Afghanistan across the CIS region. Viktor Ivanov, Russia’s most senior anti-narcotics official, blamed failed anti-narcotics policies by the western allies in Afghanistan for “heroin pressure on Russia”. In the North Caucasus, the quantities of drugs stemming from Afghanistan multiplied several fold in 2009 compared to the previous year. According to Ivanov, destabilisation in the region and the high crime rate could be traced back to the trade in drugs from Afghanistan.<sup>59</sup> The USA has also increasingly linked militant Islamists in the North Caucasus with the global jihad. Daniel Benjamin, Coordinator for Counterterrorism at the Department of State, drew a connection between the North Caucasus and al-Qaida after a suicide attack shook the North Ossetian capital, Vladikavkaz, killing 17 people on 7 September 2010.<sup>60</sup>

There are many indications of Islamic cells in the North Caucasus being linked to Afghanistan, Pakistan and al-Qaida, but nothing tangible. It is known that in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which has become a centre of attraction for global jihad tourism, there are also entrenched mujahedeen from the CIS region—primarily Uzbeks, but also fighters from Chechnya and other parts of the Caucasus. Within the jihad groups fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan such as the *Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan* or the *Islamic Jihad Union*, there are also fighters from the Caucasus as well as others from many other parts of the Islamic world and Western Europe. There is no distinguishable component specific to the North Caucasus.

There is no doubt that the influence of external Islamic forces increased when the Chechen resistance transformed from a national independence movement to a regional jihad. Volunteers from various parts of the Islamic world had already been active during the First Chechen War, which was still largely defined by the fight for national independence.

The influx of jihad activists into the North Caucasus, principally coming from Saudi Arabia, but also from Yemen, Egypt and Kuwait, increased over the years from 1997 through 1999. During the Second Chechen War, this external influence abated for a number of reasons. Financial flows to armed groups were more closely monitored following 11 September 2001, Chechnya’s borders were controlled more tight-

<sup>58</sup> “Tod eines Jihad-Ideologen im Nordkaukasus” [Death of a Jihad Ideologue in the North Caucasus], in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 10.3.2010, p. 7 <http://>.

<sup>59</sup> “Russian Official Blames USA, UN for Worsening Drug Threat from Afghanistan”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 3.3.2010.

<sup>60</sup> *Georgian Journal*, 16.–22.9.2010, p. 3.

ly, and hostility grew within the Caucasian populace towards foreign Islamists. Since 2007, renewed interest in developments in the North Caucasus and the “Caucasian Emirate” can be observed in Arabic media and internet forums.<sup>61</sup>

Since the mid-1990s, the catchword “Wahhabism” has circulated, indicating an externally influenced radicalisation in the process of an “Islamic rebirth” in the post-Soviet region. With allusion to the Wahhabism in Saudi Arabia, all neo-fundamentalist movements were collected under this umbrella term, which stressed their foreign origins. In recent years, the more appropriate terms Salafism or Salafis have been applied, which describe the diversity of radical and puristic Islamic orientations. In the North Caucasus, in particular, there has been evidence of conflict between the Wahhabist or Salafist orientations and traditional Caucasian Islam. A generation of young Muslims that has rebelled against the religious traditions of their parents was exposed to certain external influences. Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to consider Islamic cells in Kabardino-Balkaria or Dagestan as being primarily local branches of al-Qaida and to then place them as elements of an Islamic axis running between the North Caucasus, Central Asia and Afghanistan. Such an interpretation would be obscuring the specific local conditions of the Islamic opposition grounded in the North Caucasus, making Islamist violence solely responsible for the region’s instability. The majority of the people in the North Caucasian republics reject Salafist interference into their national and cultural heritage. In 1999, Dagestanis rose up to offer broad opposition to just this sort of interference from Chechnya, which Moscow then used to start its second military campaign against the renegade republic.

When President Medvedev declared in 2009 that the North Caucasus was a challenge faced by Russia as a whole, he connected the unacceptable conditions in this region with Russia’s homemade problems. He referred to the lack of political attention to socio-economic shortcomings in the region, the limited prospects for young people, and the endemic corruption and clientism.<sup>62</sup> Despite this admission that Russian policies had failed in the North Caucasus, the prevailing trend continued to be to attribute problems to

<sup>61</sup> Murad Batal al-Shishani, “Salafi-Jihadis and the North Caucasus: Is There a New Phase of the War in the Making?”, in: *Terrorism Monitor*, 8 (8.7.2010) 27.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. “Russlands nordkaukasisches Jahr” [Russia’s North Caucasian Year], in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 7.1.2010.

foreign activities and intrigues. In the previously cited survey on the North Caucasus conducted by the public opinion research centre VCIOM in the summer of 2009, the following question was asked: “What is causing the increase in terrorist attacks and tension?” The most common answers were “active support of local bandit groups by external forces, which seek to force back Russian influence in the Caucasus” and “fighting over resources in the Caucasian republics”. Less frequently mentioned were internal causes such as “inaction and weakness of the Russian Federation’s state power in the Caucasus” or “internal power struggles”.<sup>63</sup> Since 2009, Russian commentators have accused Georgia in particular of seeking to destabilise the North Caucasus in order to exact revenge for the war it lost against Russia and the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Conspiracy theories are circulating regarding cooperation between the Georgian secret service and al-Qaida aimed at infiltrating the region with Islamist elements.<sup>64</sup> Allegedly, foreign terror specialists have been training fighters in Georgian military camps to carry out attacks on Russian territory.<sup>65</sup>

The USA and other western actors are also occasionally accused of seeking to bring about the collapse of multi-ethnic Russia and therefore targeting the weakest point in its periphery, the North Caucasus. The West doesn’t even shy away from supporting Islamic fighters in the North Caucasus—just as before when combating the Soviet Union in Afghanistan. This coincides with perceived threats in the new Russian military doctrine signed by President Medvedev in February 2010. Within this document, “attempts by (foreign powers) to destabilise individual states and regions and to undermine their strategic security” rank second after NATO expansion into the post-Soviet region on a list of eleven “external military threats to Russia”.<sup>66</sup> In 2009, Russia considered reinforcing

<sup>63</sup> Surveys by VCIOM, 25./26.7.2009, <<http://wciom.ru/novosti/press-vypusk/single/12252.html>>; *Nordkaukasus—Russlands inneres Ausland?* [North Caucasus—Russia’s Internal Abroad?] [same as Fn. 2], p. 24, <[www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen194.pdf](http://www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen194.pdf)>.

<sup>64</sup> “Georgia Dismisses Russia’s Latest Accusation of Al-Qa’idah Links”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newline—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 3.2.2010.

<sup>65</sup> “Russian Ministry Says Has Documentary Evidence of ‘Terrorists’ Trained in Georgia”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newline—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 16.1.2010.

<sup>66</sup> *Voennaja doktrina Rossijskoj Federacii* [Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation], 5.2.2010, <[http://news.kremlin.ru/ref\\_notes/461](http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/461)>.

troops in the North Caucasus<sup>67</sup> because the security structures there could possibly fail to withstand an attack from the South. This argument insinuates an existing threat from Georgia. A Caucasian expert addressed this argument as follows: “In reality, it is not so much about Georgia, which hardly can threaten Russia in any way, but about the overall situation in the region. Armed opposition is no longer seen as something ephemeral. Its roots have expanded into almost all the national republics of the North Caucasus.”<sup>68</sup>

### Islamic Traditionalism versus Islamist Radicalisation

Islam, however, is not only being used as an instrument by groups that oppose Russia or the local regimes. In Chechnya, President Ramzan Kadyrov is working on the Islamisation of public life with the aim of adding ideological reinforcement for his rule and protecting it from militant Islamists. In this case, he is harking back to a so-called Caucasian Islam shaped by Sufi traditions with which he is seeking to force back external Islamic influences. It was within the context of this programme that in the Chechen capital, Grozny the largest mosque in Russia and Europe was built. The mosque was named for Akhmad Kadyrov, father and predecessor of the current president, and a former Chechen mufti. Spiritual leaders and politicians from many Islamic countries attended the opening ceremony, but the leaders of the neighbouring Caucasian republics were noticeably absent. Ramzan Kadyrov has increasingly practiced his own foreign policy within the Islamic world. He has planned grandiose celebrations for February 2011 in Grozny to mark the prophet’s birthday.<sup>69</sup>

Kadyrov has committed to a local Sufi Order to evoke a religious and national Chechen identity that is compatible with Chechnya’s Russian affiliation. Thus, in addition to the main mosque, the *Russian Islamic University* was also founded in Grozny. It bears the name of Kunta-haji, the leader of a branch of the Qadiriyyah Order. Following the devastating war of

North Caucasian Muslims in Dagestan and Chechnya against the Czar’s armies in 1834–1859, Kunta-haji provided religious legitimisation to the subordination of the Chechens to Russian rule, seeing that a continuation of the fighting would have meant the annihilation of entire North Caucasian peoples. It is within this ideological context that the official Islamic authorities are now expressing their loyalty to Russia’s dominion.<sup>70</sup>

There are, however, two weak points to this strategy. Firstly, as history has shown, the usage of ethnically diverse Caucasian Islam is not particularly suited to creating national cohesion. Considering the region’s competing brotherhoods, this seems more supportive of a type of particularism, which otherwise is underscored by the tribal segmentation of Chechen society and other Caucasian societies. Secondly, Chechnya’s cultural distance from Russia and its secular constitution will be marked more than ever by this official Islamisation of Chechnya, emphasising the characterisation of the North Caucasus as an internal abroad. Russian commentators point out that all of Chechnya’s schools will soon have flags with Qur’an quotations hanging next to pictures of the local leader. They pose the question as to how much longer such things will be compatible with Moscow’s support for Kadyrov. While other states in the post-Soviet region posted bans on women wearing veils in schools and government buildings—as in Tajikistan in Central Asia—Kadyrov’s campaign in Chechnya includes requiring women to comply with Islamic codes of dress when in public. This Chechen experiment is viewed with suspicion throughout the rest of Russia, particularly in the neighbouring Caucasian republics.<sup>71</sup> In Dagestan under the new rule of President Magomedov, on the other hand, there are more and more indications that Kadyrov’s strategy may be emulated. Here as well, the state is supporting a traditional local Islam over the underground Islamic elements. The President prides himself on his “efforts to eradicate gambling houses, drug addiction and alcoholism”.<sup>72</sup>

<sup>67</sup> *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 29.10.2009.

<sup>68</sup> Mairbek Vatchagaev, “Moscow and Grozny Evince Growing Nervousness over Regional Security”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6 (9.11.2009) 206.

<sup>69</sup> “Chechen Leader Proposes High-level International Islamic Festivities in 2011”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 26.2.2010.

<sup>70</sup> “Chechen Religious Figures Voice Support for Russian Authorities”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 8.5.2010.

<sup>71</sup> “The Envy of the Neighbours: Chechnya’s Imams Fight Radicalism with Islamization of the Republic”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 23.10.2009.

<sup>72</sup> Quoted in: Matthias Schepp, “Tragt Chaos in ihre Reihen” [Bring Chaos to Their Ranks], in: *Der Spiegel*, (26.7.2010) 30, p. 95.

In Russia's Muslim regions, religious and political causes for conflict can be found not only within the context of a radicalised and oppositional Islam, but also from the official state-aligned Islam. Ramzan Kadyrov has started an Islamisation process that is not only evident in his republic. In the last two years, he has increasingly taken on a role as the spokesperson for Russian Islam on a national and international stage.<sup>73</sup>

In addition, there are continual power struggles within the official clergy.<sup>74</sup> While the Muftiate is still seen as primarily aligned with the state, there is no categorical distinction between it and radical Islam. In May 2010, the Mufti of North Ossetia was accused during an interview of expressing sympathy for militant jihad and cultivating contacts with mujahedeen. He was subsequently removed from his post.<sup>75</sup>

### **Renaissance of Ethnic Nationalism: Danger of Separatism?**

During the transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period, "ethnic entrepreneurs", who mobilised popular fronts in the North Caucasus, shaped the scene of political and societal movements and unrest. The first inter-ethnic armed conflict of post-Soviet Russia erupted in this region in 1992. Ossetians and Ingushs fought over an area of land near the North Ossetian capital, Vladikavkaz. The refugee problems that this conflict caused have remained unresolved to this day. This military dispute was quickly overshadowed, however, by the Chechen secessionist movement, which would lead to the most violent conflict in post-Soviet history. After this, ethno-nationalistic elements lost ground, but trans-ethnic Islamic appeals gained more and more support. Citing recent devel-

<sup>73</sup> On 30 November 2009, he was the first to judge the controversial Swiss referendum on banning the construction of minarets: "This sort of thing plays right into the hands of Wahhabis and other organisations, who take it upon themselves to characterise Europa as islamophobic [...] In this respect, Russia serves as an example of interdenominational cooperation and as having a wise policy on religion." *Interfax*, 30.11.2009.

<sup>74</sup> On the issues of disputes and the fragmentation of Russia's mufti clergy, see Uwe Halbach, *Rußlands Welten des Islam* [Russia's Worlds of Islam], Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, April 2003 (SWP-Studie 15/2003), p. 23–25.

<sup>75</sup> Valery Dzutsev, "Removal of North Ossetian Mufti Sparks Fears Its Muslims May Choose Radical Path", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (25.5.2010) 101.

opments, Russian experts point to a revival in ethnic nationalism in the North Caucasus.<sup>76</sup> The binational "hyphenated republics" Karachay-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria are being shaken by the political factionalism of their two eponymous ethnic groups, with each of the smaller groups contesting the "ethnocracy" of the larger group. Ethnic conflicts are being stirred up by current problems in terms of communal administrative reforms, the distribution of land within polyethnic federal subjects, and competition among local leaders. This presents a dilemma for Russian policy towards the region. On the one hand, attention must be paid to proportional representation vis-à-vis ethnicity when appointing people to offices in the North Caucasian republics, and disruptions to the delicate balance will not always be without consequence. On the other hand, any reform-oriented personnel policy in the North Caucasus has to give precedence to professional criteria over any principle of descent.

In some of the republics, the ruling elites might be inclined to come forward in support of ethnic nationalism over militant Islamism. This would be a dangerous and incorrect course of action for the North Caucasus. Soviet nationality policies have imposed bizarre and conflict-prone patterns of "national state-building" and inner-Soviet demarcations on the colourful ethnogram of the North Caucasus.

National unification movements in the quieter western reaches of the region have drawn particular attention. The "Circassian question" is becoming a tricky ethno-political issue for Russia and an example of unresolved history. The ethnonym "Circassian" includes a number of ethnic groups in the north-western Caucasus, who are closely linked by language: Adyghe, Kabardins, Shapsugs, Abazins, etc. Prior to the conclusion of the Caucasian War in 1864, the Circassians made up the largest ethnic group in the North Caucasus. Afterwards, they became a tiny group within a colony that has now been settled by Russian, Ukrainians and other population groups during the Czar's rule. War, famines and expulsions thinned out the autochthonous population so extensively that their descendents want to designate this process as a genocide. According to a census in 2002, a total of 700,000 Circassians now live in Russia. In addition, there are an estimated three million people with Circassian ancestry in Turkey and several hundred

<sup>76</sup> Sergei Markedonov, "The North Caucasus—2009: In the Zone of Heightened Turbulence", *Politkom.ru*, 29.12.2009.

thousand in Jordan, Syria, Israel, the USA and other countries. In recent times, the Circassian communities strewn across the world have been increasingly communicating via the internet<sup>77</sup> and have now formed a movement that is causing problems for Russia. The Circassian question, after all, is linked for Moscow with an outstanding prestige project, which has already caused numerous problems including a tremendous cost explosion: the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics.<sup>78</sup> From the viewpoint of the Circassian movement, the Olympic grounds are located on a “site of historical genocide”. It is advocating against the project on a website designed for this sole purpose.<sup>79</sup> As a result, Moscow’s nervousness towards the movement’s activities will certainly rise in the near future.<sup>80</sup> The Circassians, like no other ethnic group, see themselves as victims of a Czarist and, later, Stalinist policy of “divide and conquer”. In their view, their historical homeland has been split by this policy into six territorial units. The more radical elements within the movement are demanding that these territories be reunited. One of these territories just happens to be Sochi.

Considering this ethnic group’s global diaspora, the Circassian question represents for Moscow a classic example of the external dimension of Caucasian problems. When Alexander Khloponin visited Karachay-Cherkessia in April 2010, he claimed that certain powers were trying to destabilise the North Caucasus from without by way of the Circassian question. The new special representative to the North Caucasus interfered with the ethno-political balance of power in the binational republic by demanding that an ethnic Circassian be placed at the head of the government. For over 20 years, there has been a formula of propor-

tional representation for the main ethnicities, namely the Turkic Karachays (40% of the population), Russians (34%) and Circassians (19%): a Karachay as president, a Circassian as the head of government, a Russian as the head of parliament. This proportional representation was disrupted by President Boris Yevseyev, who appointed a Greek to head the executive branch, thereby provoking the Circassian community. The republic’s leaders were hesitant to comply with Khloponin’s demand. The unification efforts of the Circassian movement in Karachay-Cherkessia currently represent the greatest threat to the existing territorial status of a North Caucasian republic.<sup>81</sup> In response to this threat, there have been repeated attacks on Circassian activists. On 12 May 2010, the Circassian politician Fral Shebzukhov, an advisor to President Yevseyev, was murdered in the middle of the street.

The interference of federal powers in local political institutions risks provoke or deepen local ethnic disputes. This even includes seemingly harmless measures such as one proposed by President Medvedev in December 2009 regulating the number of representatives in regional parliaments of the Russian Federation.<sup>82</sup> According to these regulations, a number of smaller republics would receive markedly fewer seats in parliament. This would have resulted in a parliamentary reconfiguration and would call into question the painstakingly crafted balance among the different ethnic groups. In the multi-ethnic Republic of Dagestan, it is especially probable that intervention by Moscow into the local political balances of power and the proportional distribution of titles would have incited ethnic unrest. Until recently, political power in this republic had been based on a concordance model in which offices were filled based on ethnic and tribal negotiations. When the office of president was introduced in 2006, it changed the political system. This topic will be addressed later in greater detail.

The ethnic cause for conflict cannot, however, be equated with separatism in the sense of a radical breakaway from Russia. The conflict between Moscow and Chechnya since the 1990s caused this Caucasian republic to be seen by Russian and Western observers as something of a domino in terms of secessionist movements in Russia. The radical split of Chechnya

<sup>77</sup> Zeynel Abidin Besleney, “Circassian Nationalism and the Internet”, *openDemocracy*, 21.5.2010, <<http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/zeynel-abidin-besleney/circassian-nationalism-and-internet>>.

<sup>78</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Multiple Problems Plague Kremlin Plans for 2014 Sochi Olympic Games”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (27.5.2010) 103.

<sup>79</sup> <[www.nosochi2014.com](http://www.nosochi2014.com)>.

<sup>80</sup> Representatives of this movement set the following demands: 1. Recognition of the “genocide” on their ancestors, 2. Enabling the return of descendents of the diaspora to the North Caucasus, 3. Unification of all former Circassian territories into a single separate federal district, 4. An end to the falsification of history regarding the voluntary attachment of Circassians to Russia. Valery Dzutsev, “The Circassian Question Is Driving Change in the Northwest Caucasus”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (3.5.2010) 85.

<sup>81</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Breakup of Karachaevo-Cherkessia Becomes Subject of Public Debate”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (28.6.2010) 124.

<sup>82</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Restructuring Local Parliaments May Aggravate the Northern Caucasus Situation”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (11.1.2010) 6.



from Russia—long since reversed—remained however, a clear exception and has not resulted in a domino effect. In Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia, there emerged national movements among the smaller eponymous ethnic groups. These movements were not aimed at withdrawing from the Russian Federation though, but were instead focused more on sovereignty vis-à-vis the eponymous larger and more politically dominant ethnic groups. On the issue of potential for secession in Dagestan, the largest North Caucasian republic, its most well-known author Rasul Gamzatov once said: “Dagestan did not join Russia on its own accord and it will not voluntarily leave it again.”<sup>83</sup> Considering the republic’s current situation, this confirmation of Russia’s territorial integrity almost sounds like a threat.

**83** Quoted in: Sergej Markedonov, “Severnyj Kavkaz: Bezopasnost’, territorija, naselenie” [North Caucasus: Security, Territory, Population], *Politkom.ru*, 7.2.2008.

## The Federal *Vertical of Power* and Subnational Authoritarianism

Unlike in the South Caucasus where Georgians, for example, can look back on a history of national statehood stretching back into antiquity, most ethnic groups of the North Caucasus can hardly look back to a historical statehood with an autochthonous basis that extends beyond narrow local borders. The spectrum of political systems in this region ranges from feudal principalities as in Kabarda to decentralised free communities as in Chechnya. If North Caucasian peoples were integrated into larger states, then as external elements of multinational empires like Russia and the Soviet Union. It was the resistance of the hill tribes to Russia's colonial policies that inspired trans-ethnic political/religious unification for the first time in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Autochthonous state formation emerged in the eastern part of the region from out of the Islam-based fighting against the Czar's armies. The resulting Imamate had to capitulate in 1859 to their opponent's superior forces. Subsequent experiences with statehood were again externally driven. Sovietisation subjected the North Caucasus to a system of order, which suggested ethnic self-determination in the non-Russian periphery, but where Moscow made all the relevant political and economic decisions. A territorial arrangement based on ethnically-defined autonomous units created a bizarre and conflict-prone territorial system here, which even emanated forth from the names of the hyphenated republics like Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria or the Chechen-Ingush ASSR. A principle of ethnic territorialism was firmly anchored in a region characterised by a vast diversity of ethnicities, which caused manifold conflicts following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

During post-Soviet development within the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus, more than any other region, raised questions about the relation between federal and regional powers and about Russia's development since Vladimir Putin took office as president. The vertical of power created by the Kremlin stood in opposition to regional level authoritarianism in which the protagonists would go their own way while also expressly stating their loyalty to the central power. The most notorious such example is Chechnya under the leadership of Ramzan Kadyrov.

As for the creation of political power in national republics of the Russian Federation, comparisons are often drawn between Tatarstan and the North Caucasus. Both represent development situations that were temporarily outside of the reach of the Kremlin. In Tatarstan's case, during the term of its long-serving President Shaimiev, these developments were consistently positive. In the North Caucasus, however, there were more precarious developments.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, the North Caucasus had a considerable influence on determining the relationship between federal and regional power during the Putin presidency. Events in this region provided the impetus for streamlining the so-called vertical of power, which became the key catchword for political developments during the Putin era. This began in 2000 with the creation of seven larger federal districts. To President Putin, the Southern Federal District including the North Caucasus remained, from a strategic point of view, the most sensible greater region. The Russian president took a decisive step towards re-centralisation shortly after the worst terrorist act in the North Caucasus, namely the hostage taking in Beslan (North Ossetia) in 2004. He succeeded in ensuring that the regional leaders, which in the case of most republics were the presidents, would be jointly appointed by the Kremlin in cooperation with the regional parliaments; they would no longer be chosen by direct elections.

Russia's regional politics are currently characterised by a generational change among the local power elites. Regional leaders in power since the early 1990s departed in 2010, including the two most prominent patriarchs, the Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiev and his Bashkir counterpart Murtaza Rakhimov, in addition to other veterans like Vladimir Chub in Rostov (after 19 years in power), Nikolai Fedorov in Chuvashia (after 16 years) and Sergey Katanandov in Karelia (after 12 years). The most spectacular action in this regard was the replacement of Yury Luzhkov, who had been Moscow's mayor since 1992 and had built up a tremendous political and economic power base. The patriarchs are being replaced by a younger cadre,

<sup>84</sup> "Russia and its Regions. Beyond the Kremlin's Reach", in: *The Economist*, 30.1.-5.2.2010.

coming in some cases from the economic management sphere. In this fashion, President Medvedev has denoted his modernisation programme for Russia at the regional level.<sup>85</sup> In addition, the presidential title is being eliminated in more and more national republics—in accordance with the motto that Russia only has one president. This has already happened in ten of Russia's 21 republics.<sup>86</sup>

In recent years, new leaders have also been appointed to head republics. Despite the supposedly streamlined access to the regional level, the North Caucasus region continued to be the portion of the Russian Federation, where the power verticals have the least access. In 2004, the Kremlin appointed a thoroughly capable special representative to the North Caucasus in the person of Dmitry Kozak. Kozak, however, was sceptical of recentralisation and shared the opinion of other critics that a concentration of power in Moscow would not offer any guarantee of more effective control over developments in the different regions.<sup>87</sup> Various reasons were asserted for explaining the deficits in Russian policy towards the North Caucasus during the recentralisation phase. One of these was the highly personalised and almost feudal connections between Moscow and the Caucasian region.<sup>88</sup> Ingushetia became a symbol for the failure of the Kremlin's vertical of power in the North Caucasus. During the presidency of Murat Zyazikov, who had been taken from Russia's secret service apparatus and sent to the North Caucasus, particularly precarious relations formed between the local society and the government. Broad opposition grew in Ingushetia against the republic's leader.

At the start of 2010, there was a further change to relations between the federal level and the regions,

<sup>85</sup> Sergei Markedonov, "The End of an Era in Regional Politics", in: *Johnson's Russia List*, (30.7.2010) 143.

<sup>86</sup> In four of the republics—Komi, Chakassia, Altai and Karelia—there was never a presidential office. In four more—Mordovia, Tuva, North Ossetia and Kalmykia—the presidential title was eliminated between 1993 and 2005. On the other hand, it was introduced for the first time in Dagestan in 2006. In seven additional republics—including most of those in the North Caucasus—the presidents have indicated their readiness to change the name of the office. In 2010, the parliaments in Chechnya and Ingushetia consented to this change. Evgenij Kozyčev, "Gde ostalis' prezidenty?" [Where Have the Presidents Gone?], in: *Kommersant*, 3.9.2010.

<sup>87</sup> Darrell Slider, "Putin's 'Southern Strategy': Dmitriy Kozak and the Dilemmas of Recentralization", in: *Post Soviet Affairs*, 24 (2008) 2, p. 177–197.

<sup>88</sup> Malašenko, *Kavkaz, kotoryj my terjaem* [same as Fn. 4], p. 4.

which impacted the North Caucasus. On 12 November 2009, President Medvedev announced during his annual address to parliament that a special position would be created to ensure more targeted federal access to the problematic North Caucasian region. The media immediately started discussing a number of candidates for this position, including President Kadyrov of Chechnya, the previous special representative Dmitry Kozak, and the Kremlin magnates Vladislav Surkov and Sergei Ivanov. But it was a surprise candidate who was then named the new "manager of the Caucasus": Alexander Khloponin. He was the past governor of the east Siberian region of Krasnoyarsk, Russia's second largest region in terms of land area, and before that, the manager of the resources company Norilsk Nickel.

### The New North Caucasian Government and Its Viceroy

On 19 January 2010, the Kremlin decided that with the exception of the westernmost republic of Adygea all of the remaining Caucasian republics in the *Southern Federal District* would be separated from this district and collected into a district of their own. The new *North Caucasian Federal District* is composed of the republics of Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and the southern Russian region of Stavropol with its 2.7 million residents. The city of Pyatigorsk, located in the Stavropol region, acts as the district's capital. Adygea continues to be part of the Southern Federal District. This district with its capital Rostov contains the southern Russian regions of Krasnodar, Rostov, Volgograd, Astrakhan and the republic Kalmykia with its titular Buddhist nationality.

This reorganisation also carries with it a corresponding increase in the status of the Caucasus in federal politics. There has been varied analysis as to the degree of its raised profile within the Federation's structure. A sceptical opinion of the new situation follows: "A quasi-Muslim district has been created with republics that are all characterised by polyethnic demographic structures and conflicts. This serves to reflect the fact that the North Caucasus is a region that is both different and dangerous."<sup>89</sup> The depiction

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in: Aleksej Malašenko, "Podnjalsja nad urovnem morja" [It Rose Above the Sea Level], in: *Kommersant*, 20.1.2010.

of the new federal district as “Caucasian” and “Muslim” and therefore also “dangerous” is, however, questionable. Aside from Dagestan, the region’s largest and most populous federal subject is Stavropol Krai with its predominantly Russian population. In post-Soviet times, this region has increasingly taken on the character as a buffer zone against the Caucasian internal abroad, providing a counterbalance within the new federal district to the approximately six million residents with Caucasian ethnicity. The reasons given for locating the centre for the new Caucasian administrative unit within Stavropol Krai were its superior infrastructure and its function as an ostensibly neutral territory. Placing a “Caucasian viceroy” within one of the national republics would have provoked the other republics against it. Stavropol Krai, however, is hardly neutral territory and serves more as an arena for clashes between Russian and Caucasian nationalists. In the city of Stavropol, there have been repeated acts of violence between Chechens and Russians. On 26 May 2010, seven people died from a bombing of the city’s House of Culture and Sport prior to a concert by a Chechen musical group. Human rights organisations that deal with xenophobia and right-wing extremism in Russia attribute this terrorist act to extreme right-wing organisations that maintain militaristic and patriotic clubs in Stavropol as well as other parts of Russia.<sup>90</sup> The region has drawn attention due to its symbolic status as Russia’s colonial outpost in the Caucasus. In October 2008, a memorial was built in the Mineralnye Vody health resort to the Russian general Aleksey Yermolov. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, he had been unrivalled among the Czar’s governors in the savagery of the punitive strikes he initiated against elements of resistance from the hill tribes. Protests against this monument erupted even within the Chechen government, despite its close ties to Moscow. They decried the erection of the monument as disrespectful towards the people of the Caucasus.<sup>91</sup>

The Republic of Adygea with its eponymous minority ethnic group<sup>92</sup> belonging within the North-western Caucasian or Circassian ethnicities, remained within

the Southern Federal District. This cemented the Adyge’s administrative separation from the closely related ethnic groups, the Kabardins and Circassians, in the neighbouring republics. Commentators critical of this development saw this as an expression of a divide-and-rule policy that the Caucasian people had already been subjected to by Russia’s central government during the times of Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union. This policy is raising resistance in particular within the previously described Circassian unification movement.

The President’s special envoy to the new federal district is also, due to this office, afforded the title of a deputy prime minister. This makes Alexander Khloponin subordinate to both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin—something unprecedented in the Russian Federation’s administrative system. By naming an economic expert to fill this position, a position expected to be taken over by a *silovik*, President Medvedev emphasised a policy for the North Caucasus in line with his message of modernisation for the Russian Federation. He made it Khloponin’s responsibility to promote the region’s economic development.

The economic orientation of this new office is confirmed by the list of responsibilities assigned to the new governor of the Caucasus. He is supposed to work closely with the other eight deputy prime ministers on all issues affecting the North Caucasus. This includes aspects associated with monitoring financial aid to the region from the national budget, public investment projects and the development of an economically effective regional infrastructure.<sup>93</sup> According to the presidential administration, since the new representative to the Caucasus is also linked to the federal government as a deputy prime minister, he has the possibility to directly intervene into economic policy. Even if it were possible to implement economic reforms in a zone marked by such heightened instability, however, regional experts doubt whether these reforms represent the ideal solution for resolving conflicts in the North Caucasus. While underdevelopment, poverty and high levels of unemployment among young people are all key issues, these are by no means the only reasons for people resorting to violent means. Reactions to the attack on the Moscow Metro in late March 2010, however, once again brought to

<sup>90</sup> “Five Theories into Stavropol Blast Being Investigated, Suspects Checked”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newline—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 28.5.2010.

<sup>91</sup> Quoted in: Valery Dzutsev, “Russian Government and Public View North Caucasians with Suspicion”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (15.3.2010) 50.

<sup>92</sup> The Adyge make up only 24% of the Republic’s population. 65% of the people here are ethnic Russians.

<sup>93</sup> “Aleksandr Chloponin polučil spisok objazannostej” [Alexander Chloponin Kept His Task List], in: *Kommersant*, 2.2.2010.

the fore another side of Russia's Caucasus policy, one that had long dominated the discourse. Once again there were pronouncements, including some from President Medvedev himself, in favour of a clampdown and extermination of the rebels down to the last man. On the regional level, for example in Dagestan, statements from political leaders in 2010 also oscillated between calling for new attempts at dialogue with the rebels and familiar invocations of extermination.

In the Russian media, Khloponin was compared even prior to taking office with the most powerful Czarist governors of the Caucasus.<sup>94</sup> At the same time, all of the commentary also pointed to the enormous, practically unmanageable challenges awaiting him. During a meeting with local administration cadres, President Medvedev warned against placing sole responsibility for modernising the region on the new man, and instead appealed to the others to show initiative of their own. Khloponin may have proven a successful manager and administrative leader in Siberia's Krasnoyarsk, where his merging of ethnic autonomies into new regional units proceeded smoothly, but in the Caucasus such an approach would meet with much greater levels of resistance. The first such resistance came as could be expected from Chechnya, where the local leader maintains direct contacts with the Kremlin and is highly unlikely to accept an intermediary positioned in between the federal and local levels of power. Khloponin's predecessor, Kozak, had also provoked the resistance of local power elites when he introduced a new administrative model in 2005. This included, for example, resistance to a new financial system for federal subjects particularly in need of subsidies (dotacionnye regiony). Towards the end of his term, there was increasing doubt regarding Kozak's effectiveness in the region. If Moscow wants to really increase its power in the North Caucasus, the entire current system of clientelism and the local power structures would have to be broken up, and the entirety of political power in the region would have to be redistributed. Such a step would carry considerable risks. Khloponin will have to assert himself not only vis-à-vis the local power elites, but also opposite federal players in the North Caucasus. In May 2010, he announced an effort to streamline branches of federal agencies in the region. This maze of administrative growth consists of 113 "federal territorial bodies" with over 20,000 state employees. In

<sup>94</sup> "Ermolov, Barjatinskij, Voroncov ... Chloponin", in: *Nezavisimaja gazeta*, 22.1.2010.

the future, Moscow's Ministry for Regional Development will coordinate and monitor all the activities of these administrative bodies.<sup>95</sup>

In addition to these administrative measures, a working group on the North Caucasus was set up in the Civic Chamber of the Russian Federation, the highest forum for civil society representation. This group is meant to work closely with Khloponin to sound out cooperation with non-governmental organisations on policies aimed at containing conflict. Furthermore, it should provide the special representative with information that is being provided to him in metered quantities, at best, by state bodies. The working group should also support Khloponin in his dialogue with civil society actors. The leader of the group sees the North Caucasus's main problem being "that the region feels completely cut off from the rest of Russia. So far, the dialogue with the Caucasus has been conducted in the language of the *siloviki*. The prevailing attitude is that the central federal government has only taken to the region in order to conduct military operations and combat terrorism."<sup>96</sup> The lack of intra-regional cooperation is also lamented, a problem which affects other parts of the post-Soviet region including Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Administrative boundaries between the North Caucasian republics serve as virtual state boundaries and draw rigid divisions.<sup>97</sup> In this context, a glimmer of hope became apparent in late 2009 when the republics of North Ossetia and Ingushetia, which had been enemies since 1992 due to an inter-ethnic conflict, signed an agreement outlining good neighbourly relations. One year later, however, this agreement was weighed down with significant pressures. Allegedly it was an Ingush man who killed 17 people on 7 September 2010 with a suicide attack in Vladikavkaz. This raised calls within the Ossetian public to seal the border to neighbouring Ingushetia. In May 2010, President Medvedev met for the first time with representatives of non-governmental organisations from the

<sup>95</sup> "In the past, the numerous territorial branches of the federal agencies located in the district operate separately of one another and follow their own interests. This makes the decision process much more difficult and prevents controlling the officials' activities", according to the special representative. "Aleksandr Chloponin skomandoval okrug perestroitsja" [Alexander Khloponin Has Prescribed a Perestroika for the District], in: *Kommersant*, 15.5.2010.

<sup>96</sup> "Kavkazu nužen dialog" [The Caucasus Needs the Dialogue], in: *Izvestija*, 28.1.2010.

<sup>97</sup> <www.gzt.ru>, 4.12.2009.

North Caucasus and Russian civil society activists. They decried the most dangerous deficits in the political culture of the North Caucasian republics: systemic corruption, widespread abuse of power in violation of human rights, and the deplorable condition of the judicial bodies. A Dagestani participant emphasised that extralegal use of state power in his homeland was providing fertile ground for martyrs and thus also for continually increasing instances of suicide attacks. He pointed to the torturing of terror suspects and persecution of their relatives for liability as precisely the activities that would prevent “return[ing] people from the forests”, and as representing a failed counterinsurgency-strategy.<sup>98</sup> While President Medvedev refused during the meeting to accept a dramatisation of the current situation in the North Caucasus as compared to developments during the Yeltsin era, President Medvedev himself used drastic terms to address key grievances: “Corruption is a crime in any region, and not only in the North Caucasus. But only in the Caucasus has it taken on an absolutely threatening form. It threatens, in essence, national security. It weakens state and social institutions. And unfortunately, in essence, the existing corruption is a case of directly aiding and abetting separatists and murderers who do their deeds in the territory of the North Caucasus [Federal] District.”<sup>99</sup>

## The Political Regimes in the Caucasian Republics

The leaders of the republics in the North Caucasus are now being obliged to come together into a team, which can pave the way for fundamental reforms. Reform efforts, however, have been aimed at representatives of local power structures, who have grown accustomed to having undisturbed control over money flows from the central government and therefore are not exactly welcoming a shift in Russia’s Caucasus policy with open arms.<sup>100</sup> The North Caucasus occupies an exceptional position in terms of the subna-

tional—or better, sub-federal—authoritarianism that evolved in Russia’s federal subjects in the 1990s.<sup>101</sup> At the same time, the local conditions for power structures vary across the Caucasian federal subjects. In Chechnya, which is largely homogeneous in terms of ethnicity, but characterised by clan structures (*teip*), political power is distributed differently than in the ethnically diverse Republic of Dagestan with its long standing ethnic concordance model. The initial situation in the binational republics Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachay-Cherkessia is also different, as the proportional representation is determined between the larger and smaller eponymous ethnic groups. There is also variance in terms of the connection between the society and the state, in particular the respective leaders of the republics. When it comes to popularity among the people, President Yunus-bek Yevkurov of Ingushetia was at the top of the list in 2009. His popularity rating accounted for a full 70% of the population, in stark contrast to his predecessor Murat Zyazikov under whose rule the state and society were at a virtual state of war. In May 2010, however, the vote of confidence in Yevkurov was far more modest at only 36%.<sup>102</sup> Ramzan Kadyrov had a popularity rating of 55% in 2009, Arsen Kanokov of Kabardino-Balkaria had 37%, Mukhu Aliyev who ruled Dagestan until 2010 had 22%, and Taymuraz Mamsurov in North Ossetia had 14%.<sup>103</sup> In order to give an impression of the at times considerable differences between political regimes, the two particularly contrasting systems in the neighbouring republics of Chechnya and Dagestan are presented here.

### The Private Kadyrovian State

Chechnya has passed through a number of different forms of political rule during the post-Soviet era. During the phase of radical separation from Russia Dzhokhar Dudayev, a former Soviet general with

<sup>98</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Medvedev Meets with Local NGO Leaders in Bid to Stabilize North Caucasus”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (20.5.2010) 98.

<sup>99</sup> Quoted in: “Russian President Rebukes Rights Official for Criticizing Caucasus Courts”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 19.5.2010.

<sup>100</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Chloponin’s Innovative Approach to the North Caucasus Faces Uphill Struggle”, in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (6.7.2010) 129.

<sup>101</sup> Vladimir Gelman, “Der subnationale Autoritarismus in Russland” [The Sub-national Authoritarianism in Russia], in: *Politik in Russlands Regionen*, 6.11.2009 (Russland-Analysen Nr. 191), p. 2–5, <[www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen191.pdf](http://www.laender-analysen.de/russland/pdf/Russlandanalysen191.pdf)>.

<sup>102</sup> “Only One Third of Ingush Trust Local Leader—Poll”, *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 12.5.2010.

<sup>103</sup> “Na Severnom Kavkaze najden pik populjarnosti” [The Peak of Popularity Was Found in the North Caucasus], in: *Kommersant*, 23.12.2009.

Chechen heritage, took charge at the head of the Chechen nationalist movement and the Republic. In the process, he developed autocratic tendencies, which did not sit well with historical political traditions of the Chechen people. In Chechen history, there had never been a centralised political power prior to the integration into the multi-ethnic Russian empire. Chechnya was organised into “free communities”. In resistance to the Russian armies during the First Chechen War from 1994 to 1996, a Chechen “nation” gathered around Dudayev, who was killed in April 1996. His successor was Aslan Maskhadov, who was elected to the office of President of the “Chechen Republic of Ichkeria” in a January 1997 election monitored by the OSCE. Maskhadov, however, was unable to assert state monopoly of power against autonomous particularist forces such as field commanders from the first war and warlords like Shamil Basayev. During its rebellion from the Russian Federation from 1996 to 1999, the republic was unable to achieve internal or external sovereignty and became a “black hole of lawlessness”. During the Second Chechen War, Russia established a regime headed by the former Mufti Akhmad Kadyrov and his clan.

Since 2007, political developments in Chechnya have been labelled as “Kadyrovisation” or “Ramzanisation”. This is a reference to the privatisation of political power by the local leader. On the one hand, these catchwords stand for the reconstruction of a war-ravaged republic, which has created a certain degree of popularity among the local population for the young president Ramzan Kadyrov, successor to his father, who was killed in 2004. On the other hand, they give name to a continued despotism that is incompatible with the official image of a Chechnya at peace. Foreign visitors who remember war-torn Chechnya and its capital, reminiscent of bombed out cities from World War II, hardly recognise the city anymore and confirm that reconstruction is proceeding—at least in Grozny and the second largest city, Gudermes. Despite continued fighting with armed resistance movements, Chechnya seems to be a more peaceful place under its 34 year old president than it was between 1994 and 2005.<sup>104</sup> Putin’s Chechenisation policy was described by critics as a transferral of unlimited power from the federal authorities to the regional authorities for exercising illegal force. Still, it has initially led to a drop in violence against civilians.

<sup>104</sup> Valery Dzutsev, “Kadyrov the Peacemaker?”, *Transitions Online*, 5.2.2010.

According to the human rights organisation Memorial, the once massive number of kidnappings of young men has now fallen. In opinion polls, locals no longer put fear of such attacks at the top of their list of complaints, but rather corruption, for which the Tsenteroi Clan from Kadyrov’s home town is notorious.<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, the private Kadyrovian state continues to be based on despotism. Russian human rights organisations accuse Kadyrov of systematically murdering his political opponents. Since Kadyrov assumed the republic’s presidency in early 2007, there has been a series of assassination attempts on Chechen politicians in Russia as well as abroad in Austria, Turkey and Dubai. The most prominent victims of such attacks include Sulim Yamadayev, a high commander in the Russian military, and his brother Ruslan, a former deputy to the State Duma.

In April 2010, Austrian authorities blamed the Chechen president for arranging the murder of his former bodyguard Umar Israilov on 13 January 2009 in Vienna. Charges being filed against Kadyrov as the one who ordered this attack could lead to the issuance of an international warrant. Attention has also been called in this context to the murders of human rights activists and journalists known for reporting critically on Chechnya; in addition to the world-famous case of Anna Politkovskaya, particularly the killing of human rights activist Natalya Estemirova on 15 July 2009. Estemirova had reported on a new increase in human rights abuses following the lifting of the special designation of Chechnya as an anti-terrorism operation zone in April 2009 and had contradicted the rosy picture of a Chechnya at peace.

In February 2010, a delegation from the British Parliament led by Lord Frank Judd visited the Caucasus republic and met with officials, representatives of non-governmental organisations and human rights activists. The delegation found that while reconstruction efforts had led to considerable changes in Chechnya, the human rights situation remained precarious. “There are still extra-judicial detention centres, still disappearances, still pressure on witnesses, still house burnings.”<sup>106</sup> Official Russian human rights politicians refer to abuses in this respect that are as severe as ever in Chechnya as well as other parts of the North Caucasus.<sup>107</sup> In a report from 2010, the Council of Europe

<sup>105</sup> Jonathan Littell, “Die Hölle ist behaglich geworden” [Hell Has Become Comfortable], in: *Die Zeit*, (19.11.2009) 48, p. 49.

<sup>106</sup> Tim Wall/Oleg Nikishenkov, “British MPs ‘Disturbed’ by Chechnya Visit”, in: *Moscow News*, 25.2.2010.

<sup>107</sup> “Russian Official Admits Human Rights Situation Diffi-

termed the situation in Chechnya and the entire North Caucasus as shocking. The people's trust continues to be undermined by extralegal actions by state authorities, which promote a "perverse spiral of violence".<sup>108</sup> In its address to President Medvedev on 19 May 2010, Human Rights Watch praised the most recent decisions by Moscow regarding the North Caucasus and its will to tackle problems in the region with more considered measures than in the past. The organisation stressed that no one was questioning Russia's right to combat terrorism or armed resistance, but emphasised that such actions must occur within a legal framework. As before, impunity continues to be the rule in this regard. During Kadyrov's administration in Chechnya, a liability system has been established for prosecuting the armed resistance groups, according to which the houses of relatives of so-called suspected terrorists are set on fire and kidnappings and torture remain items on the agenda.<sup>109</sup>

Chechnya under Ramzan Kadyrov represents a prominent variant of subnational authoritarianism in Russia. In terms of cultural, religious, economic and security policy, the private Kadyrovian state demonstrates its independence of Russia, but it expresses strict loyalty to its protector, Vladimir Putin. Russian commentators have observed that Kadyrov with his loyalty to the Kremlin has achieved a more efficient secession than the armed separatists. Following the lifting of Chechnya's designation as an "anti-terrorism operation zone" in April 2009, President Kadyrov took a significant step with his security policy by expressing opposition to the sending of police units to Chechnya from different parts of the Russian Federation. According to him, the republic, after all, had its own self-supporting security structures.<sup>110</sup> Occasionally shots are exchanged in Chechnya between Russian military units and those closely associated with Kadyrov. In July 2010, Kadyrov's forces were even blamed

cult in Chechnya", *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 23.4.2010.

**108** "Medwedew als Heilsbringer im Kaukasus? Der Europarat hofft auf einen neuen Kurs Russlands" [Medvedev as the Saviour of the Caucasus? The Council of Europe Hopes for a New Course of Action from Russia], in: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 19.6.2010, p. 5.

**109** Tanya Lokshina, "Address to President Medvedev at His Meeting with the Presidential Civic Society Council and Independent Experts on Human Rights in the North Caucasus", *Human Rights Watch*, 19.5.2010.

**110** "Kadyrov against Policemen from Other Russian Regions Coming to Chechnya", *BBC Monitoring Global Newswire—Former Soviet Union Political File*, 13.3.2010.

for supporting a special operation in February by insurgents against federal troops.<sup>111</sup> On religious issues Kadyrov also goes his own way, as has already been described.

There have been increasing signs of a looming conflict between Kadyrov's local rule and Russian access via the new North Caucasian federal district. In the person of Khloponin, a Russian government figure has for the first time dared to criticise Kadyrov and his foreign policy. Referencing Kadyrov's state visits to the Middle East, he posed the question as to who the Chechen president was representing abroad: Russia, or his own private sphere of influence. In the past, the central federal government has always placed importance on controlling the foreign policy communications of its federal subjects and allowing them limited room to negotiate with foreign governments. Kadyrov's Chechnya once again serves as an exception in this regard. There is increasing evidence of discord between Moscow and Grozny and for another—this time, hopefully purely political—Chechen conflict.<sup>112</sup> Kadyrov's rule also continues to be challenged militarily as evidenced by the terrorist attack on the parliament in Grozny in October and an offensive against his home town Tsenteroi in August 2010.

### Dagestan: From Model of Ethnic Concordance to Power Vertical

When the North Caucasus is discussed, international attention is generally focused on Chechnya. For Russia, however, Dagestan is the most strategically important republic in the region as it is located on the Caspian Sea and home to 2.7 million people. Dagestan constitutes a special federal subject from among the 83 regions in the Russian Federation, including 21 national republics. For a long time, it was characterised by an ethno-political pluralism and the lack of any sort of power vertical. Due to its unusual ensemble of political institutions, it differed until recently not only from its Caucasian neighbours, but from any other region in the Russian Federation. Due to its distinctly multi-ethnic structure, Dagestan was particularly prone to inter-ethnic conflicts during the

**111** Valery Dzutsev, "Kadyrov's Forces Accused of Aiding the Insurgency and Obstructing Federal Forces", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (19.7.2010) 138.

**112** Valery Dzutsev, "Moscow Grows Weary over Kadyrov's Excessive Independence", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (2.8.2010) 148.



transition from the Soviet to the post-Soviet period. With the introduction of a post-Soviet constitution in 1994, however, politics in Dagestan followed the demands of a segmented society in which power was negotiated along ethnic and tribal lines, ensuring at least a minimum level of peace.<sup>113</sup> On the grounds of valid ethno-political concerns, Dagestan forewent the office of president, which existed in most of the national republics of the Russian Federation. A state council made up of members from the republic's 14 main nationalities acted as the highest executive authority. The highest office was that of Chairman of the State Council, which was to rotate among the different ethnic groups.

This political structure was supposed to ensure the republic's cohesion and its integration into the Russian Federation. The arrangement, however, was determined to such a great extent by ethnic parties acting in parallel, in concert and in opposition to one another that the republic's political scene was entirely dominated by the balancing out of different clans' interests. There was therefore little chance to deal with the challenges of the post-Soviet epoch.<sup>114</sup> In addition, the agreed upon rotation principle did not really come into its own. The first chairman, the ethnic Dargin Magomedali Magomedov remained as a substitute president for 13 years at the head of the state council. Following the passage of a federal law, initiated by the Russian President in 2004, regarding the naming of republic and regional leaders, Dagestan also had to introduce a presidential system as in the other Russian republics. In February 2006, President Putin named Mukhu Aliyev, a former speaker of parliament, as the first President of Dagestan. This institutional and personnel change came with the aid of a new power vertical at a time when Dagestan turned out to be a crisis zone that threatened to overshadow Chechnya. While President Aliyev confirmed that extensive structural reforms were urgently needed, he was unable to prevent further destabilisation and later failed in an attempt to secure a second term.

**113** Robert Bruce Ware/Enver Kisriev, *Dagestan. Russian Hegemony and Islamic Resistance in the North Caucasus*, Armonk, N.Y./London: M.E. Sharpe, 2010, p. 70–87.

**114** Otto Luchterhandt, *Dagestan—Unaufhaltsamer Zerfall einer gewachsenen Kultur interethnischer Balance?* [Dagestan—Unstoppable Disintegration of an Advanced Culture of Inter-Ethnic Balance?], Hamburg: Institut für Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik, 1999 (Hamburger Beiträge zur Friedensforschung und Sicherheitspolitik Nr. 118).

In early 2010, the relations between Moscow and Makhachkala were once again tested as a new president was needed. This affair was going to be decided in the Kremlin, but helped to stir up local domestic politics and push violence to new levels within the republic. *Novaja gazeta*, a newspaper critical of the Kremlin, noted: “Dagestan’s actual presidential election is taking place within the Kremlin, while two thousand kilometres further south, wasteful fighting is being waged over this position.”<sup>115</sup> President Magomedislam Magomedov, son of the former state council chairman was installed in February 2010 and is now faced with the challenge of preserving the ethnic balance of power and distributing official posts in a reasonably undisturbed fashion among members of at least the three largest ethnicities, the Avars, Dargins and Kumyks.

Political power struggles are connected in Dagestan with Islamic mobilisation. In the place of the “ethnic entrepreneurs” from the beginning of the post-Soviet period, Islamic groups have increasingly been appearing since the mid-1990s as political actors and armed forces. In 1998, some communities carried out an “Islamic secession” from the republic’s corrupt administration and adopted the Sharia legal framework. When Islamic field commanders from Chechnya interfered in August 1999, they provoked broad resistance from the Dagestani population, the majority of which tends to be decidedly against the so-called Wahhabis and jihad. Nevertheless, Dagestan’s Sharia Jama’at now makes up a sizable part of the armed resistance of the “Caucasian Emirate”.

The installation of a presidential power vertical has done nothing to aid Dagestan’s political consolidation or pacification. Although Ingushetia had been the record holder in the North Caucasus in terms of violence and political instability in the previous two years, in 2010 the region’s largest republic once again assumed this position at the top of the list. According to the CSIS, in the summer of 2010 Dagestan with its 165 deaths due to “incidents of violence” was far ahead of Chechnya (86) and Ingushetia (53).<sup>116</sup>

**115** *Novaja gazeta*, 11.1.2010.

**116** CSIS, *Violence in the North Caucasus. Summer 2010: Not Just a Chechen Conflict*, Washington, D.C., 2010, p. 4.

## Outlook: Europe and the North Caucasus

Russia's pretence that developments within its periphery be treated exclusively as its own domestic affairs has placed the North Caucasus largely off bounds for international politics even though the region continues to be in great need of peace and economic development. Since the Second Chechen War, the Russian government has placed limitations on the access of foreigners to the North Caucasian republics. Large parts of the region were considered border zones, entrance into which required special permission from the federal security service FSB. Foreign non-governmental organisations, journalists and human rights activists were subject to considerable restrictions. In this manner, the region was sealed off from the external world. But now President Medvedev has begun signalling a possible opening of the region by way of initiating administrative reforms in 2010. President Medvedev also made a push for economic development as a crucial development strategy. Following a meeting between Medvedev and the President of the World Bank, Robert Zoellick, the Kremlin announced that new World Bank projects for 2010 in Russia would focus in particular on the North Caucasus.<sup>117</sup> Credit Suisse and a financial group from the United Arab Emirates were the first foreign investors to announce interest in getting involved with tourism projects in the North Caucasus that were now the object of special support from Moscow.<sup>118</sup> The North Caucasus with its unresolved security problems, however, remains a long way from receiving intensive foreign or even domestic investment activity.

Nevertheless, cooperation on stability policy in the North Caucasus, which President Medvedev has committed to with the catchphrase of modernisation partnership, could play a role in Russia opening up to Europe. A signal for this came in June 2010 in the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly, which in the past had dealt with the situation in Chechnya in a critical fashion. In Strasbourg, a report by the Swiss lawyer Dick Marty was presented dealing with

the current political status of human rights in the North Caucasus. Marty deplored the continuous human rights abuses and, in particular, the climate of intimidation under Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov. For the first time, the Russian side did not respond to this type of criticism with vehement protestations. Duma members in the Council of Europe's Legal Affairs Committee, who had once exploded into rage due to complaints about Russia's Caucasus policies, cooperated constructively in formulating the report. With the exception of criticisms of Kadyrov, the Russian delegation's leader pointed to the report as objective and helpful: "only an idiot" could deny that there are human rights abuses in the Caucasus and that the law enforcement bodies are corrupt.<sup>119</sup> This awakened burgeoning hopes in Strasbourg that Russia would actually consider correcting its current approach, which had been to focus solely on the application of force.<sup>120</sup> Even though the North Caucasus, unlike the South Caucasus, lies beyond the reach of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, there are abundant reasons for this realignment to be supported by European and German policy. As stated earlier, there is no other post-Soviet region that is so exposed to the issues of extremism and terrorism as the North Caucasus. Following the Russian-Georgian War in August 2008, the EU has intensified its position in conflict transformation in the South Caucasus, in particular via its new observer mission along the administrative borders between Georgia and Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This mission has placed them on the interface between the South and the North Caucasus.

Since the terrorist acts in Beslan in 2004, there have been considerations between Berlin and Moscow over an opening of the North Caucasus to European policy. During his state visit to Germany in December 2004,

<sup>119</sup> According to Sergej Markow, quoted in: *Izvestija*, 24.6.2010.

<sup>120</sup> "Medwedew als Heilsbringer im Kaukasus?" [Medvedev as the Saviour of the Caucasus?] [same as Fn. 108], p. 5; Ellen Barry, "Russian Envoys Back European Criticism of Kremlin's Caucasus Policy", in: *New York Times*, 22.6.2010, <[www.nytimes.com/2010/06/23/world/europe/23russia.html?ref=todayspaper](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/23/world/europe/23russia.html?ref=todayspaper)>.

<sup>117</sup> Valery Dzutsev, "Moscow Struggles to Control and Modernize the North Caucasus", in: *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 7 (19.2.2010) 34.

<sup>118</sup> "Investory potjanulis' na Kavkaz" [Investors Drawn to the Caucasus], in: *Kommersant*, 11.6.2010.

President Putin announced for the first time his willingness to discuss cooperation in terms of stability policy in this region. In April 2005, Brussels sent a delegation to several republics in the North Caucasus to sound out the possibilities for cooperation, which could improve socio-economic development in and around Chechnya.<sup>121</sup> The proclamation of such cooperation in the North Caucasus, however, was quickly forgotten. Still, there is a certain degree of foreign commitment on the level of civil society cooperation. The EU and individual European countries like Switzerland are supporting non-governmental organisations in projects that aim to address the socio-economic causes for the increase in violence.<sup>122</sup> The underlying assumption driving these projects is that it is primarily the lack of prospects among young people, the corruption, and the poor governance that is to blame for instability in the North Caucasus. This point of view corresponds with new statements from Moscow. In July 2010, Prime Minister Putin presented a strategy plan until 2025 for the North Caucasus. The plan should help to eliminate key grievances including clan-based political patronage and corruption.<sup>123</sup> Understanding is also growing in Moscow that the way of application of force by state bodies in the past has done more to destabilise the region than to stabilise it. This realisation should be given clear voice in Germany and the EU's dialogue with Russia. President Medvedev sees Germany as one of the key countries among the protagonists in the modernisation partnership he is seeking, and these protagonists cannot fail to overlook the precarious situation in Russia's internal abroad. The toast delivered by Foreign Minister Lavrov at the 10<sup>th</sup> Petersburg Dialogue in July 2010 "To the solution to all conflicts!" should not exclude Russia's own conflict region.

## List of Abbreviations

ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
CSIS	Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, D.C.)
FSB	Federal'naja služba bezopasnosti (Federal Security Service)
KAFFED	Kafkas Federasyonu Derneği (Federation of Caucasian Associations)
VCIOM	Vsserossijskij centr izučeniija obščestvennogo mnenija (All-Russian Public Opinion Research Centre)

**121** Uwe Halbach, *Der Kaukasus in neuem Licht. Die EU und Rußland in ihrer schwierigsten Nachbarschaftsregion* [The Caucasus in a New Light. The EU and Russia in their most challenging Neighbouring Region], Berlin: Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik, November 2005 (SWP-Studie 35/ 2005), p. 31–34.

**122** In this way, Swisspeace cooperated with Russian NGOs to implement a project on "Humanitarian Dialogue for Increasing the Security of Civil Society in the North Caucasus".

**123** Evgenija Pis'mennaja/Marija Cvetkova, "Ofšor Chloponina" [Chloponin's Tax Haven], in: *Vedomosti*, 2.7.2010.