

**“RUSSIA’S TINDERBOX”**

**Conflict in the North Caucasus  
And its Implications for  
The Future of the Russian Federation**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	Background to the Report
Introduction	
Executive Summary	
Section I	The Structural Legacy of the USSR
Section II	The Crisis of National and Regional Leadership in the North Caucasus
Section III	The Failure of Russia's Regional Policy
Section IV	Territorial Disputes in the North Caucasus
Section V	Chechnya
Appendix 1	The Refugee Crisis in the North Caucasus
Appendix 2	The Islamic Factor in the North Caucasus
Bibliography	Selected Works in English for Additional Reading on the North Caucasus

## PREFACE

### Background to the Report

In the Summer of 1993, the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project began an inquiry into the conflicts in Russia's North Caucasus region, as part of a broader study of post-Soviet ethno-political conflicts. In the course of this inquiry, it became apparent that there were practically no contemporary English-language studies of the North Caucasus. Although the new Transcaucasian states of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan were beginning to be studied more closely as a consequence of their new status as independent states after 1991, information on the Russian North Caucasus region was only available from news wires and the occasional flying visits of Western correspondents. This was in spite of the prevalence of violent conflict in the Caucasus as a whole, the involvement of North Caucasian groups in these conflicts, and Chechnya's 1991 declaration of independence from the Russian Federation.

By 1993, Azerbaijan and Armenia had been in a *de facto* state of war over Nagorno-Karabakh for almost five years; an armed conflict had flared between Georgia and South Ossetia sending a wave of refugees into North Ossetia in the North Caucasus; North Caucasian mercenaries were fighting on the side of Abkhazia in its war with Georgia; and a violent conflict had erupted within the North Caucasus itself between Ossetians and Ingush. In acknowledgement of these developments, a number of prominent Russian institutes in Moscow, such as Valery Tishkov's Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, Grigory Yavlinsky's EPIcenter, and Ol'ga Vasil'eva's North-South Center, had begun to produce surveys of the North Caucasus region and the ethno-political situation in individual republics. These were not generally translated into English, however, and were not available to the majority of Western analysts and policymakers.

In response to this information vacuum, the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project began its own study of the North Caucasus region in the Spring of 1994, under the direction of its Associate Director, Fiona Hill, and with the assistance of a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The aim of the study was to build on the existing Russian-language and English-language literature, conduct new research, and produce a comprehensive analysis of conflict in the North Caucasus for a Western audience that would explain both the importance of the region for the Russian Federation and the sources and triggers of violence. This report is the culmination of the study which concluded in July 1995.

The report draws on new data and interview material from the North Caucasus collected by Dr. Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov, a senior researcher at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography in Makhachkala, Dagestan and an advisor to the government of Dagestan on ethnic issues in the republic. Dr. Magomedkhanov was a visiting scholar at Harvard from March to June 1995 and prepared background material for the study during his stay.

A small Working Group of specialists from the Harvard community was also convened by the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project to provide input into the North Caucasus study and to comment on its findings. This group included Ivan Ascher, Sergei Grigoriev, Pamela Jewett, Aliona Kostritsyna, and Matthew Lantz of the Project's research staff; Brian Boeck from the Harvard History Department, Nicholas Daniloff from Northeastern University, Ruth Daniloff, John

Lloyd of the *Financial Times*, Arthur Martirosyan from the Conflict Management Group, and Gela Sulikashvili.

Additional materials for the study were obtained with assistance from Leila Alieva of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Baku; Roy Allison of the Royal Institute of International Affairs in London; Jonathan Cohen of International Alert in London; Michael Ochs of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe at the US Congress; Lara Olson from the Consensus Building Institute in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Suzanne Pattle of the Minority Rights Group in London; Dennis Pluchinsky of the US Department of State's Threat Analysis Division; and George Tarkhan-Mouravi of the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in Tbilisi.

Commentary on early drafts of the report was also provided by Alexander Babyonyshev of Harvard University's Slavic Department; Henry Hale of Harvard's Government Department; Kenneth Keen of Harvard University; Teresa Lawson of the Kennedy School of Government's Center for Science and International Affairs; Stephen Shenfield of Brown University's Center for Foreign Policy Development; Astrid Tuminez of the Carnegie Corporation; and Celeste Wallander of Harvard University's Government Department. Jeffry Pike of Harvard University produced the original maps of the North Caucasus region and the individual republics for the report.

## **“RUSSIA’S TINDERBOX”**

### **Conflict in the North Caucasus And its Implications for The Future of the Russian Federation**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Chechnya. Prior to the December 1994 Russian military intervention, few people in the West other than Russian specialists had even heard of Chechnya or were familiar with its people. Today, it is infamous as the site of one of the most violent ethno-political conflicts of the 1990s and of the largest military campaign on Russian soil since World War II. Chechnya’s capital, Grozny, is in ruins, in the wake of a massive and ferocious bombing campaign by the Russian airforce. Hundreds of thousands of Chechens have been killed, maimed or left homeless.

Russian military intervention has, however, ended in stalemate. The initial conflict that sparked the war between the Russian political leadership in Moscow and Chechnya over the republic’s status in the Russian Federation has not been resolved by the overwhelming show of force.

The factors that both led to war and now hinder a peace settlement are not exclusive to Chechnya. They are present to a greater or lesser degree throughout the Russian Federation, but are most acute in the broader region of which Chechnya is a part—the North Caucasus. In contrast to the rest of the Russian Federation, which has largely managed to avoid violence since 1991, the North Caucasus region has now been the scene of two wars and an array of armed clashes, and has also become embroiled in conflicts beyond its borders.

The North Caucasus region consists of seven mountainous republics designated as the territory of a number of non-Russian ethnic groups—Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, and Adygeia—and two Russian regions, Krasnodar and Stavropol’, which are situated on the steppe north of the mountain ridge. Russian geographers and economists also frequently consider the Rostov Oblast’ of the Russian Federation, which lies to the north of Krasnodar on the border with Ukraine, as part of the North Caucasus Economic Region.<sup>1</sup>

The North Caucasus is Russia’s land bridge between the Caspian and the Black Seas and thus the crossroads for trade between North and South, East and West. As such, it is of critical strategic and economic importance to Russia. It is Russia’s southern flank, the front-line military

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<sup>1</sup> The territory of the North Caucasus region is 355,100 square kilometers, which is equivalent in size to Germany, and accounts for approximately 2% of the total territory of the Russian Federation. According to the 1989 Soviet Census, the total population of the North Caucasus is 16,751,000, which is approximately 6% of Russia’s total population. The seven mountain republics have a combined population of 5,628,000, accounting for 33% of the population of the region.

district guarding the international border with the new states of Transcaucasia—Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and Russia’s old imperial rivals—Turkey and Iran. It is Russia’s route for pipelines from oil fields in the Caspian to its ports on the Black Sea and markets in Europe and the Middle East. And it is Russia’s premier agricultural region, producing almost one quarter of all its annual agricultural output.<sup>2</sup>

The North Caucasus is also one of the most densely populated regions of Russia, with a population density ranging from 27.7 people per square kilometer in Karachaevo-Cherkessia to 76.5 people per square kilometer in North Ossetia, in sharp contrast to an average of only 8.4 for the Russian Federation as a whole. This unusually high population density is complicated by the fact that the North Caucasus is the most ethnically diverse region of the Russian Federation, with as many as 40 small ethnic groups spread across its territory. Although Russians are the largest of the ethnic groups, accounting for 67.6% of the total population, they are unevenly spread with non-Russian groups dominating in the east of the region toward the Caspian Sea.

In spite of its preeminence as a center of agricultural production, and indeed because of its economic specialization, the North Caucasus region has experienced a severe economic decline since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The seven mountainous republics of the region have been especially hard hit. Prior to 1991, the North Caucasus had the largest rural population in Russia, with 43% of the total population living in rural areas as compared to 26% for the Federation as a whole. Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia had the highest ratios of rural to urban population in the region.<sup>3</sup> In the Soviet period, high rural birth rates and the generally high population density in the region produced a labor surplus in the republics of the North Caucasus. Up until 1991, this surplus was diverted by the local authorities to avoid destabilizing levels of unemployment. In addition to permitting migration from impoverished and over-populated mountainous regions of the North Caucasus to the lowlands and urban centers, local authorities created construction brigades for seasonal work elsewhere in the Russian Federation, and actively encouraged migration to other regions of the USSR. According to the 1989 census, as a result of these initiatives, one in four North Caucasians lived beyond the borders of their national republics. The dissolution of the USSR and the erosion of the command economy in the Russian Federation, however, turned off this safety valve for local authorities in the North Caucasus leaving large numbers of unemployed in rural areas and increasing pressure on land and housing.

Because of their asymmetrical population profile and a corresponding low level of industrial development, the economies of the seven North Caucasus republics have been traditionally weak

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<sup>2</sup> Together with the Rostov Oblast, the North Caucasus Economic Region accounts for 50% of Russia’s vegetable oil, 42% of Russia’s sugar, 33% of Russia’s wool, 25% of Russia’s grain, 20% of Russia’s vegetables, and 15% of Russia’s meat. Krasnodar dominates this agricultural production and is also the major center for food processing, while Rostov is the manufacturing base for agricultural machinery, producing 80% of Russia’s combine harvesters.

<sup>3</sup> For example, in 1989, 75% of the Chechen population lived in rural areas, and 70% of the Karachai and Cherkess populations. See Ol’ga Vasil’eva and Timur Muzaev, *Severnyi kavkaz v poiskakh regional’noi ideologii*, Progress (Moscow, 1994), p.29. Other figures for the North Caucasus were obtained from EPIcenter (the Center for Economic and Political Research) in Moscow.

and dependent on subsidies from the center to stave off collapse.<sup>4</sup> Before 1991, 50-70% of the budget revenues of the republics came from direct federal subsidies and centralized bank credits, with Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan being the most heavily subsidized. In the post-Soviet period, the republics' problems have been compounded by dramatic declines in industrial and agricultural production. In 1992, for example, industrial production fell by 36% in North Ossetia, 30% in Chechnya, and 28% in Dagestan, as opposed to 18.8% for the Russian Federation as a whole. In Chechnya, per capita food production declined by 46% in 1992, in contrast to an average decline of 18% across Russia. In the North Caucasus region in general, industrial production fell by 23% for 1992, and by a further 21.6% in 1993, while the corresponding decline for the rest of the Russian Federation was only 16.2% in 1993. Likewise, average salaries in the North Caucasus declined to one third of the average for Russia, although prices on all commodities rose to the same levels across the Federation. By 1993, as a direct result of economic collapse, 97% of the republican budget of Ingushetia, for example, came from Russian federal government subsidies.

These economic difficulties, the high population density, extreme ethnic diversity, and a number of other important factors have combined to turn the North Caucasus region into a maelstrom of ethno-political conflict. Since 1991, a series of often violent disputes have erupted between Ossetians and Ingush; between Kabardinians and Balkars, and Karachais and Cherkess; between Chechens and Laks, Chechens and Avars, Kumyks and Laks, and Lezgins and Azeris in Dagestan; between Cossacks and all of the other ethnic groups; and between Chechens and Russians. These disputes center on the issue of which ethnic group has the ultimate political authority over a certain territory and the people who inhabit it and thus who determines access to the region's scarce resources of land, housing and jobs.

In terms of the potential for widespread violence over these issues, the North Caucasus could be the next Bosnia. As many as 50,000 people may have died so far in the war in Chechnya, almost 600 people were killed in the 1992 conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, several hundred people have been killed in armed clashes in other republics, and hundreds of thousands in the region have been made homeless. In addition, all of the elements that produced conflict in the Balkans are present in the North Caucasus:

- the disintegration of a large multi-ethnic Communist state that removed the ideological underpinning from a complex national-territorial administrative structure;
- a multi-ethnic mix of people with historic grievances who oppose the administrative border arrangements within the state and the new configuration of international borders;
- a faultline between Eastern Orthodox Christianity and Islam;

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<sup>4</sup> In contrast to its share of Russian agricultural production, the North Caucasus economic region is responsible for only 7.6% of Russian industrial output. Industry in the region is dominated by mineral and raw material extraction, and the production of oil and gas. Prior to its secession from the Russian Federation in 1991, Chechnya accounted for 50% of the total oil production in the region. Chechnya was also the center of oil-refining in the North Caucasus, with the refinery in Grozny producing 90% of Russia's aviation engine oil.

- a strategic international border zone separating the region from a number of new and unstable states and major powers with their own ethno-political conflicts, historic interests in the area, and North Caucasian diasporas;
- a refugee crisis of catastrophic proportions that foments additional strife in areas where the refugees are temporarily housed.

The North Caucasus is a tinderbox where a conflict in one republic has the potential to spark a regional conflagration that will spread beyond its borders into the rest of the Russian Federation, and will invite the involvement of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey and Iran and their North Caucasian diasporas. As the war in Chechnya demonstrates, conflict in the region is not easily contained. Chechen fighters cut their teeth in the war between Georgia and Abkhazia, the Chechen and North Caucasian diaspora in Turkey is heavily involved in fund-raising and procuring weapons, and the fighting has spilled into republics and territories adjacent to Chechnya.

The thesis of this report is that the conflicts in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, are, in the first place, directly attributable to the structural legacy of the USSR. In spite of the dissolution of the USSR, its successor states, including the Russian Federation, have retained the old ethnically-based Soviet administrative structures. These structures have created the basic conditions for ethno-political conflict across the whole of the former Soviet Union, and especially in the North Caucasus where individual ethnic groups have been divided by administrative borders and new international frontiers.

One of the most important consequences of the structural legacy of the USSR is a lack of experienced national and regional leaders capable of guiding the successor states and their administrative units through the minefield of post-Soviet reform. Where the old Soviet leadership was rapidly overthrown in the late 1980s and early 1990s in new states such as Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, the Baltic states, and in republics such as Chechnya, the transition has been a rocky one and conflicts have erupted both internally and externally. Where the old leadership has been retained in a “national” guise in new states such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and in republics such as Tatarstan and Dagestan, a modicum of stability has been maintained, although reform has been both slow and difficult.

The general crisis of leadership has been compounded by the failure of the post-Soviet governments to develop and implement coherent policies to tackle the problems created by the USSR’s structural legacy. As the largest, most ethnically diverse of the Soviet successor states, the Russian Federation has been particularly challenged by this legacy. Its government, however, has consistently failed to rise to the challenge. And, in the North Caucasus, its failure has had drastic consequences.

In the North Caucasus, the three related problems of the administrative structures inherited from the USSR, poor leadership, and inadequate central policies have been exacerbated by a number of other factors specific to the region:

- The extreme ethnic diversity, high population density, and severe economic decline mentioned earlier in the introduction.

- Cleavages between Orthodoxy and Islam, which exacerbate already tense political and economic relationships between Russians and non-Russians, and among the non-Russian groups.
- The spill-over of ethno-political conflicts in the Transcaucasus, in Georgia and Azerbaijan, which have sent waves of refugees into the North Caucasus, and drawn North Caucasian volunteer forces into the fighting.
- A hostile attitude toward indigenous North Caucasians as a group among ordinary Russians and the authorities in Moscow. From 1992 to 1994, for example, the Moscow city authorities cracked down on traders and vendors from the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia, blaming them for the rise in crime since the collapse of the USSR, and expelling them from the capital. The term “people of Caucasian nationality” was coined by the Moscow government and is now in official usage, in spite of the fact that the “Caucasians” are a collection of disparate peoples and not a single ethnic group. Caucasians are also commonly referred to as “blacks” in Moscow street jargon. Prejudice against Caucasians as a group provides a basis of popular support for a hard-line approach toward the North Caucasus region.<sup>5</sup>
- An equally hostile attitude among most of the North Caucasian groups toward Moscow and Russia, although not specifically toward ethnic Russians. This is the result of a historical legacy of struggle against incorporation into the Russian Empire in the 19th century, and repression by the Bolshevik and Soviet governments in the 20th century. The Russian government’s continuation of Soviet policies which encourage dependence on Moscow and attacks on “people of Caucasian nationality” since 1991 have increased resentment.
- The deportation of a number of ethnic groups from the North Caucasus to Central Asia in the 1940s, and the desire of the groups involved to restore the *status quo ante*. The deportees have, as a result, come into conflict with other North Caucasian peoples who either seek to prevent any changes to the current configuration of borders, or who—like the Cossacks—wish to resurrect even earlier administrative and national entities destroyed in the Russian Revolution.

The report examines how the overall structural legacy of the USSR and these specific factors have produced conflict in the North Caucasus. The first section of the report explains how the USSR was structured and how this affected the political development of the North Caucasus republics. The second section discusses the crisis of national and regional leadership and the general political vacuum in the North Caucasus. It describes how one regional organization, the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, has tried to seize the initiative in this vacuum, provoking confrontation with Moscow and exacerbating the cleavage between the North Caucasian peoples and the region’s

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<sup>5</sup> See Celestine Bohlen, “Irate Russians Demonize Traders From Caucasus,” *New York Times*, October 20, 1992; Fred Kaplan, “Moscow cracks down –on outsiders: Police take advantage of state of emergency to drive many ethnics from city,” *The Boston Globe*, October 14, 1993; Gillian Tett, “Moscow is accused of targeting ethnic groups,” *Financial Times*, October 16-17, 1993; and Nataliya Gevorkyan, “Racism in a ‘weak form’,” *Moscow News*, May 6-12, 1994.

Russian population. The third section describes the confusion in Moscow's regional policy and its failure to find a strategy for dealing with the North Caucasus.

This exposition of the overall problem is followed by a comprehensive overview of the conflicts in the North Caucasus in the fourth section. This overview describes how the specific factors of population density, ethnic diversity, economic decline, religious cleavages, and the experience of the deportations have triggered conflict in individual cases, and indicates how some republics have thus far managed to avoid violent conflict.

The report concludes with a case study of Chechnya. It offers an explanation of how the structural legacy of the USSR, the political naiveté and poor judgment of Chechnya's new leadership, and Moscow's *ad hoc* policy combined to provoke a full-scale war on the territory of the Russian Federation.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### 1. The Administrative Structure of the Soviet Union:

The administrative structure of the Soviet Union gave the national republics of the North Caucasus the forms of sovereignty but denied them the substance; made the issue of ethnicity a central feature of regional politics; and left a configuration of borders specifically designed to keep the peoples of the region in constant competition and make Moscow the sole arbitrator of the territorial system.

Although the USSR was a highly centralized state and the Communist Party in Moscow dominated all decisionmaking, it had the form at least of a federation. This federation consisted of a descending hierarchy of administrative units based on a combination of territory and ethnicity, with some national groups having more privileges, more institutions and more opportunity to manage their own affairs than others.

In spite of the fact that ethnicity was one of the building blocks of the Soviet Union, and individual administrative units were associated with a particular national group, in the majority of cases ethnic and administrative borders did not coincide. The Bolshevik creators of the system were anxious to prevent the total domination of any of the non-Russian groups in a particular territory, and the creation of coalitions of groups that could threaten Russian and thus Soviet rule. As a result, a policy of divide and rule was practiced, giving a deliberate arbitrariness to the administrative system. Different ethnic groups were jumbled together in the individual national-territorial units.

When the USSR collapsed in 1991, those national groups at the top of the administrative hierarchy were able to secede and form independent states. The rest, including the republics of the North Caucasus, were not. Instead of being under the ultimate jurisdiction of a non-national supra-state, the USSR, which was formally dominated by a political party, the CPSU, they were now subordinate to a political entity that was controlled by another ethnic group.

This perception of being under the jurisdiction of an ethnic group rather than a state is a crucially important one in the former Soviet Union. The ruling group is seen to monopolize political power and to deny access to resources of land, housing and jobs to members of other ethnic groups. At a time when these resources are at their most scarce, when salaries have declined, the social safety net has disappeared, and prices on basic foodstuffs have risen precipitously, the monopoly of political power by one group is viewed as a threat to the physical survival of others.

As a result of this perception, the peoples of the North Caucasus, and indeed every other ethnic group in the former USSR that was denied its own independent state in 1991, feel that their future is jeopardized. Their national movements, and governments in the case of Chechnya, either want their designated republic to be given the right to secede, or want to have their ethnic group acknowledged as the equal of the dominant group through the creation of a federated state that will ensure political power and access to resources.

In almost every case in the North Caucasus there is an added complication. Members of the individual ethnic groups and their traditional territory are located within the designated borders of some other group. Every national movement therefore seeks to gather all the members of its group under one political roof. Consequently, national movements in the North Caucasus demand the realignment of administrative borders.

## **2. The Lack of Experienced National and Regional leaders:**

This is the fundamental tragedy of the successor states to the Soviet Union and particularly of the republics of the North Caucasus—they have few competent national leaders. Because of the hierarchy of privileges in the USSR, smaller national units like the North Caucasian republics did not have either the facilities to train national cadres or the context in which they could develop experience of self-government. All directives came from the center, and the top leadership was appointed by the center. Because all power was concentrated in Moscow in the hands of the CPSU, the more ambitious members of non-Russian elites throughout the USSR gravitated there, leaving few talented people behind in the localities.

With the dissolution of the USSR and the demise of the Soviet leadership appointed by the center there was no nationally-trained elite to take its place—either in the new states or in the administrative entities like the North Caucasus republics that demanded increased autonomy. The old Soviet leadership that remains in place in the republics has no experience in self-government and still looks to the center for guidance. The new national leaders who have emerged to challenge and replace them have no practical political or administrative experience and often a poor grasp of specific local conditions. In the North Caucasus, these new leaders have risen to prominence because of their ethnic affiliation and perceived social standing, not because of proven competence.

Because there were no regional structures in the USSR, there are also no leaders capable of appealing to all the different ethnic constituencies in the North Caucasus. The Russian political parties that should assume this role are still in their infancy. They are Moscow-based, have few regional representatives, and have no political platform for the North Caucasus as a whole. As a result, politics in the North Caucasus centers on the parochial concerns of the various ethnic groups.

Where there has been an articulation of broader regional interests, it has been based on the sum of the individual national grievances, collective opposition to Moscow, and the perception of external threat to the North Caucasian peoples—as in the case of wide-spread support in the North Caucasus for the Abkhaz and the Ossetians in their respective struggles with Georgia. This articulation has also come from an extra-governmental group, the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus, which is a coalition of nationalist movements led by new leaders with no practical experience in government. In the vacuum created by the absence of political parties, the Confederation has demanded the allegiance of the non-Russian peoples of the North Caucasus and pursued a policy of regional secession from the Russian Federation.

### 3. The failure of Russian policy:

Since the collapse of the USSR, the Russian government has failed to tackle the problem of its structural legacy. It has neglected its role as ultimate arbitrator of the Russian Federation's territorial system and failed to provide leadership:

- The ministry tasked with formulating policy for reforming the structure of the Russian Federation and managing relations among its constituent units is weak and has had four heads in four years. In addition, political decisionmaking on the issue is scattered among a number of government agencies and ministries, leading to confusion and contradiction.
- There is no consensus in Moscow about the kind of state Russia should become. Two opposing groups have emerged among Russian politicians: "statists" who believe that Russia should be a unitary state with all power concentrated at the center; and "federalists" who argue that it should be a federation with power devolved by the administrative units to the center. Infighting on this issue has put the future structure of the federation on hold.
- A controversial policy has been adopted as a stop-gap measure to prevent the Russian Federation from unraveling. This involves the signing of treaties between Moscow and the most troublesome federal units. For the units and the "federalists" in Moscow, the treaties are seen as demarcating powers between the center and the subjects of the Federation and as the building-blocks for a new reformed Russian Federation. For the "statists" they are a necessary evil, a means of buying some time before reining the units back in. But with the expectations of Russia's republics now riding on the treaty process, any reversal of the policy will provoke more conflict.
- There is no government strategy for dealing with conflict in the North Caucasus. Instead, Moscow has resorted to improvisation and *ad hoc* measures. It has sent delegations to the region, issued decrees and laws, created a dizzying array of local organizations, and even dispatched troops as in the case of Chechnya. But it has not developed any concrete mechanisms for implementing its directives, and has refused to work with the new national elites. The result has been further political fragmentation.

As a consequence of the structural legacy of the USSR, and Moscow's failure to address it, the North Caucasus is mired in conflict. In addition to some specific triggers, every conflict in the North Caucasus, including Chechnya, can be traced to a dispute over the status of a republic within the Russian Federation, a dispute over the current alignment of administrative borders or the political jurisdiction of a particular territory, and the gross political mismanagement of both the national leadership and Moscow. Where conflicts have erupted into violence, the national leadership has shown itself unwilling to compromise and Moscow has either failed to implement its own political directives or has approached the issue in a heavy-handed and chauvinistic manner.

None of these disputes in the North Caucasus is the result of ancient tribal hatreds. The fact that a political or economic issue has assumed an ethnic dimension is the direct result of the linkage of territory and ethnicity in the USSR. This is emphasized by the fact that, prior to Russia's incursion into the North Caucasus, when the current administrative structure and borders first began to take shape, there was no record of ethnic conflict. There were disputes between groups over grazing rights in mountain pastures, but no instances of violence either on the basis of ethnicity or because of the seizure and colonization of another group's territory.

The conflicts in the North Caucasus can not be solved by violence. They can only be solved by a change of policy in Moscow and by the willingness of the national leadership of the North Caucasus to remove ethnicity from the political and economic disputes of the post-Soviet transition. Chechnya is a tragedy that is doomed to repeat itself unless political structures in the Russian Federation evolve.

## SECTION I

### The Structural Legacy of the USSR

The structural legacy of the USSR is the key to understanding the instability in the North Caucasus. Indeed, it is the key to understanding the difficulties faced by all of the former republics of the USSR in building independent states and in forging a new relationship with Moscow.

The forms of national sovereignty created by the Bolsheviks to administer the multi-ethnic state inherited from the Russian Empire have left an indelible mark on post-Soviet politics. They were based on a compromise brokered by Lenin and Stalin between the demands of the Russian Empire's disparate ethnic groups for self-determination and the Bolshevik ideal of a unitary party and state.<sup>6</sup> In the 1920s, the territorially and historically based provinces of the Russian Empire were replaced with a hierarchy of national-territorial units in an asymmetrical federation: the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

#### The Administrative Structure of the USSR:

Each national-territorial administrative unit in the USSR was granted a degree of autonomy, or special rights and privileges, by the center.<sup>7</sup> The number of these rights and privileges was dependent on the unit's position in the hierarchy, with those at the top theoretically having the most autonomy from the center:

1. *Union Republics* (SSRs). These were the building blocks of the USSR. They included the Russian Federation and 14 other republics which were ascribed to the most populous and historically important non-Russian national groups—the “titular” nationalities. Each union republic had a border with a foreign country in addition to borders with other union republics;
2. *Autonomous Republics* (ASSRs). These were sub-divisions of the larger union republics, designated as the territories of national minorities who were neither strategically located nor numerous enough to merit a union republic;

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<sup>6</sup> Prior to the Russian Revolution, non-Russian national groups accounted for more than 40% of the Russian Empire's total population. According to the census of 1906 “Russians” had a clear majority of 65.5% only if Ukrainians and Belarussians were counted as ethnic Russians.

<sup>7</sup> Under the Soviet Constitution these national-territorial units are considered to be legal entities or “subjects.” The units at the top of the hierarchy, the Union Republics, are “subjects” of the USSR, while the smaller units from Autonomous Republics to Autonomous Okrugs are “subjects” of the Union Republic of which they are a part. In the case of the republics of the North Caucasus, they are subjects of the Russian Federation.

3. *Krais*. These were large territories, of geographic or military significance, located in strategically important borderlands;<sup>8</sup>
4. *Autonomous Oblasts (AO)*. These were the designated territory of national minorities living in a coterminous geographic area within a union republic or one of its krais;<sup>9</sup>
5. *Oblasts*. These were the basic non-national administrative units of the union republics;
6. *Autonomous Okrugs*. These were the designated territory of national minorities living in a coterminous geographic area within oblasts. They were the smallest of the national-territorial units and had little real autonomy apart from the right to support their own cultural institutions.

The hierarchy itself was loosely based on a categorization of peoples derived from “scientific Marxism,” which classified groups according to four stages of national development: tribalism, feudalism, capitalism, and socialism. Those groups that had advanced to the final two stages were subjected to a further classification as historic or non-historic nations—the former having an advanced culture and a history of independent statehood prior to their incorporation into the USSR. Only those nations that had successfully advanced toward socialism and were considered culturally significant were granted union republics. Others, like the peoples of the North Caucasus, were denied this privilege as a result of either not having advanced past the feudal stage of development, or not having attained a sufficiently high level of national culture.

#### **Attributes of National Sovereignty:**<sup>10</sup>

On paper at least, the three primary autonomous units—the union republics, autonomous republics, and autonomous oblasts—had their own distinctive attributes of sovereignty. *Union republics* were formally described as “sovereign socialist states” in the Constitution of the USSR. As such, they theoretically had their own constitution, which they could pass without further approval from the central authority; their own citizenship; a legislature and an executive in the form of a

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<sup>8</sup> There are six krais in the Russian Federation: Stavropol’ and Krasnodar in the North Caucasus, Primorsky and Khabarovsk on the Pacific Coast and Russia’s border with China; Krasnoyarsk in Siberia bordering the autonomous republic of Tuva (Tuva was an independent satellite of the USSR until 1944); and Altai on the border with Mongolia. In functional terms there is presently no difference between the administration of a krai or oblast. Both are equal subjects of the Russian Federation. The term krai is maintained as a mark of the territories’ former historic significance.

<sup>9</sup> Of the six Russian krais, only Primorsky Krai does not contain an autonomous oblast.

<sup>10</sup> The information contained here on the administrative structure of the USSR and the attributes of sovereignty is based in part on research conducted by Brian Boeck, Associate of the Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project. Some of this material was previously presented in B.J. Boeck, *Kabardino-Balkaria and Adygeia: Were the Structural Forms of Soviet Autonomy Significant?* (unpublished working manuscript, April 1994). The author is also grateful to Alexander Babyonyshev of the Slavic Department at Harvard University, for his assistance in cutting through the administrative complexities of krais and oblasts. For a detailed discussion of the administrative system of the USSR see D.L. Zlatopol’skii, *Gosudarstvennoe ustroistvo SSSR*, izd. Yuridicheskoi literatury, Moscow 1960.

Supreme Soviet and a Presidium of the Supreme Soviet; a government in the form of a Council of Ministers; and their own judicial authority with a Supreme Court and a Republican Procurator. In addition, they were entitled to establish universities and pursue cultural and education policies in the national language (although in practice this was discouraged by an active policy of Russification beginning in the 1930s). Most importantly, a union republic had the nominal right to conduct direct relations with foreign powers, create its own republican armed forces, and secede from the USSR.<sup>11</sup>

*Autonomous republics* were described as “national states” rather than “sovereign states.”<sup>12</sup> Because they were not “sovereign” they did not have the right to pass their own constitution without the approval of the union republic of which they were part. They were subjects of the union republic, rather than the direct subjects of the USSR and, as such, did not have the right to secede from either the union republic or the USSR.. Autonomous republics did, however, have their own Supreme Soviet, Council of Ministers and Supreme Court. Their Supreme Soviets also had executive, legislative and budgetary powers, and the ability to establish the republic’s administrative divisions. In addition, each ASSR was entitled to nominate an assistant to the Head of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the respective union republic, and to hold 11 seats in the Council of Nationalities of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. These provisions thus enabled an autonomous republic to play a role, albeit limited, in decision-making at the highest level. Under specific circumstances autonomous republics could even appeal for an upgrade of their status to union republic: if they were located on the periphery of a Union republic, if the titular nationality was the largest group in the republic, and if there was a population of at least one million.<sup>13</sup> In terms of the development of national culture, an ASSR was also entitled to establish a university, a national publishing house and other research institutions, and thus train its own national cadres.<sup>14</sup>

*Autonomous oblasts* were defined as “oblasts characterized by particularities of daily life and national composition.”<sup>15</sup> They had fewer structures of national sovereignty than autonomous republics but a high degree of control over local affairs and administration, especially in the spheres of education and culture. They were directly subordinated to a union republic and its administrative organs or a krai in the case of the Russian Federation and did not have their own constitution, Supreme Soviet or Council of Ministers. The highest body was the Oblast Executive Committee

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<sup>11</sup> These rights only became important in the Gorbachev era when SSRs, like the three Baltic States, sought sovereignty and independence from the USSR.

<sup>12</sup> In the North Caucasus, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Checheno-Ingushetia and Dagestan were all autonomous republics.

<sup>13</sup> These criteria were established by Joseph Stalin in 1936. See *I.V. Stalin, Voprosy leninizma*, izd 11-e, Moscow 1952, p.567.

<sup>14</sup> Unlike in the SSRs, however, where native languages were guaranteed a certain level of prestige and a defined place in the education system and the bureaucracy, in ASSRs the language of the larger unit tended to dominate. See Ronald Wixman, *Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes in the North Caucasus*, University of Chicago Department of Geography Research Paper, No. 191, 1980.

<sup>15</sup> In the North Caucasus, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Adygeia were autonomous oblasts prior to July 1991.

which operated in accordance with a charter.<sup>16</sup> An AO had 5 seats in the Council of Nationalities of the USSR Supreme Soviet, but no permanent representative in the leadership of the respective union republic. As far as national education issues were concerned, an AO was not entitled to its own national university or publishing house, but it could establish a pedagogical institute and a research institute for the national language, literature, history and culture. Opportunities for national political and cultural development were thus more limited for an AO than for an ASSR.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Importance of National Sovereignty:**

Although in practice the sovereignty of the individual administrative units was subordinate to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in Moscow in all aspects of decision-making, the attributes of sovereignty—the councils of ministers, the supreme soviets, and national universities—were of critical practical and symbolic importance to members of the groups designated as the “titular nationality” of their particular SSR, ASSR and AO. These attributes guaranteed a high degree of political influence at the local level, a limited degree of political participation at the federal level for the national elite, and access to key resources from education to employment for the general population of the “titular nationality.”

The titular national group was guaranteed a percentage of the top positions in government, key industrial enterprises, agricultural establishments and local universities, and preferential access to employment, housing, and higher education. Those members of the titular national group in the bureaucracy therefore saw the sovereignty of the republic as the guarantee of their positions and were opposed to any changes in the system that might affect either the status of their republic or their respective national group.

The importance of national sovereignty is most clearly illustrated by two cases. In the first case, in Dagestan, no one group had a majority clear enough in the Soviet period to warrant the title of “titular nationality.” As a result there was a constant jockeying among the elites of the constituent peoples for control of key political posts and thus of decisionmaking in the republic. For example, the national groups of the Avars and Kumyks frequently contested their respective shares of political appointments at the republican level and in district councils. In 1991, the Kumyk national movement

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<sup>16</sup> Lacking these institutions, AOs also had no bureaucracy of their own and had to share cadres with the adjacent territory of the union republic, i.e. the krai. Seeing as appointments were usually made at the krai level, the titular nationality of the AO was at a disadvantage in competing for key jobs and influence. Capitals of AOs were often, as a result, dominated by the population of the larger union republic. For example, in the North Caucasus, according to the 1989 Soviet census, the capital of the Adygei AO (now the republic of Adygeia), Maikop, has a majority ethnic Russian population. The titular nationality, the Adygei, account for only 10% of the total population. By way of further example, in the Karachaevo-Cherkessia Autonomous Oblast which was subordinated to Stavropol' Krai, the Communist Party boss in the 1970s and 1980s, Valentin Lenichenko was appointed by Stavropol' and was not a member of one of the titular nationalities. See Marina Pustilnik, “Karachaevo-Cherkessia: Caucasian Stresses,” in *Transition*, Open Media Research Institute, March 15, 1995, pp.16-18 (p.16).

<sup>17</sup> The native language in AOs was poorly developed as medium of communication. In the public sphere preference was given to the language of the union republic, i.e. to Russian in the case of the North Caucasus AOs. Native language instruction also rarely extended beyond the first grades of primary school.

*Tenglik* went so far as to blockade transportation routes until Avars were removed from posts in the Dagestani leadership and to demand the creation of a separate Kumyk republic which would be administered entirely by ethnic Kumyks.<sup>18</sup>

In the second case, the comparative development of non-Russian urban populations in the ASSRs and AOs of the North Caucasus after the Second World War demonstrates that the formation of ministries and a bureaucracy staffed with national cadres was the primary factor in the urbanization and modernization of the national-territorial units of the USSR. Prior to the 1920s, the non-Russian populations of the North Caucasian republics were predominantly rural. The major towns in the region, such as Vladikavkaz, Grozny and Makhachkala, were established as Russian military and trading outposts in the 19th century, and were thus populated by Russians. Over time, however, as a result of their state structures, the ASSRs were able to promote education, jobs, and the provision of housing for the titular nationality. For example, in Nal'chik, the capital of the Kabardino-Balkaria ASSR, the two titular nationalities accounted for only 15.5% of the total population in 1959, but represented 41.5% of the total population by 1989.<sup>19</sup> In contrast, in the Adygei AO, where state structures were shared with Krasnodar Krai, only 15% of the total Adygei population had become urbanized by 1989.<sup>20</sup>

Autonomous oblasts and autonomous okrugs, which had even fewer attributes of sovereignty, were acutely aware of the greater access to resources and influence accorded to those higher up the hierarchical ladder. In addition, members of groups without a designated national territory, or those living outside the borders of their national republic or oblast' (with the notable exception of ethnic Russians, the "first among equals" across the whole of the former Soviet Union), had no guaranteed access whatsoever to education, jobs and housing.

### **Territorial Readjustment in the Soviet Period:**

Despite these limitations, members of all the seemingly disadvantaged groups could hope for a change in their political fortunes and a readjustment in their favor by the center. From the 1920s to the 1980s, the federal system of the USSR was repeatedly modified by *fiat* of the CPSU. These modifications included:

- border realignments and transfers of territory between union republics, such as the transfer of Crimea from the Russian Federation to Ukraine in 1954;
- the division of union and autonomous republics into separate units, such as the repeated subdivisions of the Circassian people of the North Caucasus in the 1920s and 1930s;

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<sup>18</sup> See Ol'ga Vasil'eva and Timur Muzaev, *Severnyi kavkaz v poiskakh regional'noi ideologii*, Progress (Moscow, 1994), p.44.

<sup>19</sup> See M.N. Guboglo, *Razvitie etnodemograficheskoi situatsii v stolitsakh avtonomnykh respublik v 1959-1989 gg.*, RAN document No. 33, Series A of *Mezhnatsional'nye otnosheniya v sovremennom mire*, Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Moscow, 1992).

<sup>20</sup> Figures from *Kubanskii Kur'er* (Krasnodar), December 20, 1991.

- the amalgamation of different nationalities into a single territorial unit, such as the creation of the Kabardino-Balkarian AO in 1922;
- the upgrading of autonomous units, such as the promotion of Kabardino-Balkaria from AO to ASSR status in 1936;
- and the elimination of other autonomous units altogether, such as the dissolution of the Checheno-Ingushetia ASSR in 1944 during the deportations of these ethnic groups from the North Caucasus.

*Realpolitik* lay at the heart of all these attempts to tinker with the system, not the desire to align administrative borders with ethnic frontiers or to rationalize the system. In some cases, the modification rewarded a particular national group for loyalty to the state, or was designed to curry favor with a key political constituency. In others, the intention was to weaken a coalition or large ethnic group that either posed a threat to Russia's domination of Soviet politics or could demand secession from the USSR. In the case of the Circassians, who were forcibly divided into new Soviet "nationalities" (the Adygei, Cherkess and Kabardinians), the territory of other ethnic groups was added to their individual national units to dilute the population even further and keep them in constant competition over political and economic resources. Radical territorial changes, such as the abolition of Checheno-Ingushetia and the deportation of its people, were used to punish specific groups. In each case, the modification stressed the point that Moscow and the CPSU were the ultimate arbitrator of the system and the bestower of territory and privilege.<sup>21</sup>

The frequent realignments belied any notion that the borders of the Soviet Union's constituent units were set in stone. Instead, they were suggestive of the fundamental arbitrariness of the system and encouraged expectations among the non-Russian peoples of further territorial change at the whim of the center.

### **Demands for Territorial Change During *Perestroika*:**

With the advent of *Perestroika*, Moscow was overwhelmed by demands from non-Russian national groups for the revision of the USSR's internal borders. Armenian nationalist groups in both the Armenian SSR and the Nagorno-Karabakh AO demanded the transfer of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan to Armenia. Prominent Moscow intellectuals and dissidents, including Andrei Sakharov and his wife Elena Bonner, lent their support, presenting the dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh's status as the "test case" of *Perestroika*.

In the Russian Federation, for example, the republic of Buryatia demanded the incorporation within its borders of Buryat territories in neighboring Russian oblasts. Ethnic Germans demanded the restoration of their autonomous republic on the Volga. In the North Caucasus, Karachais, Balkars, Kabardinians, and Ingush all demanded their own separate republics.

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<sup>21</sup> For a further discussion of Soviet policy in the North Caucasus, see Wixman, "Soviet Nationality Policy and Practice" in *Language Aspects of Ethnic Patterns and Processes in the North Caucasus*, pp.121-170.

The Soviet government of the Russian Federation did take some initial steps to respond to these demands. In December 1990, the Constitution of the Russian Federation was amended to delete the word “autonomous” from “autonomous republics,” which amounted to a symbolic elevation in status. And in July 1991, the Russian Federation’s parliament formally endorsed requests that the Gorno-Altai, Khakass, Adygei, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia autonomous oblasts be upgraded to the status of republics.

### **Demands for Territorial Change in the Russian Federation After 1991:**

The demands for territorial change were given further impetus by the dissolution of the USSR and the establishment of the Russian Federation as an independent state in December 1991. The most dramatic example was the attempted secession of Chechnya from the Russian Federation in November 1991, the formal division of the Checheno-Ingushetia ASSR into two new republics in June 1992, and Moscow’s subsequent efforts to bring Chechnya back into line. Under the USSR Constitution, ASSRs were not permitted to secede from their parent union republic. Chechen nationalists, however, first demanded that the republic be accorded parity with the 15 union republics of the USSR in 1989. After the independence of the adjacent union republics of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in 1991, Chechnya’s case for its status to be upgraded to that of a union republic seemed stronger, since in accordance with Stalin’s criteria for the promotion of an ASSR to an SSR, Chechnya now had an international border, the titular nationality was the largest group in the republic, and its total population was over one million.<sup>22</sup>

At the end of December 1991, Chechnya’s outright declaration of independence and the grumbling from the republics suggested that the Russian Federation might follow the USSR down the path of disintegration. The abolition of the CPSU and the collapse of Soviet central planning and distribution had severed key political and economic ties between Moscow and the periphery, leaving the federal center severely weakened. A haphazard and unregulated devolution of economic and political power to the Russian republics and regions began. For Moscow to regain control of the federation it seemed that a comprehensive reform of its administrative structure would be required.

The first step in Moscow’s reform of the federation’s structure was the announcement of a Federal Treaty between Moscow and the 89 subjects of the Russian Federation in 1992.<sup>23</sup> This echoed an attempt by former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev to conclude a new Union Treaty between the USSR and the 15 constituent union republics in 1991 to preempt a spate of secessions led by the Baltic States.<sup>24</sup> Just as Gorbachev’s step, however, precipitated the August 1991 coup by a

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<sup>22</sup> According to the 1989 Soviet census, the combined population of Checheno-Ingushetia was 1,270,429, with the Ingush portion accounting for only 12.9% of the total (approximately 165,000).

<sup>23</sup> The 89 “subjects” of the Russian Federation consist of 21 republics, 1 autonomous oblast (the Jewish AO), 10 autonomous okrugs, 6 krais, 49 oblasts, and 2 cities with special status—Moscow and St. Petersburg. The 1992 Federal Treaty consisted of three separate documents, signed between the Federal government and the republics, between the Federal government and the krais, oblasts and cities, and between the Federal government and the autonomous okrugs and autonomous oblast.

<sup>24</sup> The existing Union Treaty was that of 1922 which had provided the basis for the creation of the USSR.

group of high-level Soviet functionaries who were opposed to the devolution of power, Yeltsin's proposal did not succeed in stabilizing the Russian Federation.

Tatarstan and Chechnya abstained from signing the Federal Treaty in March 1992, and a number of the actual signatories, such as Yakutia and Bashkortostan, made official declarations of serious reservations. Russia's oblasts also immediately protested what they perceived as special privileges accorded to the national republics in the treaty and demanded equal rights.

### **The Dilemma of Post-Soviet Structural Reform:**

The protests of the oblasts highlighted the fundamental dilemma of post-Soviet structural reform in the Russian Federation:

- should the ethno-territorial principle be retained with its asymmetry and special privileges given to the republics?
- or should the Federation be based on self-administering units organized according to territorial size and economic principles, along the lines of the states of the USA and the German *Lands*?
- or should the Federation be abolished altogether and a unitary, centralized state be created, with only limited administrative devolution to units akin to the old Tsarist *gubernias*?

There is presently no consensus in Moscow on this issue and Russia's politicians vacillate between the three positions.<sup>25</sup> Retaining the current structure demands its rationalization, and a coherent strategy for the devolution of an appropriate degree of power to the Federation's non-Russian ethnic groups. It is opposed by many Russian political leaders and oblasts. The territorial-administrative principle, on the other hand, while facilitating the functions of the central government, implies a radical departure from the *status quo* and is strongly opposed by the national republics. The third option suggests an end to democratization and a return to the over-centralization of functions in the Soviet period. While the latter is favored by officials of the central government in Moscow and businessmen seeking a uniform legal framework for country-wide operations,<sup>26</sup> it is opposed by all the constituent units of the federation.

The difficulties of reaching a consensus on the direction of structural reform are compounded by the necessity of creating a post-Soviet political system for the Russian Federation.

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<sup>25</sup> For the most recent in-depth discussion and illustration of this dilemma see Rafael Khakimov, "Russia and the Process of Federalization," and "Appeal to President Boris Yeltsin from President M. Shaimiev, Tatarstan, President M. Rakhimov, Bashkortostan and President M. Nikolaev, Sakha (Yakutia): For a Consistent Policy to Democratize and Federalize Russia," in *Bulletin of the Ethnic Conflict Management in the Former Soviet Union Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning of Conflict, Special Section*, pp. 10-16, Conflict Management Group June 1995 (hereafter CMG *Bulletin*).

<sup>26</sup> This information was obtained in interviews with Russian businessmen conducted by the SDI Project in June 1994.

From 1991, the question of whether Russia should be a presidential or a parliamentary republic and the revision of the Russian Constitution took precedence over the question of the respective rights of republics, oblasts and the federal center. As President Yeltsin and the Russian parliament vied for ultimate authority, the issue of structural reform was reduced to a pawn in the power struggle. For example, in August 1990, faced by declarations of sovereignty by the Mari, Komi and Tatar republics in the Volga region, Boris Yeltsin urged the Russian Federation's republics to "take as much sovereignty" as they could swallow. In 1993, to win the support of the Council of the Heads of the Republics<sup>27</sup> in pushing through a presidential constitution for the Russian Federation against the wishes of the parliament, Yeltsin capitalized on this earlier statement, presenting himself as the guarantor of republican autonomy against hardliners in the Russian parliament.

As a result of the power struggles at the center and the lack of consensus on the future structure of the Russian Federation, by the end of 1993, the Federal Treaty and a new Russian Constitution had all been concluded and brought into force, but no fundamental reform of the structure of the Federation had taken place.

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<sup>27</sup> This body was established by President Yeltsin in October 1992 to implement the basic principles of the Federal Treaty and discuss the administration of the Russian Federation on the basis of the new Constitution. See "Directive of the President of the Russian Federation On the Formation of the Council of the Heads of the Republics," *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, October 30, 1992.

## SECTION II

### **The Crisis of National and Regional leadership in the North Caucasus**

After December 1991, as Moscow politics retreated into the halls of the Kremlin and the White House, for the first time the former ASSRs, AOs, oblasts and krais were left to regulate their own political and economic affairs—raise revenues, manage their own budgets, draw up strategies for privatization, and form alliances with each other and with Moscow. However, the structural legacy of the USSR left them ill-prepared for these tasks as it deprived them of national leaders with practical political and administrative experience.

#### **The Lack of National Leadership:**

As outlined above, prior to the collapse of the USSR, the sovereignty of the USSR's administrative units was largely symbolic with all authority vested in the CPSU at the center. As a result, the most ambitious members of the non-Russian national elite gravitated toward the locus of power in Moscow, became thoroughly Russified, and lost many of their ties to their native region. Those cadres left in the republics were appointed by the center and had little contact with Moscow except to receive directives. Their political experience was thus limited to parochial affairs and did not extend to the operation of larger state structures.

The ASSRs fared much worse in this regard than the SSRs. The capitals of the SSRs, such as Kiev, Tbilisi, Almaty and Tashkent, had the atmosphere and resources of major cities, while the capitals of the ASSRs, such as Grozny, Vladikavkaz and Nal'chik, were little more than overgrown provincial towns. In the republics of the North Caucasus, as elsewhere, the road to success led to Moscow (or to another major city of the USSR) where there were increased educational opportunities and influential jobs in the central bureaucracy. This was the road taken by Ruslan Khasbulatov, an ethnic Chechen, who rose to prominence as speaker of the Russian parliament, and Ramazan Abdulatipov, an ethnic Avar from Dagestan, who became First Deputy Chairman of the upper chamber of the Russian parliament. Both were viewed as members of the central government rather than as representatives of their respective national groups in Moscow and did not play a direct role in local government.

After December 1991, however, taking their cue from the example of the SSRs, the ASSRs of the North Caucasus sought to create mini-national states with a bureaucracy staffed by the titular nationality.<sup>28</sup> They assumed the responsibility of creating the relevant state institutions, complete with executive, legislative and judicial branches, an agenda for domestic economic reform, and a foreign policy to create new relationships with other remnants of the former Soviet Union and the rest of the world. Presidents were elected, new constitutions were written without the approval of Moscow. Chechnya, which had directly emulated the SSRs in declaring its independence from

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<sup>28</sup> With the dissolution of the USSR, the autonomous republics of the Russian Federation saw themselves as inheriting the same functional relationship vis-à-vis the Federation as the union republics of the USSR had theoretically vis-à-vis enjoyed the union, i.e. as "sovereign states" joined in a federal relationship with Moscow and the Russian oblasts, and accorded the same attributes of sovereignty outlined above.

Russia, announced the formation of its own armed forces, while other republics such as North Ossetia talked of creating national guards and militias.

However, as in the rest of Russia's republics and oblasts, the cadres who ran the republics of the North Caucasus had no prior experience of self-government or direct budgetary control, and certainly no experience in negotiating political and economic alliances with the republics' neighbors. With the collapse of the Communist Party of the USSR, the old Soviet cadres were also discredited and a search began within many of the republics for new national leaders who could guide them through the minefield of democratization and marketization.

The leadership issue is an extremely important one in the Russian Federation, for both Russian political culture and that of the more "traditional societies" of the North Caucasus revolve around the central figure of a leader or *vozhd*'. As Valery Tishkov, Director of the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow, and the former head of the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy, wrote: "For the small ethnic groups of the Russian Federation, great importance is attached not so much to local competence and responsibility as to becoming well-known in the Federation as a whole and acquiring prestigious titles (Academician, General and so forth), which satisfy national pride and inspire belief in larger influence...For many, ethnic affiliation became a political resource. Those who possessed this could formulate claims to power over their 'own' people."<sup>29</sup>

In other words, the inadequacy of the old republican leadership and the search for a new national leader made it possible for members of the non-Russian elite at the federal level to acquire influence in their home republics. Ethnic affiliation and a prominent position in federal institutions, not proven administrative experience or a particular political platform, became the keys to power in the North Caucasus republics.

In such a manner, high-ranking former Soviet Generals became the new presidents of Chechnya and Ingushetia, well-known intellectuals and members of the cultural elite became the leaders of new national movements throughout the North Caucasus, and prominently placed North Caucasians in Moscow sought to influence political developments in their native republics to their advantage.

### **The Lack of Regional Leadership:**

The central focus on ethnicity in republican politics has created a leadership vacuum. It has resulted in a situation where no North Caucasian leader has been able to offer a coherent political platform for the broader region. Those political figures who aspire to regional leadership, such as Ruslan Aushev the President of Ingushetia, and Ramazan Abdulatipov the First Deputy Chairman of the Russian parliament's upper chamber, have found that their ethnic identification limits their appeal outside their 'native' republic.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Valery Tishkov, "The Ambitions of Leaders and the Arrogance of Power," in *CMG Bulletin*, February 1995, pp. 3-6 (p.5).

<sup>30</sup> Aushev is a former Soviet Major-General and veteran of the war in Afghanistan, who resigned his commission over the failure of the Russian government to negotiate effectively in the conflict between North Ossetia and

The ethnic identification of politics in the North Caucasus is the result of more than the centrality of the *Führer Prinzip* in the political culture. It is in part a consequence of the fact that the interest-based political parties in Moscow have failed to organize themselves in the regions since 1991. With the exception of the rump Communist Party, the Agrarian Party and Vladimir Zhirinovskiy's Liberal Democratic Party, parties have remained the cliques of the Moscow elite with few grass roots organizations or regional representatives. In June 1995, for example, only six parties had officially registered with Kabardino-Balkaria's Ministry of Justice: the Agrarian Party of Russia, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Democratic Party, the Party for Russian Unity and Accord (PRES), the Adygei People's Party, and the Consolidation Party. Of these six, only the Agrarian party and the Communists, who had combined their ranks, had any significant membership with approximately 5,000 members. The other parties had virtually no republican membership, with PRES and the Consolidation Party having around 120 members each, and the Democratic Party was thought to have disbanded entirely.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to the marked absence of interest-based political parties, the North Caucasus has no common regional administrative structures. In the Soviet period, as illustrated by the division of the Circassians in the 1930s, the government was eager to eliminate any potential power base among its constituent national groups that could challenge its rule. In the case of the North Caucasus, the creation of common institutions and the encouragement of regional integration among republics with a tradition of opposition to Moscow were obviously not in the USSR's best interests. Likewise, the government of the Russian Federation has not created any coherent political structures to bind the region together.

As a result, politics in the North Caucasus has tended to become parochial national politics. Would-be political leaders must concentrate on the exploitation of the most salient issues in the region—the conflicting aspirations of the individual national groups—to build a power base. The result has been a succession of movements and associations that have sprung up around self-appointed national leaders. These movements purport to represent all the 'ethnic interests' of the group, and seek to change the political balance within the republics in the group's favor.<sup>32</sup>

Some of these movements have relatively benign goals, such as pursuing national cultural, political and economic development within the existing framework of their respective republics. In Dagestan, for example, the Imam Shamil National Front was created in 1991 to promote Avar interests in areas like Northern Dagestan where Avar populations live alongside Kumyks, Chechens and Russians. The National Front claims to be in favor of a sovereign and unified Dagestan rather than a specific national homeland for the Avars or a 'Dagestan for Avars.' It has also presented itself

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Ingushetia. Since his election as President of Ingushetia in February 1993, he has often become the voice of nationalities who have not been acknowledged by regional political groups. Abdulatipov, an ethnic Avar from Dagestan, is the highest-ranking "North Caucasian" at the federal level. As such, he has been the initiator of a number of Moscow-based efforts to promote regional integration.

<sup>31</sup> See *Gazeta Yuga*, July 14, 1995, cited in *FBIS*, July 19, 1995, p.50.

<sup>32</sup> See Vasil'eva and Muzaev, pp.7-10.

as a mediator in inter-ethnic conflicts in the republic, such as the conflict between the Chechens and the Laks in fall 1992 and between the Kumyks and Laks in the summer of 1993. Likewise, the Lak national movement, *Kazi-Kumukh*, which emerged from an earlier Lak national front, *Tsubarz*, seeks to promote the national culture and identity of the Lak population concentrated in the Novolaksky district of Dagestan while retaining the unity of the republic as the common state of all ‘Dagestanis.’

Other movements, however, such as the Lezgin national movement *Sadval* (“Unity”) in Dagestan, or the Kabardinian (Congress of the Kabardinian People), Balkar (National Council of the Balkar People), Karachai (All-national Council of Karachai Peoples), and Cherkess (Congress of Abazin and Cherkess Peoples) national movements, seek territorial change in addition to national-cultural development. In the case of *Sadval*, the goal is the unification of traditional Lezgin territories and populations separated since 1991 by the new international border between the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan. The other movements seek the division of their respective dual republics into individual national units, while still other movements, like the Ingush party *Niiskho* and the Peoples Council of Ingushetia compete for the same national constituency.<sup>33</sup>

The fact that politics is largely confined to national politics and that no regional structures exist has produced a political vacuum in the North Caucasus. One organization, the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus—in Russian the *Konfederatsiya narodov Kavkaza* (hereafter KNK)—has tried to fill this vacuum and seize the political initiative for the region. Its political platform has been the sum of the individual national grievances against Moscow. Its goal has been to replace the republican governments with a supra-state structure and to secede from the Russian Federation.

#### **Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK):<sup>34</sup>**

The KNK is a strictly independent political operator that claims to speak on behalf of all the non-Russian peoples of the North Caucasus. It brings together national representatives from Abkhazia, Adygeia, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North and South Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya, Ingushetia, and Dagestan, and representatives of key groups that do not have their own territory, such as the Shapsugs of Krasnodar Krai and the Meskhetian Turks. However, with the notable exceptions of the governments of Abkhazia and Chechnya which have sought to exploit the organization in their conflicts with Georgia and the Russian Federation, the KNK has not won the

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<sup>33</sup> This information is from interviews with leaders of the North Caucasian national movements conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov since 1991.

<sup>34</sup> This section is based on Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, “Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus,” in *Report on Ethnic Conflict in the Russian Federation and Transcaucasia*, Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project (John F. Kennedy School of Government, July 1993), pp.108-111; with supplementary research by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov and Khasan Dzutsev in Dagestan and North Ossetia, and Larisa Khaperskaya in Rostov-on-Don (Courtesy of the Conflict Management Group Network on Ethnological Monitoring and Early Warning Network). See also Ol’ga Vasil’eva and Timur Muzaev, *Severnyi Kavkaz v poiskakh regional’noi ideologii*, pp.13-18.

support of the republican governments of the North Caucasus.<sup>35</sup> The governments do, on the other hand, take it seriously as a regional player.<sup>36</sup> In the absence of a powerful political party with a regional manifesto, the KNK's vision for the North Caucasus is the only vision that has been offered to the people of the region.

The KNK was first constituted in August 1989 as the Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus at a meeting in the Abkhazian capital Sukhumi convened on the initiative of the Abkhazian government. It was seen as a means of winning support from the neighboring republics of the North Caucasus for Abkhazia's conflict with Georgia. The Abkhazians as an ethnic group are closely related, linguistically and culturally, to the peoples of the northwestern reaches of the Caucasus mountains. Like the peoples of the North Caucasus, the Abkhazians were also dissatisfied with their republic's status as an autonomous region under the ultimate jurisdiction of a state dominated by another ethnic group. They thus sought the federalization of Georgia, and equal representation for Abkhazians and Georgians in the central government, or complete secession if a political accommodation could not be reached.<sup>37</sup>

The first meeting was followed by the gradual institutionalization of the Assembly. This included the establishment of a parliament with the selection of Yusup Soslambekov, the head of the Committee on International Relations of the Chechen parliament, as its Chairman; the election of an ethnic Kabardinian, Yuri (Musa) Shanibov—a former professor of Marxism-Leninism with little political experience—as the President of the Assembly; and the creation of a militia from volunteer forces armed with weaponry purloined from Soviet arsenals. In the fall of 1990, a Confederative Treaty was signed, on the basis of which the Assembly was declared the legal successor to the 1918 Mountain Republic and entrusted with the task of restoring the sovereign statehood of the North Caucasus.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Valery Kokov, the President of Kabardino-Balkaria, for example is an avid opponent of the KNK. In October 1992, Kokov was accused of arresting and beating volunteers of the Confederation who were intending to fight in Abkhazia (Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*, p. 110).

<sup>36</sup> Some regional leaders have established their own organizations to liaise with the KNK. For example, in July 1994, President Aushev of Ingushetia initiated the creation of the "Council of the Leaders of Public Movements and Organizations of Cossacks and Peoples of the Northern Caucasus" in Nazran to work with the KNK and convene a new Congress of peoples of the North Caucasus. This effort was side-lined by the outbreak of war between Moscow and Chechnya in December 1994.

<sup>37</sup> Although the peoples of the North Caucasus are often divided against each other they have a tradition of showing a united front when one of the groups or the region itself comes under attack from the outside. This was demonstrated both during the Caucasian Wars of the 19th century when the region was invaded by the Russian Empire and by the creation of the Mountain Republic during the Russian Revolution. Support for the Abkhazians against the Georgians in the form of the creation of the Assembly of the Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus is thus another expression of North Caucasian solidarity in the face of an external threat.

<sup>38</sup> The Mountain Republic was established in Tbilisi, Georgia in May 1918 by a group of North Caucasian representatives under the protection of Turkey. From September 1918 to May 1919 the government of the republic was centered in Dagestan until the republic fell to the counter-revolutionary forces of General Anton Denikin's Volunteer Army. The North Caucasus was incorporated into the USSR by the Bolsheviks in 1922—initially as the Autonomous Mountain Soviet Socialist Republic in acknowledgement of the brief independence of this entity. By 1936, the Mountain ASSR had been divided into the individual ASSRs and AOs of the North Caucasus.

After 1991, Abkhazia's role as the catalyst for the organization was assumed by Chechnya, which also sought to use it as a tool, this time for the Chechen struggle with Moscow. Chechnya's President, Dzhokhar Dudayev, brought the third congress of the Assembly together in Grozny in November 1991 under a slogan of opposition to "the imperial forces of Russia." In Grozny the Assembly was also transformed into the Confederation of Mountain Peoples of the Caucasus.

The congress in Grozny marked the beginning of a campaign of civil disobedience by the KNK under Chechen auspices, with the aim of achieving the unification of the North Caucasus at Moscow's expense. The organization's membership of regional movements and ethnic groups was also expanded to officially include the Chechen and Abkhazian republics, and in October 1992, at another congress in Grozny, the Confederation finally changed its name to the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus.<sup>39</sup>

In the course of 1992, the KNK frequently clashed with the Russian government over its policies in the region, including: Yeltsin's recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity in his June 1992 agreement with Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze to deploy peacekeepers to South Ossetia; an official announcement that the Russian Federation would not intervene in the conflict with Abkhazia; and a series of repressive measures against key KNK figures, such as the attempted arrest of Yuri Shanibov in September 1992.<sup>40</sup> For its part, the KNK demanded that the leaders of the North Caucasus republics denounce the March 1992 Federal Treaty with Moscow, that all Russian troops be withdrawn from the Caucasus, and that the independence of Chechnya, South Ossetia and Abkhazia be recognized.

### **The Confederation's Vision for the North Caucasus:**

From Moscow's point of view, the KNK's activities in the North Caucasus and its vision for the region are deeply troubling. The KNK's stated objective is to restore the 1918 Mountain Republic of the North Caucasus as a confederation stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea with its capital in Sukhumi, Abkhazia, on the basis of a shared historical experience in the Caucasian wars of 1817-1864 and a common cultural heritage rooted in Islam.

In theory, such a confederation would exercise full control of the key Black Sea-Caspian Sea axis and the transportation and communication links between Russia and Transcaucasia (and hence Turkey and Iran) to the south—at the expense of Russia's strategic position in the region. It is no surprise that the threat posed by the creation of a Mountain Confederation has been repeatedly stressed by Russian officials.

In May 1993, for example, following a visit to the North Caucasus by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, a meeting of the Russian Security Council was convened to discuss

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<sup>39</sup> This final name change was implemented to emphasize the inclusion of those North Caucasian peoples usually associated with the lowlands, such as the Kabardinians, as well as those associated with the mountains, such as the Balkars, in the organization.

<sup>40</sup> See Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*, p.109.

the situation in the region. At the news conference following the meeting, the then First Deputy Chairman of the Russian parliament's Council of Nationalities, Ramazan Abdulatipov, expressed great concern about the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus' "possible plot against Russian interests." Russian Procurator General, Valentin Stepankov, also noted that his office was engaged in preventing "confederation attempts to become a parallel state power" in the North Caucasus.<sup>41</sup>

In spite of Moscow's concerns, the KNK has not yet become a parallel state power in the North Caucasus. Indeed, by the fall of 1994, the KNK had lost much of its vigor as a political force as a direct result of its own internal contradictions.

Since its formation in 1989, the KNK has been high on rhetoric, but low on concrete action. In fact, the KNK has offered little in the way of a coherent political strategy for the North Caucasus. There is no blueprint for the actual implementation of the 1990 Confederative Treaty, and the conception of the subsequent relationship with Moscow and the rest of the Russian Federation has remained vague.<sup>42</sup>

After January 1993, the influence of both Abkhazia and Chechnya in the KNK declined steadily. Having concluded ceasefire agreements with Georgia in the fall of 1993, Abkhazia distanced itself from the organization, and the Chechen leadership gradually became preoccupied with its own struggle rather than broader regional politics. Once the Abkhazian-Chechen alliance was broken and the two republics went their separate ways, the organization lost its ideological motor and was unable to come up with a new political platform.

#### **Assessment of the Role of the KNK in the North Caucasus:**

The KNK's vision of a Confederation based on a tradition of struggle with Moscow and a collective Islamic heritage is not a long-term prospect for either promoting cooperation among the non-Russian peoples of the North Caucasus or integrating the region. It is also not a tenable platform for operating in an environment where the majority of the population is Russian, and where Russians constitute a significant proportion of the populations of every national republic. In aspiring to regional leadership on this basis, the KNK has reproduced, within itself, the problems that beset the North Caucasus.

First, as a collection of representatives from the individual national movements and ethnic groups the organization has no serious leadership with regional appeal. Second, the prevalence of conflict in the region suggests that the republics and peoples of the North Caucasus do not have as much in common today as geography, culture and a shared historical experience might indicate. The

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<sup>41</sup> See "Caucasian 'Highlanders' May Act Against Russian Interests," *ITAR-TASS*, May 14, 1995.

<sup>42</sup> On the first issue, there were suggestions that an initial confederation of Dagestan and Chechnya would set an example for the rest of the North Caucasus, but this was opposed by the Dagestani government. On the second, there was no agreement on whether the proposed Confederation should be created within the framework of the Russian Federation, or as a separate entity with some kind of associative arrangement with Russia. (This information is from interviews conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov and leaders of the KNK since 1991.)

members of the KNK all have a different idea about what they want to achieve. The complex ethnic mix of the region, combined with the USSR's successful policy of divide and rule, and the lack of regional institutions and established interest-based political parties, have all worked against the political integration of the peoples of the North Caucasus.

The 1992 conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia, both members of the KNK, is the event that most clearly underscores the fact that the region is set upon itself by territorial disputes and national and religious contradictions. The conflict demonstrated that any organization that seeks to dominate regional politics through the integration of the non-Russian peoples, like the KNK, must first defuse a minefield of complicating factors.

North Ossetia and the Ossetians also challenge the vision of a Confederation of North Caucasian republics and peoples brought together by a common Islamic heritage and a shared historic struggle against Moscow. The republic is predominantly non-Muslim and the Ossetians are traditionally oriented toward Russia.<sup>43</sup> The demographic situation in North Ossetia is also such that the Ossetian population would be overwhelmed in a Caucasian Confederation and the republic's political leverage would be minimized.<sup>44</sup>

The participation of North Ossetian representatives in the KNK has thus been based on the desire to use the organization as a platform in the territorial dispute with Ingushetia, and to support South Ossetia in its conflict with Georgia. It has not been the result of a shared belief in regional integration through a North Caucasian Confederation. This is demonstrated by the fact that the North Ossetian government has repeatedly stressed its intention to seek "sovereignty" as part of the Russian Federation and has turned towards Moscow, not the KNK, for assistance in its conflict with the Ingush. The close relationship between North Ossetian and Russia, and Moscow's view of the former as its outpost in the North Caucasus, foster the animosity of the neighboring republics.

From the perspective of the ethnic Russian population of the North Caucasus, the KNK's vision for the North Caucasus is an entirely negative one. The Russian community has been pointedly excluded from membership in the organization. The Cossacks and Russian communities in the region have serious territorial disputes with North Caucasian peoples and republics, and equally serious fears of a rise of "Islamic Fundamentalism" in the region. On the basis of statements such as those made by Magomet Magomayev, the chairman of the KNK's religious societies council, who justified the involvement of Confederation militias in the Abkhazian-Georgian conflict with a reference to Islamic law and the will of Allah;<sup>45</sup> Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudayev's decision to take his oath of office on the Koran; and the reported involvement of mercenaries from local Muslim

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<sup>43</sup> Although the majority of Ossetians are Eastern Orthodox Christians, 25% of the population are declared, if not practicing, Muslims.

<sup>44</sup> By way of illustration, North Ossetia lags far behind the rest of the North Caucasus in population growth with only a 10% increase in the Ossetian population between 1959 and 1989 to a total of 598,000, in contrast to a 27% increase in the total Chechen and Ingush populations of the North Caucasus, for example, to 957,000 and 237,000 respectively. (Figures from the 1989 Soviet census.)

<sup>45</sup> See Vladimir Miroshnichenko and Dmitry Panayev, "Highlanders Invoke Allah but Face Yeltsin's Wrath," *Kommersant*, September 1, 1992.

countries (i.e. Turkey, Iran, and Jordan) in regional conflicts, ethnic Russians fear that the proposed North Caucasus Confederation will become an Iranian-style Islamic state. The inter-ethnic conflicts in the region, the regional economic crisis, the concomitant rise in crime, and the increased influence of traditional clan structures in a number of republics, have also engendered fears that any North Caucasian Confederation would be incapable of sustaining itself and would inevitably degenerate into a lawless state riven by clan conflicts. For ethnic Russians, therefore, the Mountain Confederation is a vision of the “Lebanonization” of the whole region.<sup>46</sup>

Although the KNK has made some effort to assuage these fears, by establishing links with the Russian Cossack movements in the region and acknowledging the Cossacks as “among the indigenous Caucasians,”<sup>47</sup> it has not been able to overcome the perception that it is a secessionist and anti-Russian force.

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<sup>46</sup> This information is from interviews with local Russian officials conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov since 1991, and by Fiona Hill in the summer of 1995. For a piece that typifies Russia’s fears of the Lebanonization of the North Caucasus, see L.Ia. Dadiani and A.Iu. Shumikhin, “*Livanizatsia*” kak model’ etno-sotsial’noi konfliktnosti i polozhenie v zone Kavkaza: sopostavitel’nyi analiz, Rossiiskii Nauchnyi Fond (Moscow, 1994).

<sup>47</sup> In 1993, after President Yeltsin signed the Russian government’s “Decree on Reforming the Military Structure, Border and Security Forces on the Territory of the North Caucasus region of the Russian Federation, and State Support for the Cossacks” the Cossacks became a force to be reckoned with. In response, the KNK organized a series of meetings with local Cossacks formations and an “Agreement on the Principles of Cooperation and Mutual Assistance Between the Confederation of Peoples of the Caucasus and the Cossacks of Southern Russia” was concluded. However, as is the case with all of the KNK’s declarations of principles, there were no concrete results from this agreement.

## SECTION III

### **The Failure of Russia's Regional Policy**

The increasing demands for territorial change and structural reform in the North Caucasus and the crisis of national and regional leadership have not been met by a coherent response from Moscow. Russia has failed to formulate either a strategy for implementing structural reform or a regional policy for the Russian Federation. The Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy that is supposed to coordinate Moscow's efforts is weak, and as a result, a number of other government agencies compete for influence over the future of the Russian Federation and two conflicting ideas have emerged in Russian politics as to what form the new post-Soviet Russian Federation should take.

Instead of following from structured debates and eventual political consensus, regional policy in Russia is the sum of individual initiatives and is consequently confused. The legal framework established to regulate relations between Moscow and the subjects of the Russian Federation consists of four contradictory pieces of legislation: the 1992 Federal Treaty; the 1993 Russian Constitution; a set of bilateral treaties between Moscow and individual republics and oblasts; and a new draft law on the delimitation of powers between the center and the periphery. As a result of having no overall blueprint for the future of the Russian Federation, Moscow has resorted to improvisation and *ad hoc* measures to address the issue of conflict in the North Caucasus.

#### **Institutional confusion in Moscow:**

Theoretically, the conduct of regional policy in the Russian Federation is assigned to the Ministry of Nationalities and Regional Policy—a ministry which was created in 1992 on the basis of a pre-existing State Committee for Nationality Affairs (*Goskomnats*). In practice, however, policy-making has been diffused among a number of institutions, including:

- the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy;
- the Russian parliament, under the jurisdiction of the Subcommittee on Regional Policy, and the Subcommittee on Federal Relations;
- the Presidential apparatus, under the President's special advisor on nationalities issues and the Center for Ethno-political and Regional Studies;
- the Russian Security Council, under the jurisdiction of specially convened subcommittees on regional issues;
- the federal security and counter-intelligence services;
- the Ministry of Foreign Affairs;
- the Ministry of Internal Affairs;

- the Ministry for Emergency Situations;
- and, since the intervention in Chechnya, the Ministry of Defense.

As Galina Staravoitova, President Yeltsin's former advisor on nationalities issues, said in 1992, "[W]e have too many people who consider themselves specialists on the national question. There is the Council of Nationalities, there are subcommissions of the Supreme Soviet, there is the State Committee for Nationality Affairs...and there are numerous volunteers."<sup>48</sup>

In part, this diffusion of policy is the result of the weakness of the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy. Since 1991, the ministry has changed leadership—and thus direction—four times.<sup>49</sup> However, the nature of the issue is also a major contributing factor. As the current head of the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, noted in an interview in the Russian press, he is not in charge of the “ministry for the settlement of nationalities conflicts.”<sup>50</sup> The outbreak of armed conflict on the territory of the Russian Federation demands the attention of other government agencies. The ministries of Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Emergency Situations, and Defense, have all become involved in nationalities and regional policy when inter-group conflicts in the North Caucasus and elsewhere have required the imposition of martial law or the deployment of troops, or when they have threatened to embroil external powers. The federal security and counter-intelligence services have become involved, as in the case of Chechnya, when the decision has been taken by the Russian government to lend support to key opposition movements in their political struggle.

There is, however, no coordination of effort among the institutions, and no agency has the ultimate responsibility for decision-making on nationality and regional policy. In an interview, Vyacheslav Mikhailov himself described the role of his ministry as an advisory one: “first, analyz[ing] ethnic problems in a profound fashion; and second, draw[ing] up recommendations on shaping the Russian Federation's nationalities policy,” but not making Russian policy. While

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<sup>48</sup> Cited by John Dunlop in “Gathering the Russian Lands: Background to the Chechnya Crisis,” *Working Papers in International Studies 1-95-2*, The Hoover Institution (Stanford University, January 1995), p.6.

<sup>49</sup> In March 1992, Valery Tishkov was appointed Chairman of what was then the State Committee on Nationality Policy (*Goskomnats*). Frustrated by Yeltsin's reluctance to take his advice seriously, and exasperated by the government's contradictory statements regarding ethnic conflicts, Tishkov resigned after a tenure of only seven months. He was replaced in October 1992 by Sergei Shakhrai, a key adviser to President Yeltsin and one of the architects of the Federal Treaty and the Russian Constitution. Shakhrai was elevated to the rank of Vice-Premier, and *Goskomnats* was upgraded from a State Committee to the full-fledged Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy. However, Shakhrai became increasingly involved in political intrigue in Moscow and was eventually removed from his post in May 1994. Nikolai Yegorov, the former head of Krasnodar Krai, was chosen as his successor. Yegorov, in turn, was forced to resign in June 1995, in the wake of the Chechen attack on the Russian city of Budennovsk in Stavropol' Krai. He was replaced in July 1995 by Vyacheslav Mikhailov, a nationalities expert and a former Deputy Minister of Nationalities and Regional Policy.

<sup>50</sup> See Yelena Dikun, “A Problem has Found a Specialist: Interview with Vyacheslav Mikhailov, Newly Appointed Nationalities Minister,” *Obshchaya Gazeta* (in English), No. 31, August 3-9, 1995.

absolving the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy of the responsibility for Russian regional policy, Mikhailov did not, however, indicate in his interview which government institution he considered to have the ultimate responsibility for policymaking.

### **Conflicting Ideas of the Future of the Russian Federation:**

The fact that the nationalities ministry is weak and that policymaking is spread across a number of institutions illustrates the difficulties Russia faces in resolving the question of what kind of state the post-Soviet Russian Federation should become. Since 1991, two ideological trends have emerged in Russian politics that can roughly be described as “statism” and “federalism”:

#### **1. “Statists” (“*derzhavniki*”)**

Statists are opposed to the federalization of Russia. They favor the creation of a unified or *edinoe* Russian state, with a return to the traditional Russian territorial administrative units—the *gubernias* or provinces. This would imply the abolition of the republics.

As far as the North Caucasus is concerned, adherents of this camp trace a direct continuum between Russia’s struggle in the Caucasian wars of the 19th century and the attempt to find a *modus operandi* in the post-Soviet period. They prescribe the continuation of the old Tsarist and Bolshevik policy of divide and rule in the region—singling out those groups that have been historically loyal to Russia (the Ossetians and Cossacks), marginalizing those that have been its implacable opponents (the Chechens, Ingush and Dagestanis), and meeting any show of resistance with a prompt and forceful response. The conflict between Moscow and Chechnya has both played into and resulted from this general approach.

Prominent among the statists are Russian Defense Minister Pavel Grachev; former Russian Vice President Alexander Rutskoi, who now heads a political movement, *Derzhava* (“Great Power”), which actively promotes the concept of a unitary state; and other heads of ministries and members of President Yeltsin’s administration. Ramazan Abdulatipov, the Deputy Chairman of the Russian Council of the Federation, has also been sympathetic to these views, but his approach has been tempered by the realization that “regional policy,” in the form of a return to *gubernias*, cannot simply replace “ethnic policy” in Russia and that radical changes in the existing administrative structures will provoke additional conflict.<sup>51</sup>

#### **2. “Federalists”**

The second trend, toward “federalism,” favors the decentralization of the Russian state and the clear demarcation of powers between the center and the Federation’s constituent units. This trend can be further sub-divided into two groups: those who believe that the current ethno-territorial units of the Russian Federation should be retained, and those who assert that new administrative units

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<sup>51</sup> See John Dunlop, p. 13; and Ramazan Abdulatipov “O federativnoi i natsional’noi politike Rossiiskogo gosudarstva” (An Appeal to Boris N. Yeltsin 1995), published in full in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, p.8.

should be created on the basis of territorial size and economic principles, along the lines of a German-style *Länder* system, with every unit having equal privileges.

In formulating policy toward the North Caucasus, federalists advocate the treatment of all republics on an equal basis. They seek to establish cooperation both among the republics and with the federal center.

The idea of keeping the existing units of the Russian Federation has been supported by Galina Staravoitova, the erstwhile presidential advisor on nationalities, and Sergei Kovalev, the former Chairman of the Presidential Commission on Human Rights. The *Länder* option has been promoted by both Valery Tishkov and Sergei Shakhrai as former nationalities ministers, and by leaders of the Russian democratic parties, such as Yegor Gaidar and Grigory Yavlinsky. Neither option, however, has found much support in the so-called “power ministries” (Foreign Affairs, Internal Affairs, Security and Defense), where so much of Moscow’s policy toward the regions has ultimately been determined.

### **The Framework for Regulating Relations Between Moscow and the Subjects of the Federation:**

The multiplicity of government agencies concerned with regional policy and of ideas on the future form of the Russian Federation have resulted in the creation of a contradictory legal framework for the regulation of Moscow’s relations with its regions. This framework comprises the Federal Treaty, the Russian Constitution, a set of bilateral treaties, and a draft law on the delimitation of powers within the Federation.

Initially, the 1992 Federal Treaty was intended to be the fundamental document delimiting powers between the federal government and the Russian Federation’s constituent republics and oblasts, and was to be enshrined in the new Russian Constitution. However, as was noted earlier in the text, Tatarstan and Chechnya did not sign the Treaty and a number of other republics and regions expressed strong reservations about its provisions. As a result, the chapters dealing with the delimitation of powers in the Russian Constitution were rewritten and resubmitted to the republics and regions for approval in the referendum on the Constitution in December 1993. A number of republics that had initially signed the Federal Treaty—including in the North Caucasus, Adygeia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia—now rejected the Constitution on the grounds that it violated the original provisions of the Treaty.

In the wake of these rejections, and to prevent its relations with the regions from falling into legal limbo, Moscow began to conclude bilateral treaties with key republics. The first of these treaties on Mutual Delimitation and Delegation of Authority was signed between Russia and Tatarstan in February 1994. The treaty focused on issues such as foreign economic activity, the management of state property, budget and taxation, industry and transportation, and the work of the judicial system, and left the question of the ultimate status of the republic within the Russian Federation in abeyance. Since February 1994, Moscow has concluded treaties with Bashkortostan, Sakha-Yakutia, Buryatia, and Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia in the North Caucasus, more treaties are planned with additional republics, including Dagestan, Ingushetia, and Karachaevo-Cherkessia in the North Caucasus.

This activity has raised expectations among those republics that have signed treaties of fundamental change in the structure of the Russian Federation and of the continued decentralization of the state. Mintimer Shaimiev, for example, the President of Tatarstan, has presented the republic's treaty with Moscow as an antidote to "statists" who would erode the rights of the republics, and a step towards the creation of a real federal state in place of what he describes as a unitary state with "decorative" federalism. He has advocated that Moscow conclude bilateral treaties with all the subjects of the Russian Federation, including the krais and oblasts.<sup>52</sup>

These expectations were initially encouraged by Sergei Shakhrai, the architect of the first treaty with Tatarstan. In February 1994, Shakhrai asserted that he saw the treaty as the "locomotive" of federal relations and that such treaties could be concluded with each subject of the Russian Federation. Shakhrai suggested that the series of individual treaties between Moscow and the republics would become the building blocks of a new federation, with the division of power between the center and the republics defined by the voluntary delegation of power by Moscow.<sup>53</sup>

Since February 1994, however, Shakhrai has also suggested that the treaties were conceived as a 'stop-gap measure' rather than as 'building blocks,' and were intended to placate the most troublesome of Russia's republics to prevent them from following Chechnya down the path to secession.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, those republics that have been the first to conclude treaties with Moscow are those that have either protested the most loudly, or are the most economically or strategically significant. Tatarstan and Bashkortostan are major oil-producing regions at the center of key communication lines, Sakha-Yakutia is the heart of Russia's diamond industry, and North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria provide a counter-weight to Chechnya in the North Caucasus. The treaty with North Ossetia, for example, was signed in March 1995, after the outbreak of war and after North Ossetia had become the forward base for Russia's assault on Chechnya.

The sense that the treaties have not become the determining legislation for the future of the Federation is confirmed by the current passage through the Russian parliament of a draft law on the division of authority between the federal government and the subjects of the Federation. As might be expected, there are several competing versions of this law, including a version produced by the presidential apparatus, and a draft produced by Vladimir Mikhailov, a "centrist" deputy from Tatarstan, who has proposed the abolition of the Tatarstan Treaty and an end to the treaty process. This draft has been given added weight by a backlash against the "presumptuous" activities of those republics that have signed treaties. In May 1995, for example, Kabardino-Balkaria concluded a Friendship Treaty with Abkhazia without consulting the Federal government. Because the treaty also

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<sup>52</sup> See President Mintimer Shaimiev, at "The Hague Roundtable," cited in Bruce Allyn, "Foreword From Editor of English Edition," *CMG Bulletin*, February 1995, pp.9-13.

<sup>53</sup> See Sergei Shakhrai "Federalizm ili desintegratsiya," *Segodnya*, No. 37, cited in Bruce Allyn, "Foreword from Editor of English Edition," *CMG Bulletin*, October 1994, pp.7-8.

<sup>54</sup> See Sergei Shakhrai, "Official Memorandum to President Boris N. Yeltsin," No. 1576, March 1995, cited in Rafael Khakimov "Federalization and Stability: A Path Forward for the Russian Federation" in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, pp.10-14 (p.11).

contained provisions on security and cross-border transit, all of which come under the jurisdiction of the Federal government under the Russian Constitution, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately protested Kabardino-Balkaria's action and denied the legality of the treaty. In addition, in August 1995, during celebrations in Kazan to mark the fifth anniversary of Tatarstan's declaration of state sovereignty, Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin praised Tatarstan's positive role in the development of "new Russian federalism" but stressed that Russia still needed a new and clearly formulated nationalities policy to regulate relations between the center and the regions.<sup>55</sup>

In short, contrary to the hopes of the republics, the bilateral treaties do not appear, at this stage, to be part of a blueprint for regional policy and a decentralized Russian Federation. Instead, they seem to be a tool for Moscow both to give itself leverage with the republics and regions and to buy time until the question of how to restructure the Federation is finally resolved.

### **Moscow's Policy Toward the North Caucasus:**

All this competing legislation suggests that there is no real framework and that there are few guidelines in Moscow for conducting relations with individual republics or with broader regions like the North Caucasus. As a result, although Moscow has clear strategic imperatives in the North Caucasus, the absence of some clearly defined 'grand design' for the Russian Federation has prevented it from translating these imperatives into a consistent policy.

Specifically in the North Caucasus, Moscow's objectives are:

- to prevent the emulation of Chechnya's secession by other republics—the so-called "domino effect"—and keep the region within the Russian Federation;
- to obstruct regional attempts at integration that might lead to the creation of an independent and anti-Russian Mountain Confederation;
- to stabilize the region by bringing an end to conflicts and territorial disputes, by force if necessary.

As far as the conflicting trends in Russian thinking on the future of the Federation are concerned, statist and federalists in Moscow are united in seeking to keep the North Caucasus within the Russian Federation. What they fail to agree on is how this should be achieved. As a result, Russia's approach toward the region has consisted of a series of uncoordinated individual initiatives and improvisations, including: intermittent official visits; presidential decrees and parliamentary laws; more decrees and laws to combat the unintended side-effects of the first; conferences and round-tables; and the sponsorship of alternative regional political organizations to provide counterweights to the KNK. Of the early initiatives, four in particular exacerbated what had already become a tense political situation in the North Caucasus by 1991.

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<sup>55</sup> See Liz Fuller, "Chernomyrdin, Yeltsin Laud Tatarstan," *OMRI Daily Digest*, September 1, 1995.

## **1. Yeltsin's March 1991 Visit to the North Caucasus**

This first presidential visit to the region was the beginning of post-Soviet Russian policy toward the North Caucasus and occurred at the height of the stand-off between Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev over the future balance of power in the Soviet Union. To emphasize the primacy of the union republics over the union itself and to demonstrate Russia's sovereignty, Yeltsin made the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict a *cause célèbre* for the Russian Federation and traveled to the Caucasus to conclude an agreement for its peaceful resolution. Yeltsin's trip greatly inflated expectations of a positive Russian intervention in regional conflicts.

## **2. The 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples**

These expectations and regional tensions were raised even higher in the aftermath of Yeltsin's visit, by the passage in April 1991 of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples. Although laudable, the Law's proposition that those peoples who had been subjected to deportation in the 1940s should have their former lands restored or receive compensation brought all the territorial disputes in the North Caucasus into sharp focus. The impact of the Law on the individual disputes is discussed in depth in Section IV.

## **3. The 1992 Creation of the Ingush Republic**

Yeltsin's visit and the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples were compounded in April 1992 by the adoption of a decree by the Russian Parliament on the division of Checheno-Ingushetia and the creation of a new Ingush Republic. This decree was confirmed in a June 1992 law, which was passed without the provision of measures for its implementation and with no decision taken on the ultimate territorial, administrative or governmental configuration of this new republic. As a result, the law simply fostered conflict between the Ingush and Chechens over a disputed district, Sunzhensky; and between the Ingush and the North Ossetians over the Prigorodny district in North Ossetia, which had been transferred to the latter in the 1940s after the deportation of the Ingush. Moscow's failure to resolve the issue of Ingushetia's borders led directly to the armed conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia in the fall of 1992. The law also set, once again, a precedent for changing the borders and the status of autonomous units in the Russian Federation, thereby encouraging demands for more change from other republics and peoples.

## **4. Yeltsin's Rehabilitation of the Cossacks**

Significant change, however, came only for one group in the North Caucasus—the Cossacks, and indicated the primacy of Russian-speaking groups over the North Caucasian peoples. In 1992, Yeltsin issued a decree officially rehabilitating the Cossacks, followed in March 1993 by a decree essentially restoring the Cossacks' former status under the Russian Empire as territorially-based paramilitary units in the North Caucasus Region.<sup>56</sup> Yeltsin's decrees on the rehabilitation of

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<sup>56</sup> March 15, 1993 Decree On the Reforming of Military Structures, Frontier and Interior Forces on the Territory of the North Caucasian Region of the Russian Federation and State Support for the Cossacks.

the Cossacks in 1992 and 1993 were a direct consequence of the earlier legislation on the rehabilitation of repressed peoples and a response to vociferous Cossack demands that they be accorded special attention by Moscow. The decrees were also, however, a reflection of Moscow's tendency to play divide and rule in the region. For though they were embroiled in a number of territorial disputes in the region, as Section IV describes, the Cossacks had their status elevated at the expense of the other groups, fostering increased animosity in the region. As Ramazan Abdulatipov, the First Deputy Chairman of the Russian Parliament's Council of the Federation, noted after the 1993 decree was issued, it "reduce[d] to nothing all the efforts...to normalize the situation [in the North Caucasus]...and sen[t] us back to the era of Shamil's wars" when Cossacks fought the North Caucasian peoples as the proxies of the Russian Empire.<sup>57</sup>

The potentially destabilizing consequences of all these initiatives were not initially considered by Moscow. After the outbreak of armed conflict between Ossetians and Ingush in October 1992, Moscow was faced with the question of how to address the activation of all the region's disputes. One response came in November 1992 with the imposition of a moratorium on the reexamination of the internal borders of Russia, which effectively shelved the implementation of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples and led to a flood of criticism from the representatives of the repressed peoples, who had expected the imminent resolution of their situation and some form of material or monetary compensation. This moratorium and the shelving of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples are perhaps the best example of the inconsistency of the central government's policy. Another response to the activation of the disputes was the creation of new political organizations in the North Caucasus.

### **Organizational Creation in the North Caucasus:**

In late 1992, in the wake of the ill-conceived legal initiatives, the Security Council of the Russian Federation established a special Inter-regional Commission under the leadership of Vladimir Lysenko<sup>58</sup> to focus on the situation in the North Caucasus. A North Caucasus Coordinating Council was also set up under Ramazan Abdulatipov, the First Deputy Chairman of the Russian parliament's Council of Nationalities, to produce proposals for the Russian government to stabilize the situation in the region.

The Security Council's commission produced two reports entitled "The Current Ethno-political Situation in the North Caucasus and the Path Toward its Stabilization" and "The Conception of Russian Nationalities Policy in the North Caucasus."<sup>59</sup> Both reports singled out "national separatism," on the part of the KNK and the national movements in the republics, as the root of all problems in the North Caucasus. All of their policy recommendations followed from this conclusion.

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<sup>57</sup> Cited in Dunlop, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Then Deputy Head of the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy, and later the Chairman of the Russian Duma Subcommittee on Federal Relations.

<sup>59</sup> Published in *Yuige Igilik*, N. 16, 1993, cited in Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.23 and p.43.

The first report recommended that, instead of working with the new political forces such as the KNK and the national movements, Moscow establish alternative organizations in the North Caucasus. The separatist urges of the nationalist movements could only be overcome, the report concluded, if Moscow concentrated its efforts on increasing the popularity of as many pro-Russian socio-political groups in the region as possible.

The second report, which outlined the tenets of Russia's policy toward the region, affirmed that "assisting the creation and growth in popularity of pro-Russian oriented social movements" was the primary method of tackling national separatism in the North Caucasus. Drawing on the experience of the decree on the creation of the Ingush republic and the subsequent conflict between Ingushetia and North Ossetia over the Prigorodny district, the report also confirmed that a moratorium should be imposed on the division of the existing republics in the region, and further suggested that disputed territories be placed under the jurisdiction of the President of Russia.<sup>60</sup>

Both reports grossly over-estimated the impact of "national separatism" on the region. In fact, while seeking to change the territorial and administrative configuration of the region, the majority of the national movements in the North Caucasus have been in favor of remaining within the Russian Federation. Their "separatist tendencies" have been just that—"tendencies" limited to the realm of rhetoric and political protest rather than separatist acts.

The major factor behind this restraint is the traditional weakness of the economies of the North Caucasus republics. As noted in the introduction, the republics of the North Caucasus are economically dependent on the Russian Federation, which makes complete independence a less than attractive option, except for the most radical groups. As a result, with the exception of Chechnya, the republics have sought the renewal of their union with Moscow before pressing for the reform of the Russian Federation. All the republics signed the March 1992 Federal Treaty. Although Adygeia, Dagestan and Karachaevo-Cherkessia rejected the new Russian Constitution in the December 1993 referendum, their rejection was not a prelude to secession. The North Caucasian republics seek increased autonomy and concrete guarantees of economic and political rights from Moscow, not independence.

In spite of these facts, the Security Council reports did not consider the possibility of using economic leverage to forge a new relationship with the North Caucasus. Instead, the reports were the starting point for the creation of a succession of regional organizations which would be disposed towards Moscow and would provide a counter-weight to the KNK and the other national movements. After 1992, Moscow indulged, and urged groups in the region to indulge, in the creation of a profusion of organizations.

This policy has also been unsuccessful. The result is a dizzying array of associations, congresses and unions, all competing for the same constituencies. Regional politics has been

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<sup>60</sup> Vasil'eva and Muzaev, *op. cit.*, p.23; "Commission to Discuss National Policy on North Caucasus," *Interfax*, December 17, 1992, and "Russia Drafts Concept of Ethnic Policies in North Caucasus," *Interfax*, January 6, 1993.

fragmented even further and none of the organizations has succeeded in offering an alternative vision to the KNK that is capable of bringing the North Caucasus together behind Moscow.<sup>61</sup>

The first major pro-Russian organization was created by Ramazan Abdulatipov even before the publication of the Security Council's report. Then First Deputy Chairman of the Russian parliament's Council of Nationalities and presently First Deputy Chairman of the Federation Council, Abdulatipov was one of the few high-ranking North Caucasians at the federal level. In the fall of 1991, Abdulatipov convened a congress of the Association of Peoples of the Caucasus in Moscow. The Association was intended to be a direct challenge to the KNK which, at this juncture, had just declared the creation of a Mountain Republic and seemed poised to instigate regional separatism. The Association was based in Moscow with a heavy representation of Moscow scholars and Dagestanis (as Abdulatipov is an ethnic Avar from Dagestan). In 1992, it began to publish a Russian-language magazine in Moscow, *Ekho Kavkaza* ("Echo of the Caucasus"), which gave concrete form to the idea of regional integration. With a distribution of 50,000 copies and Abdulatipov as chair of the advisory board, the journal profiled the individual national groups and local political leaders, and discussed cultural, economic and social issues in the North Caucasus.<sup>62</sup>

The Association, however, failed to become a credible counter-weight to the KNK and, instead of drawing support away from the KNK was one of the factors that galvanized it into action in 1991 and 1992. With the exception of the continued publication of its magazine, the Association engaged in little discernible activity after its establishment.

The second major organization, the North Caucasian Democratic Congress, was established in Stavropol' Krai as the direct result of a conference in Piatigorsk sponsored by the Russian government in January 1993. The conference was organized by the Ministry for Nationalities and Regional Policy, then headed by Sergei Shakhrai. It was the first initiative in the North Caucasus that attempted to move beyond a confrontational approach to the region and find concrete mechanisms for cooperation, and concluded with the signing of a "Declaration on the Principles of Inter-ethnic Relations in the North Caucasus." Ninety-three representatives from 37 republican parties, movements, and the regional branches of Russian political parties took part in the conference, with the notable exception of the KNK. Nineteen of these organizations were later represented in the Political Council of the Congress. To mark a break with the radicalism of Chechnya, a leader of the Chechen opposition and a former minister of the USSR oil industry, Saslambek Khadzhiev, was elected head of the Political Council. Sergei Shakhrai's opening statement at the conference stressed that the chief priority of Russia's policy in the Caucasus was the preservation of a unified Russian state.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Short-lived organizations in the region have included the North Caucasian Inter-Parliamentary Union formed at a meeting of regional leaders led by Ramazan Abdulatipov in Piatigorsk in October 1992 and the Assembly of the North Caucasian Peoples, established as the result of a conference in Moscow in October 1992. Numerous conferences of ethnic and socio-political movements in the North Caucasus were also convened throughout the region in 1992 and 1993 to provide additional "pro-Moscow" fora for the discussion of regional issues.

<sup>62</sup> See also Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.23.

<sup>63</sup> See Galina Kovalskaya, "The Caucasus: a mechanism for settling and averting conflicts has yet to be found," *New Times International*, February 1993 pp.6-9.

In response to the refusal of the KNK to participate, the Congress presented itself as the KNK's "democratic" alternative. Yet, its establishment was not accompanied by any larger political strategy and no concerted effort was made to create a broad social base of support for the Congress in the region. The Ministry was very much the initiator of the conference and most of the movements that were represented in the Congress either were affiliated with small national groups or were amorphous organizations with democratic orientation but no political influence.<sup>64</sup>

There were nonetheless some positive results from the conference in Piatigorsk. A North Caucasus Economic Association was created to promote the economic development of the region and a series of "round-tables" were established to bring together representatives of the political forces in the region and the federal government. The round-tables, in turn, encouraged the formation of Consultative Councils in the regional parliaments which became a forum for all the political parties in an individual republic. Thus an institution to promote continuous dialogue between the ruling elite and the opposition national movements was established.<sup>65</sup> This represented a very small step toward promoting cooperation with the new political forces in the North Caucasus.

The most recent of Moscow's efforts at organization-building is the International Congress of Highlanders (in Russian the *Mezhdunarodnyi Kongress Gortsev*) which looks even further afield than the Russian Federation in its activities.<sup>66</sup> This organization, like the Association of Peoples of the Caucasus, was also created at the initiative of Ramazan Abdulatipov and held its founding Congress in Dagestan in July 1994. The International Congress seeks to tap in on increased interest in the North Caucasus from international companies and Western analysts in order to attract foreign investment to the region. The coordinating council and the secretariat of the Congress are all housed in the Analytical Center of the Council of Federation, which is staffed by a group of Moscow-based analysts headed by Abdulatipov.<sup>67</sup>

Apart from creating this succession of weak organizations, the Russian government has done little to address the persistence of conflict in the North Caucasus. Since the March 1993 decree on creating Cossack military structures, the only other concrete government action has been the intervention in Chechnya. An August 1995 press report sums up the Russian government's approach toward the region: when representatives of the administrations of all the republics, kraia and oblasts of the North Caucasus met in Moscow in August 1995 to establish an extensive program for the

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<sup>64</sup> See Larisa Khaperskaya, "Analysis of the Ethno-Political Situation in the North Caucasus," in *CMG Bulletin*, May 1994, pp. 20-25; and Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.17.

<sup>65</sup> For a discussion of the conference in Piatigorsk see Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p. 48.

<sup>66</sup> The Congress initially referred to itself in official correspondence in English as the "International Congress of Mountaineers"—"Mountaineers" being the usual English term for *Gortsy*. But the coordinating council changed the name to the "International Congress of Highlanders" in the summer of 1995 after some of the international groups it hoped to attract to its events noted that the English name evoked the image of a gathering of mountain climbers (*alpinisty* in Russian) rather than of North Caucasian peoples.

<sup>67</sup> Information from the Analytical Center of the Council of the Federation.

redevelopment and expansion of basic economic infrastructure, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Oleg Soskovets told the meeting that “Moscow counted on the region to take care of itself.”<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> See “North Caucasians Announce Development Scheme,” *Monitor* (Jamestown Foundation), August 22, 1995.

## SECTION IV

### **Territorial Disputes in the North Caucasus<sup>69</sup>**

As stated in the introduction, in addition to a number of specific factors, every conflict in the North Caucasus can be traced to a fundamental dispute over the status of a republic within the Russian Federation, a dispute over the alignment of administrative borders or the political jurisdiction of a particular territory, and the gross political mismanagement of the national leadership and Moscow. In each case the goal of the conflicting parties is the same: to have their respective group recognized as the “titular nationality” of the disputed territory and thus to ensure access to political power, land, housing and jobs for members of the group.

#### **The Historical Background to Conflict in the North Caucasus:**

Disputes over territory among the various national groups have certainly been a permanent feature of North Caucasian history. Prior to the Russian incursion into the region, however, these disputes were confined to issues such as grazing rights in the sparse mountain pastures. In spite of the high value of land and the population pressure exerted on it the disputes were localized and never translated into widespread inter-group conflict. As a group of peoples, the North Caucasians were extremely conservative and risk-averse. They were inclined to stay on their ancestral lands, and traditionally—although they might form raiding parties to carry off cattle—they did not seize and colonize the land of neighboring groups. Land was perceived as something more than a piece of property and was elevated in the culture of North Caucasian groups to the status of something sacred—a direct link with the ancestors who had lived and were buried there. The ethnic borders in the region were elaborated in great detail between the various peoples, resulting in a complex mosaic of settlements dispersed among isolated mountain valleys and of grazing rights across the adjacent lowland *steppe*. This mosaic was destroyed during the Caucasian Wars and by the subsequent colonization of the region by Russian settlers.

As a result of this colonization, Russians now represent the largest ethnic group in the North Caucasus, accounting for 67.6% of the total population. The distribution of the Russian population is, however, uneven. Russians are the overwhelming majority in the west and northwest and a minority in the east of the region.<sup>70</sup> The Russians tend to dominate, however, in the major urban centers which were originally established as Russian military fortresses, communication points and

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<sup>69</sup> This section is based on the long-term research of Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov and interviews conducted with scholars and political figures for the SDI Project from March 1994-March 1995; research carried out by Brian Boeck in Krasnodar Krai and the western North Caucasus in 1992-1993; Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*; CMG *Bulletin*, January 1994-June 1995; and Vasil’eva and Muzaev, pp.28-41. Unless noted, all population figures are from the 1989 Soviet census or the official statistics of the respective local governments.

<sup>70</sup> In 1989, Russians accounted for 85% of the total population in Krasnodar, 77% in Stavropol’, 55% in Adygeia, 42% in Karachaevo-Cherkessia, 32% in Kabardino-Balkaria, 30% in North Ossetia, 23% in Checheno-Ingushetia, and only 9% in Dagestan.

trading posts.<sup>71</sup> A significant portion of the Russian population is also of Cossack ancestry, a fact which has had an important impact on the region's territorial disputes.

The repeated redivision of land, changes of administrative borders, and movement of peoples in the Tsarist period, were continued by the Bolsheviks after the Russian Revolution (see Section I). Today, the territorial legacy of both the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union has produced a series of disputes over political jurisdiction that is the primary destabilizing factor in the North Caucasus. This legacy has been exacerbated by the failure of Russia's regional policy and the economic decline of the region since 1991. In the post-Soviet period, territorial disputes in the North Caucasus have six components:

1. The repeated modification of administrative borders since the 1920s and the division of individual groups among several administrative units.
2. The deportation of North Caucasian peoples to Central Asia between 1943-1944, and their subsequent return to the region in 1956-57.
3. The official rehabilitation of these groups by the Russian government in the April 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.
4. The increase in the value of land and its natural resources with the initiation of market economic reforms: the proposed privatization of state-owned land now seems to threaten members of one group with loss of livelihood, while promising economic advantage to members of another.
5. A flood of refugees into the North Caucasus from Transcaucasia and other areas of the former Soviet Union since 1989, which exerts additional pressure on scarce land and resources and radicalizes local politics.
6. The failure of Moscow either to follow through with the implementation of laws affecting the region, or to adopt a comprehensive approach to the political resolution of the disputes.

In the post-Soviet environment where Russian political parties are fluid and transitory and lack a coherent platform, ethnic affiliation, the historic location of borders, traditional settlement patterns, graves of ancestors, the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, land privatization and demands for territorial change have become the fabric of local politics. While most territorial disputes in the region have been limited to the level of protest, demonstration, appeal and

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<sup>71</sup> Vladikavkaz, Grozny and Makhachkala were all initially established as Russian fortresses before being transformed into towns after the 'pacification' of the Caucasus. The original Russian inhabitants were, therefore, military officers, soldiers, and government officials and their families. The growth of the civilian population came in the late 19th century and the early 20th century with the construction of the first railways and the industrial development of the North Caucasus. Large numbers of ethnic Russians were resettled in the region from the central provinces of the Russian Empire along with other Orthodox Christian Slavs from the Ukrainian *steppe*, displacing the native population in the most fertile areas of the west and northwest.

inflammatory rhetoric, others have resulted in sporadic or sustained violent conflict—as in the case of the dispute between North Ossetia and Ingushetia over the Prigorodny district of North Ossetia.

In response to the constant threat of violence, some attempts at conflict management and resolution have been made by local and federal authorities. These attempts have been most notable in Dagestan, which is the most ethnically diverse of the North Caucasian republics. The federal government in Moscow has occasionally dispatched special missions to Dagestan and granted subsidies and concessions to key groups. In general, however, the Dagestani government and socio-political groups have taken the initiative in conflict management and have presented themselves as mediators between the many ethnic groups.

In Dagestan and elsewhere in the North Caucasus two key events have played a major role in fomenting conflict: the 1943-1944 deportations and the April 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.

### **1. The Deportations of 1943-1944, and their Aftermath:<sup>72</sup>**

Between November 1943 and March 1944, the Karachai, Ingush, Chechen and Balkar people, along with other minority groups from across the USSR (including the Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars, Kalmyks and Meskhetian Turks) were deported to Central Asia and Siberia as punishment for suspected collaboration with invading German forces during the Second World War. The autonomous administrative units of the individual peoples were dissolved, and the territory transferred to other units. Members of other national groups were resettled in the deportees' former homes and on their lands.

The first people to be deported in the North Caucasus were the Karachai, 69,267 of whom were transported to Central Asia in November 1943 and their autonomous oblast' abolished. They were followed in February 1944, by the Chechens and the Ingush. The territory of the Checheno-Ingushetia ASSR was divided among the Georgian SSR, the North Ossetian ASSR and Stavropol' Krai. In all, 387,229 Chechens and 91,250 Ingush were deported—the latter from their four small districts of Nazran, Malgobek, Prigorodny and Mozdok.<sup>73</sup> These districts were transferred to the jurisdiction of North Ossetia. In the wake of the deportations, Ossetians from the South Ossetian AO in Georgia were forcibly relocated to the Prigorodny district, while Russians, Ukrainians and other North Caucasian groups were settled on the rest of the territory. In Dagestan, Kumyks, Laks and Avars were moved onto the land of a Chechen sub-group known as the Chechen-Akkinty (30,000 of whom were also deported to Kazakhstan), and their district, the Aukhovsky district, was

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<sup>72</sup> The seminal work on the deportations is Aleksandr M. Nekrich, *The Punished Peoples: The Deportation and Fate of Soviet Minorities at the end of the Second World War*, W.W. Norton & Company (New York, 1978).

<sup>73</sup> In the 1920s, the Chechens and the Ingush had separate autonomous oblasts. The oblasts were merged in January 1934 to create the Chechen-Ingush autonomous oblast'. Its status was upgraded to an autonomous republic in 1936.

dissolved. In March 1944, the final group of 37,773 Balkars was deported from the Kabardino-Balkaria ASSR, and the republic reconstituted as the Kabardinian ASSR.<sup>74</sup>

The repeal of the deportations did not take place until Nikita Khrushchev's "Secret Speech" on the excesses of Stalinism in 1956. This was followed in 1957 by official permission for the deportees to return, and the reconstitution of the republics of Checheno-Ingushetia and Kabardino-Balkaria. Violent clashes, however, ensued between returnees and the new inhabitants of the territory—including a pogrom in 1958 by Russian settlers against Chechens and Ingush which left a legacy of ill-will between the groups in the region.

In Checheno-Ingushetia, all of the ASSR's former districts were returned with the exception of Mozdok and Prigorodny and the right bank section of the city of Vladikavkaz, which were left in North Ossetia.<sup>75</sup> Three additional districts, Kargalinsky, Naursky and Shelkovsky, inhabited by a mixed population of Chechens, Ingush, Cossacks and Nogais were transferred to the Chechen-Ingush ASSR from Stavropol' Krai. During the 1992 conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia over Prigorodny the Ossetians claimed that these three districts were direct compensation for the Ingush for the loss of the Prigorodny district.

As far as the Karachai were concerned, although they were allowed to return to the North Caucasus in the late 1950s their former autonomy was not restored. Instead, an autonomous oblast, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, was created through the amalgamation of the Karachai with the neighboring Cherkess. Its capital was designated as Cherkessk, the traditional Cherkess center, rather than Karachaevsk, the Karachai center, or some neutral town on the ethnic frontier between the two groups. On their return, the Karachai were also resettled in the foothills of the Caucasus mountains rather than in the range in the south of the republic where they had been deported from. In addition, the Karachai did not receive full exoneration until 1979 for war crimes they had been accused of in the 1940s, which included the bizarre charge of the ritual slaughter of 150 children. The loss of traditional lands and the perpetuation of the false accusation caused considerable resentment toward the Soviet government among the Karachai.

In the restored autonomous units a distinct political and social advantage was retained by those who had not suffered deportation. Those groups that had either remained in the units, or had been brought in to replace the deportees dominated the post-1957 governments. This made it difficult for the returnees to gain access to key posts, housing and educational facilities and compounded the problems of discrimination and deprivation they had faced in exile in Central Asia. After 1957, neither the Soviet government nor the government of the Russian Federation took aggressive measures to rehabilitate politically and economically the Chechens, Ingush, Balkars and Karachais. Thus, in the *Perestroika* period, with the political revisitation of Stalinism by the Russian

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<sup>74</sup> Figures for the deportations of the North Caucasian peoples taken from Svetlana Alieva (ed), *Tak eto bylo: Natsional'nye repressii v SSSR-1919-1952 gody*, Vol.1-3, Insan (Moscow, 1993), cited in Helen Krag and Lars Fuchs, *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads*, Minority Rights Group International Report 1994, p.13.

<sup>75</sup> Until the mid-1930s, Vladikavkaz was the administrative center of the Ingush, Ossetians and Terek Cossacks, with the right bank section of the Terek river assigned to the Ingush.

government, the expectation was that the wrongs inflicted on “the punished peoples” would be redressed. To promote full rehabilitation, the Association of Repressed Peoples was established by representatives of the national movements of the four deported North Caucasian groups, the Karachais, Balkars, Ingush and Chechens, to exert pressure on the authorities at the regional and federal level. The Association played a major role in the formulation of the April 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.

## **2. Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples:**

The Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples was intended to compensate for the deportations and to facilitate a return to the *status quo ante*. The Law was an official acknowledgement by the Russian government of the right of groups to resettle on their former territories and be compensated for their loss. It stated that the borders between republics of the Russian Federation should be restored to their configuration at the time when the “repressed peoples” were deported. In the North Caucasus, the Law was seen as a promise to the deported groups of an elevated status within the Russian Federation, as the guarantee of increased representation in government bodies, and as the precursor of territorial redistribution. Based on Soviet practice, the deported groups anticipated that they would now be included in all of the key institutions making decisions about critical issues such as privatization and land reform. They also expected to be able to determine the ethnic composition of local authorities and to express an opinion on all policies directly affecting their interests.

In addition to these general expectations, the Law encouraged a number of very specific territorial aspirations among the deported groups of the North Caucasus: the creation of a separate Ingush republic; the division of Kabardino-Balkaria to compensate the Balkars for their loss of autonomy; the upgrade of Karachaevo-Cherkessia from AO to ASSR; and the restoration of the Aukhovskiy district of the Chechen-Akkinty. The latter, whose numbers had swelled to around 70,000 in exile, had been unable to return to their former homes after 1957 and had been resettled in the Khasavyurtskiy district of Dagestan.

The majority of the general and specific expectations generated by the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples were not met. The Law was passed without any mechanism for its implementation, and instead of compensating for the deportations and facilitating a return to the *status quo ante*, its provisions created a series of new problems. The primary problem was the fact that in all cases the former territory of the deported peoples had been resettled in a deliberate attempt by the Soviet government to make their return difficult, if not impossible. The former deportees could not be returned to their old homes without displacing a new set of people.

A second major problem was that the Law noted in Article 13 that separate enactments would be made to restore the status of each “repressed people.” This provision encouraged competition over whose case would be addressed first and politicized the deportees even further. Open confrontation with both the local authorities and those settled in the “repressed peoples” former homes became the means of attracting Moscow’s attention to an individual case.

A third problem was posed by the fact that the scope of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples was not limited to those groups that had suffered deportation in the 1940s. It

encompassed all groups repressed at any juncture during the Soviet period. As a result the Law became an instrument for all aggrieved groups pressing claims on the Russian government. The most significant of these groups in the North Caucasus was the Cossacks, whose autonomies had been abolished as a consequence of the Russian Revolution and the Civil War. In spite of their pre-Revolutionary status as a military caste, rather than a distinct ethnic group, the Cossacks were specifically mentioned in the Law as a “repressed *people*.” This legitimized Cossack demands that they be given parity with the non-Russian ethnic groups of the region.

Some action was taken by the Russian government, in the wake of the Law to address individual cases, but in each case this action was ill-conceived. Karachaevo-Cherkessia was upgraded from an AO to an ASSR in July 1991 but there was no specific program to address the grievances of the Karachai. The Aukhovskiy district of the Chechen-Akkintsey in Dagestan was restored in May 1991 in a vague formulation and only after armed clashes had broken out between Chechens and other groups settled in the area. A law on the formation of an Ingush republic was passed in June 1992, but with no instructions on the delimitation of the new republic’s borders. And a decree on the rehabilitation of the Cossacks was issued in June 1992, again with no concrete program appended to promote the development of the Cossacks.

The inadequacies of the 1991 “Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples” and its supplementary legislation were the principal contributory factors in the most serious territorial conflict in the North Caucasus, prior to the outbreak of the war in Chechnya: the conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia over the Prigorodny district of North Ossetia in the fall of 1992.

### **North Ossetia-Ingushetia:**

In addition to the passage of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples and the territorial legacy of the deportations, a number of other factors contributed to the outbreak of violence between North Ossetia and Ingushetia:

1. The violent conflict between South Ossetia and Georgia in 1991 and 1992.<sup>76</sup> This resulted in a flood of Ossetian refugees from South to North Ossetia, the majority of whom were housed in the Prigorodny district upsetting the ethnic balance between Ossetians and Ingush.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> This conflict was the result of a dispute over the status of South Ossetia within the new Georgian state. It centered on Georgia’s refusal to upgrade South Ossetia from an AO to an ASSR which resulted first in South Ossetia’s request for inclusion in the Russian Federation and then in its declaration of independence from Georgia.

<sup>77</sup> The *Ossetians* are an Iranian-speaking group, the descendants of the Alans who settled in the Caucasus in the 4th century and were pushed into the mountains by invading Turks and Mongols. The Alans converted to Eastern Orthodoxy under the influence of the Byzantine Empire in the 9th century. The majority of Ossetians, however, remained pagan until conversion by Russia in the 18th and 19th centuries. The Sunni Muslim *Ingush* are closely related ethnically and linguistically to the Chechens. They were, in fact, formerly considered to be part of the same Caucasian ethnic group, the *Nakh*. The distinction between the two people arose during the Caucasian Wars in the mid-18th century. The Ingush, who were the western branch of the *Nakh*, distinguished themselves from the eastern branch, the Chechens, by refusing to fight the Russians. Both groups were given their names by the Russians according to the key village in their respective territories—“Ongusht” and “Chechen.”

2. The secession of Chechnya from Russia in October 1991. This spurred Ingushetia to separate from Checheno-Ingushetia and seek its own autonomy within the Russian Federation.
3. North Ossetia's decision in May 1992 to increase its autonomy unilaterally and create a National Guard. This led to the formation of Ingush militias in direct response to a perceived Ossetian threat to the security of the Ingush population in the Prigorodny district.
4. The June 4, 1992 Law on the Formation of an Ingush Republic Within the Framework of the Russian Federation. All the state institutions, educational facilities, and centers of communication and information for Checheno-Ingushetia were located in Grozny, now the Chechen capital. The June 1992 Law, however, had no provisions for the recreation of these state institutions in the new Ingush capital, Nazran, nor for the demarcation of the state borders of the new republic.<sup>78</sup>
5. The July 3, 1992 Law on the Imposition of a Transitional Period for State-Territorial Delimitation in the Russian Federation. This was, in effect, a moratorium on territorial change in the Russian Federation. The transitional period was established for a total of five years—equivalent to President Yeltsin's term of office—and confirmed in November 1992. The Ingush greeted the July 1992 Law as a betrayal by the Russian government as it came so close on the heels of the law creating their new republic and implied that there would be no official demarcation of their state borders.
6. The July 23, 1992 agreement between the Ingush and the Chechens regulating their mutual border in defiance of the Russian government's moratorium. For Ingushetia this agreement left only the issue of its western border with North Ossetia unresolved.

With respect to the actual object of the dispute between Ingushetia and North Ossetia—the Prigorodny district—the territory was of perceived vital importance to both parties. Their respective claims were also complicated by the emergence of a third party with aspirations for the territory, the Terek Cossacks. The Cossacks viewed the Prigorodny district as an integral part of their traditional lands which had been taken from them during the Russian Revolution—before it was assigned to the Ingush in the 1920s by the Soviet government. In the conflict between the Ingush and the Ossetians, the Cossacks have tended to side with North Ossetia, going so far as to provide volunteer forces for the North Ossetian National Guard.

For the Ingush, the Prigorodny district represents one third of the non-mountainous territory of the traditional Ingush lands, with significant Ingush populations concentrated in several key villages. In addition, with the inclusion of the right bank quarter of Vladikavkaz, Prigorodny was the primary urban area for the Ingush, and thus the major political economic and cultural center. Since 1957, however, the Ingush population in the Prigorodny district has experienced discrimination at the hands of the North Ossetians. In 1982, for example, the official registration of Ingush in the

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<sup>78</sup> A state committee was established in the Russian Federation Supreme Soviet to discuss the implementation of the law *ipso facto*, but violence erupted in the Prigorodny district before it could make any rulings.

district was severely restricted, denying new residents housing and employment. Ingush political leaders first began to demand the return of the Prigorodny district to their jurisdiction in the 1960s and the issue remained a central feature of Ingush politics until the dissolution of the USSR with violent clashes between Ingush and Ossetians occurring in 1973 and 1981.

For North Ossetia, Prigorodny is a vital piece of real estate. North Ossetia is the smallest and most densely populated republic in the North Caucasus (with 76.5 people per square kilometer, in contrast to 8.4 per square kilometer for the Russian Federation as a whole).<sup>79</sup> In 1990, faced by a wave of migration from elsewhere in the USSR, North Ossetia's parliament adopted a decree to limit the number of people moving into the republic. This decree was effectively annulled by the war in neighboring South Ossetia, when the republic's population density was dramatically increased by the influx of an estimated 100,000 South Ossetian refugees.<sup>80</sup> Most of the refugees were housed in Prigorodny.<sup>81</sup> As far as the North Ossetian leadership is concerned, the loss of the Prigorodny district and the inevitable relocation of a significant proportion of the Ossetian population across the Terek River would increase the population pressure in the heart of the republic to breaking point.

The first clashes over Prigorodny in the current round of conflict between Ossetians and Ingush came immediately in April 1991, when the North Ossetian government failed to take any action to address Ingush territorial demands proceeding from the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples. North Ossetian authorities killed 27 Ingush protesters and imposed an 18-month state of emergency in the Prigorodny district. In October 1992, following the June 1992 law on the creation of the Ingush republic and the almost immediate moratorium on territorial change, Ingush leaders petitioned President Yeltsin to demarcate the Ingush-North Ossetian border. In a letter to the Russian President, they predicted that the government's inaction would result in a large-scale ethnic conflict. In addition, they requested that Presidential rule be implemented in Prigorodny and in Ingushetia for the duration of the transitional period leading up to the actual formation of the republic.

The government was, however, preoccupied with dealing with Chechnya's secession and failed to respond to the appeal. A response came instead from the radical Ingush national movement, *Niiskho* ("Justice"), who urged the Ingush to take matters into their own hands and seize the Prigorodny district by force. In late October 1992, clashes between the North Ossetian National Guard and Ingush militias in Ingush-populated villages outside Vladikavkaz triggered a wide-spread conflict. In the course of the conflict, the Ossetians accused the Ingush of attempting to seize Prigorodny by force; the Ingush accused the Ossetian and Russian governments of provocation and attempting to expel the Ingush population from the district; the North Ossetian government issued

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<sup>79</sup> See Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.31. According to statistics produced by the North Ossetian government in January 1994, 70% of the republic's population was concentrated in urban centers.

<sup>80</sup> The actual figure for the number of refugees is disputed by both Georgians and Ossetians. In any case, many of the refugees left North Ossetia after the stabilization of the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia in 1993-1994.

<sup>81</sup> After the deportation of the Ingush in 1944, and the transfer of the Prigorodny district to North Ossetia, Ossetians from the South Ossetian AO of Georgia were resettled in the district. Many of the South Ossetian refugees in 1991-1992, therefore, had relatives in the district.

repeated ultimatums to the Ingush to disarm and turn in their weapons—all of which were ignored; Ingush militias did indeed attempt to seize control of the most heavily-populated Ingush areas of Prigorodny by force; both the Ingush and the Ossetians indulged in rounds of reciprocal hostage-taking; and a Russian airborne regiment and 2,000 soldiers from the OMON (special Interior Ministry troops) were dispatched to the district by Moscow to support the North Ossetian National Guard. Moscow's action provoked further clashes between the OMON and the Ingush.

Russia's approach toward the North Ossetia-Ingushetia conflict was conditioned by the secession of Chechnya. Russia's goals were to suppress any group that would further destabilize the situation in the North Caucasus, to send a message to other would-be secessionists about the kind of response they could expect from Moscow, and to bolster the position of pro-Russian groups in the region—in this case the Ossetians.

North Ossetia is one of the principal strategic areas in the North Caucasus and stands astride the old Georgian Military Highway which was the main communication line for securing the Caucasus in the 19th century. Mozdok, a major town in the north of the republic, is a key base for the North Caucasian Military District, and in December 1994 became the forward base for the Russian assault on Chechnya. Throughout the armed conflict in the Prigorodny district, the Russian press and government demonstrated a clear bias for the Ossetians, in spite of the legitimacy of the Ingush claims to the territory confirmed in the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples.<sup>82</sup>

The conflict was also exploited by Russia as a pretext for an attempted assault on Chechnya, ostensibly to prevent Chechen forces from coming to the aid of their Ingush allies and to halt a flow of arms from Chechnya to Ingushetia. During the initial deployment of Russian troops to North Ossetia and Ingushetia in November 1992, Russian forces were moved rapidly east across Ingush territory towards the as yet unmarked border with Chechnya. This *démarche* led to the immediate mobilization of both Chechnya and the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus (KNK). The KNK threatened to send 500,000 volunteers against the Russian forces if they did not withdraw from Chechen territory. After a tense stand-off, Moscow backed down to avoid the escalation of the North Ossetian-Ingush conflict into a region-wide conflagration.

In addition to deploying troops in the region, the Russian government declared a state of emergency in North Ossetia and Ingushetia, which began on November 2, 1992 and was repeatedly renewed. A provisional administration was established to govern the disputed area until its status and that of Ingushetia's could be resolved. Direct presidential rule over Prigorodny was not introduced, however, in spite of the fact that it had been requested by Ingush leaders and also recommended by the Russian Security Council's 1992 report on the situation in the North Caucasus (see Section III). Instead, the Prigorodny district was left under the jurisdiction of North Ossetia, and nominally under that of the Provisional Administration.

As mentioned earlier, the conflict was a great blow to the KNK's plans to create a Mountain Confederation in the North Caucasus, and highlighted the extent and seriousness of the region's

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<sup>82</sup> See the discussion of the conflict in Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*, pp.54-57.

internal contradictions. Both the KNK and the Russian government proved incapable of mediating a conflict between two neighbors under their respective jurisdictions.

A political solution to the conflict has proven difficult to find. The Provisional Administration is still in place and the official state of emergency in the region is extended every 4 months. The Provisional Administration is centered in Vladikavkaz with a predominantly Russian and Ossetian staff which throws its objectivity in the conflict into question.<sup>83</sup> It has also changed leadership several times since the winter of 1992, resulting in confusion over decisionmaking and a lack of continuity in its activity. The 2,500 Russian troops permanently stationed in Vladikavkaz to enforce the state of emergency have, moreover, been unable to prevent sporadic clashes between the two sides and the assassination of head of the Provisional Administration and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Viktor Polyanichko in the region in August 1993.

In addition, in the three years that have passed since the suppression of the fighting, no charges have been pressed against those from either side who are suspected of having instigated the initial clashes, engaged in looting and other criminal activity, or of having perpetrated atrocities against civilians. This has left the conflict unresolved psychologically for both sides. There is no sense that “justice” has been restored or the innocent victims of the fighting vindicated. The idea of justice is an extremely important one in a traditional society which was formerly organized on the principle of “blood revenge” as a means of redressing wrongs. For the North Caucasus, if the authorities can not be seen to have restored order and honor, then the conflict is not over.<sup>84</sup>

In spite of repeated agreements by the governments of North Ossetia and Ingushetia and decrees by the Russian government on the return of refugees,<sup>85</sup> of the approximately 60,000 Ingush refugees who had fled from the district between 1991-1993, all but a few thousand have been denied the possibility of returning to their homes by the intervention of Ossetian nationalist movements.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> The government of Ingushetia has repeatedly accused the Provisional Administration of siding with North Ossetian and continues to demand that Presidential or direct Russian Federal rule be imposed in Prigorodny. See for example, Natalya Gorodetskaya, “Ingushetia has Demanded Establishment of Federal Rule in Prigorodny Raion. The Provisional State Committee has Proposed that Everyone Live in Concord (sic),” *Segodnya* (in English), June 3, 1995.

<sup>84</sup> See, for example, interviews with Ingush victims of the conflict in S. Belozertsev, L. Dubanova, *Mekhaniki smerti: Krasnyi terror vremen perestroiki*, (Moscow, 1993), p.97.

<sup>85</sup> The most recent agreements between the North Ossetian and Ingush governments include the Nal’chik Protocol of December 1993, and the Beslan Agreement of June 1994, both of which focus on the repatriation of Ingush refugees to the Prigorodny district. The former stated that the process would be completed by March 1994. The Russian government’s decrees include the February 25, 1993 Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 280 on the return of refugees to four rural settlements; Decision No. 120 of the Russian Government “On Measures to Provide Housing to Refugees and Forced Migrants on the Territory of North Ossetia and the Ingush Republic,” of February 12, 1993; and Decision No. 606 of the Russian Government “On Measures for the Comprehensive Resolution of the Problem of Refugees and Forced Migrants in the Zone of the Ossetian-Ingush Conflict.”

<sup>86</sup> The actual number of Ingush refugees from Prigorodny remaining in Ingushetia is contested by the Ossetian and Ingush governments. President Ruslan Aushev of Ingushetia puts the figure at 70,000. Independent analysts from North Ossetia, extrapolating data from the 1989 Soviet census in the spring of 1994, however, estimated that the total number of refugees remaining in Ingushetia could not exceed 27,100. They noted that only 36,300

The refugee issue and the status of the Prigorodny district remain the principle bones of contention in the dispute. In June 1995, for example, one returning Ingush refugee was killed and five injured by “unknown assailants” during a protest by Ossetians in Prigorodny, although the refugees were accompanied by an armed escort of Russian and North Ossetian militiamen. Both the North Ossetian and Ingush Presidents viewed the attack as a provocation aimed at preventing the long overdue rapprochement between the two republics, and at derailing proposed summit meetings on the issue in July 1995.<sup>87</sup>

### **Dagestan:**

Since the independence of the former Soviet republics of Transcaucasia, Dagestan has become a key strategic outpost and border region for the Russian Federation. The republic’s capital, Makhachkala, is now Russia’s largest port on the Caspian Sea and thus a spring-board for exploitation of the Caspian’s potential oil reserves. Dagestan has, however, suffered severely from the economic decline of the North Caucasus and is heavily dependent on the Russian Federation for economic assistance. Eighty percent of the republic’s budget comes directly from federal subsidies and many Dagestanis seek work outside the republic. Prior to 1991, more than 30% of all Dagestanis lived permanently elsewhere in the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan, and a further 20% of those resident in the republic sought seasonal work in Russia. This large Dagestani diaspora and economic dependence have encouraged a close relationship between the Dagestani government and Moscow. Dagestan was, for example, the last of the Russian Federation’s autonomous republics to declare its sovereignty within the federation and its government has been cautious and risk-averse in its dealings with the center.

Dagestan’s risk aversion also stems from the fact that it is the most ethnically diverse of the North Caucasian republics.<sup>88</sup> As a reflection of this diversity, Dagestan has many territorial disputes

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Ingush lived in North Ossetia prior to the fall of 1992, of whom 17,700 lived in the Prigorodny district itself. By August 1, 1993, 4,500 Ingush had returned to the Prigorodny district, and a total of 9,200 Ingush were then living in North Ossetia as a whole. See Lev Dzugaev and A. Dzadziev, “Vladikavkaz: North Ossetian-Ingush Relations and the Problem of Refugees,” in *CMG Bulletin*, May 1994, pp. 17-18. The number of Ingush refugees returning to their homes in 1995 dropped significantly between March and May as a result of the continued stalemate in North Ossetian-Ingush relations. In March 1995, for example, 99 families returned to Prigorodny as opposed to 40 in May. See Natalya Gorodetskaya, “Presidents of North Ossetia and Ingushetia Start Negotiations. Return of Refugees to Prigorodny Raion will Possibly be Speeded Up,” *Segodnya* (in English), July 8, 1995.

<sup>87</sup> See Natalya Gorodetskaya, “Akhsarbek Galazov Urges Making the Caucasus Untroubled. People Have Been Murdered in Prigorodny Raion Again,” *Segodnya* (in English), June 27, 1995.

<sup>88</sup> There are 14 nationalities with official status in Dagestan and 32 ethnic groups registered in the 1989 Soviet census in a population of 2 million. The largest group are the Avars with a population of approximately 496,000 and the smallest are the Ginukhs with only 400. The other main North Caucasian groups are the Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, Tabassarans, Chechens, Nogais, Rutuls, Aguls and Tsakhurs, in addition to significant populations of Russians, Azeris, Tatars and Jews. The majority of the Dagestani peoples are Sunni Muslims with the exception of a small percentage of Shi’ite Dargins in south-central Dagestan. Most of the groups are indigenous to the northeastern Caucasus and multi-lingual, speaking the languages of neighboring ethnic groups in addition to their own. The languages are primarily Caucasian in origin with a strong Turkic influence as a result of the successive migration of Turkic peoples from the Asiatic *steppe*. The Turkified Kumyks, in particular, have had a great cultural and linguistic impact in Dagestan. Before the Russian Revolution, the

within its borders, a number of which have resulted in sporadic violence. The most serious of these disputes stem from the division of the peoples of the North Caucasus in the early Bolshevik period and include the demand of the Lezgin population, which is split between Dagestan and Azerbaijan, for the creation of a unified republic. The remaining disputes are a direct consequence of the deportations of the 1940s and the 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples. No dispute has yet reached the dimensions of the conflict in the Prigorodny district, however, as the Dagestani government has been extremely anxious to defuse tensions between the ethnic groups and retain good relations with neighboring republics.

The efforts of the Dagestani government are in part explained by the fact that none of the ethnic groups in Dagestan has a clear majority in the population and consequently no single group is designated as the “titular nationality” of the republic. The name of the republic is a geographic one—‘land of the mountains’—rather than a derivation from the name of an ethnic group like the other North Caucasian republics. Dagestan is also an historic political entity which was retained by both the Russian Empire and the USSR and its multi-ethnic people have a long tradition of coexistence. However, the pan-Dagestani identity that is presented externally in relations with Moscow and with other republics, and that is used in self-description by members of the constituent ethnic groups when traveling outside Dagestan, does not hold internally. Inside the republic, the first allegiance is with the ethnic group and only then with Dagestan. As the Minister of Nationalities and External Relations of Dagestan, Magomed Gusaev, noted in a recent interview, there is “no such thing as a *Dagestanets*.”<sup>89</sup>

The government of Dagestan must thus promote the idea of a unified Dagestan and maintain the political balance between the individual groups to prevent the inevitable ‘domino effect’ and fragmentation of the republic that a single secession or large-scale inter-ethnic could induce. Mindful of the great potential for chaos in the republic, the Dagestani government has been the most active in the Russian Federation in pursuing conflict management and resolution. The government follows the principle that ‘it is worth paying for peace rather than for violence.’ The leaders of the republic’s national movements and the Dagestani media have also consistently practiced self-restraint to bring conflicts back from the brink.<sup>90</sup>

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Kumyk language was the language of commerce and daily business and the official language of Dagestan in the 1920s.

<sup>89</sup> The interview with Magomed Gusaev was conducted by Nicholas and Ruth Daniloff as part of a series of interviews with officials and representatives of the ethnic groups and the ethnic press in Dagestan in July and August 1995. The results of the Daniloffs’ interviews outside the major urban centers of Dagestan showed that the first allegiance of individuals is to their home village and then with the specific ethnic group. Self-identification as a *Dagestanets* is the third in the series, while identification with the Russian Federation is generally rare among the republic’s ethnic groups. These interviews will provide the basis of a forthcoming study of the role of the ethnic press in conflicts in Dagestan and the North Caucasus.

<sup>90</sup> The importance of self-restraint to head off violent conflict and chaos was repeatedly stressed by officials of the Dagestani Ministry of Press and Information and by the editors of ethnic newspapers in their interviews with Nicholas and Ruth Daniloff.

Government interventions have been complemented by the coordinated mediation of the republic's Muslim clergy, and of the Avar national movement—the Imam Shamil National Front. While the latter has been vocal in promoting Avar group interests, as the representative of the largest ethnic group in the republic it has also approached other conflicting groups with the offer to suspend all of its activities across Dagestan if their national movements will do likewise. In assuming this role, the Avar national movement has presented itself as the champion of the unity of Dagestan and the opponent of the republic's federalization—which would be extremely difficult to achieve given the small size of the republic and the large number of officially recognized ethnic groups.

### **Lezgins:**

The Lezgins are the key problem in the south of Dagestan, where they have also become a tool in relations between Russia and the new state of Azerbaijan. There are 205,000 Lezgins in Dagestan and approximately 180,000 in Azerbaijan. The people were first divided by the Russian Empire in 1861 between the Baku and Dagestan provinces, and then again by Stalin in 1920 between the Azerbaijan SSR and the Dagestan ASSR. The issue of their unification has been on the agenda since before the collapse of the USSR. In July 1990, the Lezgin national movement, *Sadval*, held its founding congress in the Derbent District of Dagestan. It demanded the creation of a unified Lezgin autonomous republic, Lezgistan, and proportionate Lezgin representation in the parliaments of both the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan. An official declaration on statehood and a resolution on changes in the border between Dagestan and Azerbaijan was issued at *Sadval's* Second Congress in September 1991.<sup>91</sup>

The creation of an official border between the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan in December 1991 greatly intensified the problem. In February 1992, Lezgins in southern Dagestan began a series of mass demonstrations which reached a peak in June and July 1992 when the Russian government announced that the new international border with Azerbaijan would follow the former administrative border along the Samur River. This river divides the Lezgin population in two. Aware of the explosive potential of the issue, the governments of Dagestan and Azerbaijan jointly requested that Moscow reconsider the proposal and take into account the interests of the respective populations of the republics. The two governments also expressed sympathy for the Lezgin demands.

In spite of the joint intervention by Dagestan and Azerbaijan, in September 1992, *Sadval* announced that the Lezgins would take imminent action to secede and create an independent Lezgistan in the southern region of Dagestan and the northern region of Azerbaijan. The ensuing stand-off culminated in March 1993 with clashes between Lezgin protesters and Azerbaijani police in the northern Azerbaijani city of Kusary which resulted in the deaths of at least six Lezgins.

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<sup>91</sup> The Lezgin national movement presently comprises *Sadval*, the more moderate Azerbaijan-based organization *Samur*, and the Lezgin Democratic Party, in addition to an array of small national-cultural associations and foundations. Its principal leaders are Ruslan Ashuraliev, an entrepreneur; Khadzhi Abduragimov, a Physics professor; Murudin Kakhriyanov, a retired General, and Nariman Ramazanov, a surgeon. For more information on the movement see Enver F. Kisriev, "Etnopoliticheskaya situatsiya v respublike Dagestan," *Issledovaniya po prikladnoi i neotlozhnoi etnologii*, No. 72.M., 1994, pp. 25-26.

Simultaneous attempts by Azerbaijan to draft 1,500 Lezgin youths into the army for deployment in Nagorno-Karabakh resulted in additional protests by 70,000 Lezgins in the region and strengthened the calls for an independent Lezgin republic.

The situation was eased somewhat, later in the spring of 1993, by the decision of the Russian Federation and Azerbaijan to maintain an open border along the Samur river. The Russian government also allocated to the Lezgins an economic assistance package of one billion rubles in government credits for the development of infrastructure, agriculture and industry and the construction of additional bridges across the Samur to Azerbaijan. However, the governments of the Russian Federation, Dagestan and Azerbaijan were not prepared to negotiate mutual territorial change and refused to create either an independent Lezgistan or a new autonomous Lezgin republic within Russia or Azerbaijan.

Since 1993, political conflict between Russian and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, the patrolling of Azerbaijan's international border with Iran and natural resource exploitation in the Caspian Sea,<sup>92</sup> and the war in Chechnya have increased tension on the Azerbaijani-Russian border. The Russian government has frequently threatened to introduce control and customs posts along the entire stretch of the border, and has restricted travel between Dagestan and Azerbaijan ostensibly to halt a flow of weapons from Turkey and Iran to Chechen rebels. These actions have been met with protests organized by *Sadval* to demand freedom of movement for Lezgins and have provoked clashes with local authorities and police.

Moscow has also come to see the "Lezgin problem" as a political tool in its thorny relationship with Azerbaijan, which greatly complicates any resolution of the fundamental issue of the Lezgin division. For example, while Abulfaz Elchibey, the pro-Turkish, anti-Russian President of Azerbaijan was in power, Russia provided a home for the Lezgin political front in Moscow and turned a blind eye to Lezgin protests in Azerbaijan. In June 1993, after Elchibey was overthrown in a coup, and Gaidar Aliev, the former Communist boss of Azerbaijan, was brought into power, the Russian government abruptly abolished the Lezgin front.

The cooperation of both the federal government in Moscow and the Azerbaijani government in Baku are essential to Dagestan's continued management of the Lezgin problem. The difficult relationship between Moscow and Baku, however, and the tensions on the new international border preclude success in the short-term. As a result, the Ministry of Nationalities and External Relations in Dagestan views the Lezgins as the most likely candidate for secession in the republic.<sup>93</sup>

### **Nogais:**

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<sup>92</sup> For a discussion of the political conflicts between Russia and Azerbaijan see Fiona Hill and Pamela Jewett, *Back in the USSR: Russia's Intervention in the Internal Affairs of the Former Soviet Republics and the Implications for United States Policy Toward Russia*, Strengthening Democratic Institutions Project (John F. Kennedy School of Government, January 1994) pp. 10-17.

<sup>93</sup> This information was obtained from Nicholas and Ruth Daniloffs' interview with the Dagestani Minister of Nationalities and External Relations in August 1995.

Another territorial dispute in Dagestan, less serious than that of the Lezgins, is also the result of the division of a people between different administrative units. In the 1920s and 1930s, the Nogai people of the North Caucasus were divided between Dagestan, Checheno-Ingushetia, and Stavropol' Krai. Like the Lezgins they have demanded the unification of their territory. In 1990, proposals were made for the creation of a joint Cossack-Nogai republic to mark traditional cooperation between the two groups in the region. The Nogai demands, however, changed as the result of an exodus of ethnic Avars from Georgia after 1991. This exodus swelled a general Avar migration from the mountainous regions of Dagestan to the lowland Nogai *steppe* that had already been underway since the 1970s. In 1992 a Nogai national movement, *Birlik*, was founded which called for the formation of a separate autonomous entity. The Nogais have not, however, been as politically active as the Lezgins, because until the war in Chechnya they still enjoyed freedom of movement between Dagestan, Chechnya and Stavropol'.

### **Chechens:**

The Chechens in Dagestan, the Chechen-Akkinty, are involved in three separate disputes with their neighbors in the eastern districts of the republic which are the result of the dissolution of the Aukhovsky district in 1944. Following its abolition, 15,000 Laks, and a number of Avars and Kumyks were forcibly resettled in the district which was renamed the *Novolaksky* or "new Lak" district.

### **The Chechen-Lak Conflict**

Conflict between the Chechen-Akkinty and Laks first flared after the April 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, which precipitated a decision in May by the Dagestani parliament to restore the Aukhovsky district and to offer Chechens parcels of land for cultivation and the construction of new houses. In April 1992, Chechens in the district hoisted the symbol of the secessionist Chechen Republic on the district's borders eliciting a protest from Lak national movements and prompting the Novolaksky district council to suspend the distribution of plots of land to Chechen-Akkinty. As a result of the Chechen action, rumors spread in the area that Chechen-Akkinty youths had joined the national guard across the border in Chechnya and that the Chechens were preparing to seize the Aukhovsky district by force.

The Chechen-Lak conflict also coincided with a stand-off between the Dagestani leadership and General Dzhokhar Dudayev's government in Chechnya. After the November 1991 secession of Chechnya, the Dagestanis had made clear their determination to stay within the Russian Federation and had subsequently been accused by Dudayev of providing a base for Russian attacks against Chechnya. In Dagestan, in turn, a number of terrorist acts which culminated in the assassination of the co-chairman of the Democratic Dagestan Movement, Magomed Suleymanov, were attributed to Chechens. Dagestani and OMON forces were deployed to combat the terrorism, and Russian troops were stationed on Dagestan's border with Chechnya in the region inhabited by the Chechen-Akkinty. The Dagestani Supreme Soviet also passed a law giving all residents over the age of 18 the right to bear arms as protection against terrorist attacks. Chechnya protested all of these actions.

The introduction of the Russian troops into the former Aukhovsky district, however, led to the de-escalation of the Chechen-Lak conflict in a somewhat dramatic manner. Both sides wanted the Russian troops to be withdrawn and were, therefore, prepared to make concessions to avoid violence. In the most striking concession, many Laks offered to relocate elsewhere in Dagestan. These concessions were complemented by the Dagestani government which gave the Chechens direct material and political assistance in restoring their villages and compensation for the loss of their former homes. The government also removed discriminatory measures against the Chechens such as restrictions on the registration of new Chechen residents in the Novolaksky district. In addition, organizational problems related to the resettlement of Chechen-Akkinty in Dagestan were resolved. The internal crisis in Chechnya and the rise of opposition to Dudayev in 1993 and 1994, also facilitated the de-escalation of the conflict as Chechnya no longer gave active support to the radical elements in the district. The defusing of the Chechen-Lak conflict is one of the most important examples of conflict management in the republic by the Dagestani government.

### **The Chechen-Avar Conflict**

The Chechen-Avar conflict emerged in September 1991 in the Kazbegovsky district of Dagestan as a result of the May 1991 decision to restore the Aukhovsky district. It centered around the issue of whose jurisdiction villages with mixed Chechen and Avar populations should come under. The Avars had been resettled in the region from their own lands in the mountains of Dagestan after 1944, and the Chechen-Akkinty thus insisted that the villages be transferred to Chechen jurisdiction. The Avars' former homes had long been destroyed, however, and the Avar national movement, *Dzhamagat*, the Imam Shamil National Front, and the Avar-led Islamic Renaissance Party all actively opposed the Chechen demands. The three Avar groups demanded in response that the implementation of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples be suspended. The situation in the district was only defused after a special visit to the area by Ruslan Khasbulatov and Ramazan Abdulatipov, the two highest ranking North Caucasians in the Russian government, and the intervention of Dagestan's Muslim clergy.

### **Kumyks:**

The final conflicts in Dagestan are the legacy not of the deportations, but of the migration in the 1970s of Laks, Dargins and Avars from the mountainous regions of Dagestan into the traditional territory of the Kumyks in the lowland areas of the republic around the capital Makhachkala and along the shores of the Caspian Sea. As a result of this migration, by the late 1980s the Kumyks were a minority of only 22% of the population in lands where they had predominated before the 1970s.<sup>94</sup> This migration was given a new dimension in May 1991 after the decision was taken by the Dagestani parliament to restore the Aukhovsky district. Laks who were willing to leave Novolaksky were offered uninhabited land in the Khasavyurt district and north of Makhachkala which were originally regarded as Kumyk areas. The Kumyk national movement, *Tenglik*, opposed the resettlement of Laks on the basis that it implied further encroachment on Kumyk territory.

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<sup>94</sup> In Dagestan as a whole, the Kumyks are the third largest ethnic group with 13% of the total population.

To protect their group rights in the face of an overwhelming influx of other peoples, the Kumyks have repeatedly demanded the creation of a separate Kumyk republic and the federalization of Dagestan. Given the Kumyks' location in the heart of the republic and around the capital, the realization of these demands would split the republic. The dispute between the Kumyks and the Laks in 1991, however, was resolved in the summer 1992 by the direct intervention of the religious authorities of Dagestan, who arranged a traditional meeting, or *Maslahat*, between the Lak and Kumyk national movements and an agreement to regulate relations.

In May 1993, the Muslim clergy intervened in a second Kumyk dispute, this time with the Dargins, over land ownership and building rights in the towns of Kostek and Novy Kostek in the Kizilyurtovsky district northwest of Makhachkala. The dispute resulted in an armed confrontation, one death, several injuries, the division of the towns along ethnic lines and the intervention of the local OMON. Only the imposition of a one month state of emergency in the region, and the active efforts of the clergy stabilized the situation. Religious leaders traveled to the region with the Lezgin deputy to the Chairman of the Presidium of the Dagestani Parliament, Bahaudin Akhmedov, to bring the two sides together in another *Maslahat*.

### **Conflict Management in Dagestan:**

Conflict management in Dagestan is a combination of religious and secular initiatives. As noted above in the discussion of individual disputes in Dagestan, the Muslim clergy has been a major force for mediation in inter-ethnic conflicts. The clergy draws on its long history as the sole integrating force in this multi-ethnic land and on the outlawing of fratricidal conflict under Islamic law. In addition to encouraging the intervention of the clergy, the Dagestani government has been careful to maintain a proportionate ethnic balance within the leadership and resisted the federalization of the unitary republic which would inevitably lead to conflict over the number of federal units and over the jurisdiction of ethnically-mixed territories. The Chairman of the Presidium of the Dagestani parliament, Magomedali Magomedov, is a Dargin; his two deputies, Bahaudin Akhmedov and Mukhu Aliev, are respectively a Lezgin and an Avar; the Prime Minister, Abdurazak Mirzabekov, is a Kumyk; a Tabassaran, Zaidullah Yuzbekov, is in charge of privatization; and a Russian is in charge of the security services.

Three other political issues have also played an important role in promoting internal stability in Dagestan:

1. The postponement of the establishment of a state language, and the promotion instead of language teaching, national festivals, native-language newspapers, and native-language programs on local television and radio for all the constituent peoples.
2. The decision not to create the institution of a presidency in Dagestan.
3. The decision not to implement land reform and privatization.

The last two issues were put before a referendum in the republic in 1992, with the majority of the electorate rejecting both concepts by a wide margin.<sup>95</sup>

By virtue of the role of ethnicity in North Caucasus politics, the institution of a presidency and the election of a president from one of the ethnic groups was perceived in Dagestan as a step toward the concentration of power in the hands of one group which would destabilize the delicate ethnic balance in the republic. Likewise, the privatization of communal or state-owned land was seen as a prelude to conflict if too much land in a group's traditional area of settlement was considered to have become the property of individuals from other groups. In rejecting the privatization of land in the 1992 referendum, the Dagestani people resolved that land would belong to the multi-ethnic citizens of the republic, not to the representatives of individual ethnic groups. In acknowledgement of the need to reform land ownership, however, provisions were made after the referendum by the parliament for the potential lease of land by individuals on a long-term basis.

### **Kabardino-Balkaria:**

The primary dispute in Kabardino-Balkaria is a product of the 1943-1944 deportations of North Caucasian peoples and of the expectations raised among deportees by the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples. The main issue in the republic is the rehabilitation of the Balkars who perceive that their interests are neglected in the current unitary republic which is dominated by the Kabardinian elite.<sup>96</sup> The Balkars have consequently demanded the division or federalization of the republic.

Beginning in 1989, the Balkar national organization, *Tere*, demanded that the former Balkar districts within the republic be restored to the pre-1944 borders. In March 1991, the first Congress of the Balkar People passed a resolution on the restoration of a separate Balkar republic which would be accorded equal political status with a Kabardinian republic in a federal Kabardino-Balkaria. They also demanded the creation of a two-chamber parliament with equal parity in representation for both peoples.

These Balkar demands for the federalization of the republic were opposed by the Kabardinian national movement, *Adyge-Khase*, which viewed the proposal as a step towards the dissolution of Kabardino-Balkaria. In April 1991, a conference of Kabardinian representatives rejected the Balkar demands that their districts be restored and that the republic be divided into two units. The Kabardinian's rejection of their demands radicalized the Balkar national movement. In fall 1991, the movement demanded a referendum on statehood for the Balkar people and secession from Kabardino-Balkaria. A National Council of the Balkar people was created, and in December

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<sup>95</sup> See Robert Chenciner and Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov, "Dagestan Avoids Violence," Report for conference on *The Contemporary North Caucasus*, London University, April 23, 1993 (unpublished).

<sup>96</sup> The Kabardinians comprise 48% of the population of the republic with the Balkars in a minority of only 9%. Ethnic Russians account for an additional 32% of the population. The Kabardinians are a branch of the Circassian people (see section on Adygeia), while the Balkars are a Turkic people with strong linguistic and cultural ties to the neighboring Karachai. Both peoples are, however, predominantly Sunni Muslim.

1991 the referendum on statehood was held in the Balkar districts of the republic. Of those who took part (80.5% of registered Balkar voters) 95% voted in favor of a separate Balkar republic.

In response to the referendum, a rival Kabardinian Congress, supported by the President of the KNK, Yuri Shanibov (an ethnic Kabardinian), was immediately called. The Kabardinian Congress brought together the ethnic group's national movement and official government representatives from the republic who were opposed to the Balkar *démarche*. A Kabardinian republic was proposed with the Congress of the Kabardinian People as its executive organ. This left the republic's two constituent groups in a tense stand-off. In January 1992, the Kabardinians declared the creation of a separate Kabardinian republic within the framework of the Russian Federation and announced that the border with the Balkar republic would follow a frontier laid down in an agreement between the Kabardinians of the lowlands and the Balkar mountain tribes in 1863. This proposed frontier effectively reduced the pre-1944 territory of the Balkars two-fold.

In spring 1992, relations between the two groups deteriorated to their lowest point with the repeated convening of competing congresses and increasingly inflammatory demands and counter-demands. The central government of the republic made no effort to intervene until armed clashes erupted between Kabardinians and Balkars in the predominantly Kabardinian Sovetsky district of the republic, prompting Balkars living in the district to resettle in adjacent Balkar districts. After these clashes, the parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria attempted to impose a moratorium on the holding of congresses, but this was ignored and the Kabardinian and Balkar national movements continued to squabble over the validity of the 1863 frontiers as opposed to those of 1944.

In September 1992, the arrest of KNK President Yuri Shanibov, who was urging KNK volunteers to intervene in the war in Abkhazia, was the spur to a violent upheaval in Kabardino-Balkaria that threatened to plunge the republic into civil war. In the wake of Shanibov's arrest, the Congress of the Kabardinian People and *Adyge-Khase* organized a series of protests that resulted in clashes with the local OMON which was deployed by President Valery Kokov to restore order. Casualties in these clashes galvanized the demonstrators to demand that the OMON be withdrawn in addition to the appeal for Shanibov's release. To defuse the situation, the authorities allowed Shanibov to 'escape' during transfer to a detention center in Rostov-on-Don. The demonstrations intensified, however, with attempts to storm government buildings, demands that Kokov's government resign, and calls for a coalition government led by the Kabardinian Congress.

The ascent of the Kabardinian Congress to power as a result of these demonstrations would have immediately provoked protests by the Balkars and propelled the republic towards division. Counter-demonstrations thus ensued in support of Kokov and the preservation of a unitary Kabardino-Balkaria. A state of emergency was declared and Russian marines were deployed on the streets of the capital, Nal'chik.

In October, as full-scale conflict broke out in neighboring North Ossetia, the Kabardinian-Balkarian leadership agreed on major concessions to placate the radical Kabardinian opposition. The OMON forces were withdrawn and the Kabardinian Congress was allowed to express its views on TV without fear of political reprisal. These concessions were sufficient to de-escalate what had been 12 days of civil unrest.

After October 1992, the war in North Ossetia was the major factor in distracting the Kabardinians and Balkars from their conflict—a warning of what might be to come if they persisted in their claims and counter-claims. Prior to the war in Chechnya, there was still, however, no decision on the ultimate status of the Balkars in the republic, and the government and the KNK leadership under Shanibov continued to snipe at each other and trade accusations on an intermittent basis.

### **Karachaevo-Cherkessia:**

The major disputes in Karachaevo-Cherkessia center around the issue of the complete rehabilitation of the Karachai people deported in 1943; the need to find a compromise between the aspirations of the deportees and other repressed groups; and the restructuring of the republic's government to reflect Karachaevo-Cherkessia's ethnic diversity. The republic's ethnic composition is 42% Russian (including Cossacks), 31% Karachai, 9% Cherkess, 7% Abazin, and 3% Nogai.<sup>97</sup>

As far as the rehabilitation of the Karachai people is concerned, the first Congress of the Karachais was held in 1988 to demand that their problems be addressed. Since 1988, the main initiatives have emanated from *Dzhamagat*, the Karachai national movement, and its Executive Committee, which like the Balkar national movement has demanded the restoration of Karachai autonomy and the creation of a Karachai republic within the borders of the pre-1943 autonomous oblast'. *Dzhamagat's* demands were affirmed by a congress of Karachai deputies from the republic's parliament in November 1990. Since this juncture, the Karachais have met firm opposition from the other main constituent groups in the republic: Russians (including the Cossacks), the Cherkess, Abazins, and Nogais.

The Cossack movement in the republic was first activated in 1991 after Karachaevo-Cherkessia's status was upgraded from AO to ASSR by the Russian Supreme Soviet. The Cossacks began to push counter-claims on Karachaevo-Cherkessia's territory by promoting the possible secession of traditional pre-Revolutionary Cossack districts. In August 1991, for example, two Cossack districts were declared: Batalpashinsky with its center in the republican capital, Cherkessk, and Zelenchuksko-Urupsky. These were presented as the basis for the formation of a larger Cossack republic under the jurisdiction of Stavropol' Krai to which Karachaevo-Cherkessia was formerly subordinated as an AO.

In October 1991, following the Cossack *démarche*, the Cherkess national movement, *Adyge-Khase*,<sup>98</sup> and the Abazin national movement, *Adylar*, held a joint congress to declare the creation of

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<sup>97</sup> The Karachai are a Sunni Muslim people of mixed Turkic, Caucasian and Persian (Iranian) origin with close linguistic ties to the Balkars. The Cherkess are a branch of the Circassian peoples (see section on Adygeia), but are also predominantly Sunni Muslim.

<sup>98</sup> As part of the divided Circassian peoples of the northwestern reaches of the Caucasus, the Karachai have been very active in promoting their ethno-cultural ties with the neighboring Adygei republic in Krasnodar Krai (see section on Adygeia below) and with the Kabardinians. As a result the national movements of the three groups bear the same name—*Adyge-Khase*.

a dual Cherkess-Abazin federal republic within the framework of Karachaevo-Cherkessia. The congress also demanded that all the major groups in the republic—Karachais, Cherkess, Abazins, Nogais and Cossacks—be accorded equal representation in the government.

In November 1991, the tempo of demands increased as radical factions of *Dzhamagat* and the Karachai Islamic Renaissance Party convened a congress to declare the immediate creation of an independent Karachai republic. In December 1991, a further Karachai congress proposed that elections for a new Karachai parliament be held. As in Kabardino-Balkaria, these two actions by the Karachais provoked a retaliatory congress. A Cossack Congress subsequently announced the creation of a Cossack republic within the frontiers occupied by the Cossack communities prior to 1917.

By the end of 1991, five competing republics had effectively been declared on the territory of Karachaevo-Cherkessia by its constituent peoples. In March 1992, in response to the possible fragmentation of the republic, the leadership of Karachaevo-Cherkessia held a referendum to resolve the issue of its future structure. In spite of the demands and declarations of the more radical movements, 78.6% of those taking part in the referendum (75% of the electorate) voted for the preservation of the unified republic. In deference to the demands of the five national movements, however, the Karachaevo-Cherkessia parliament proposed that the republic should be federalized after the referendum to give equal representation to the groups in the republican government through national quotas. A new constitution was also planned.

The Cherkess and Abazin Congress, and the Karachais were temporarily quieted by this resolution and the referendum. The former reached an accommodation with the government as a result, although the more radical wings of the Karachai national movement refused to accept results of referendum. In April 1992, they once more demanded the creation of a Karachai autonomy in its pre-1943 borders and boycotted elections to the republican parliament, holding their own rival elections for a Karachai parliament. By the summer of 1992, Karachai nationalists were pushing once again for the dissolution of the republic. Again, as in Kabardino-Balkaria, the war in North Ossetia in fall 1992 had a short-term sobering effect on the situation in the republic.

Since 1994, however, the republic has been stymied by a constitutional impasse and a struggle between the legislature and executive over their respective powers under the proposed new constitution. As a consequence, no resolution on the final national composition of the parliament and the government has been reached, and a proposal by the Head of State to hold elections in January 1995 was rejected. Discussions on the possible creation of a republican presidency became mired in a controversy over how to come to terms with the ethnicity of the president and thus avoid the possible concentration of power in the hands of one ethnic group.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Representatives of the three main ethnic groups in Karachaevo-Cherkessia (Karachai, Cherkess and Russian) presently share nominal power in the government: Vladimir Khubiev, the Karachai Chairman of the Council of Ministers and Head of State; A.G. Ozov, his Cherkess deputy; and Viktor Savelev, the Russian Chairman of the Parliament. See Marina Pustilnik, "Karachaevo-Cherkessia: Caucasian Stresses," in *Transition*, Open Media Services Institute, March 15, 1995, pp.16-18 (p.18). Russians dominate in all state institutions, especially among the committees of the Council of Ministers, while the Karachai have more representation as the directors of collective farms and industrial enterprises, and among city administrators. The Cherkess tend to predominate as

Nine competing drafts for the republic's constitution were also put into circulation, each of which offered different principles for representational parity and rotating political appointments. The consensus among political analysts in the republic was that the failure of one of the republic's five principle ethnic groups to dominate politically and socially had brought

ram to promote the development of the Karachai people. *Dzhamagat* also proposed that Karachai autonomy, in addition to monetary compensation for property and other material loss during the deportations, must be integral parts of any development program. The implementation of a program with these elements would greatly increase Karachai economic and political influence in the republic and thus the status of the Karachai elite, giving it the opportunity to seize control of the presidency.

In response to the Karachai initiatives, the republic's Russian and Cherkess populations revived their own demands for separate national-territorial entities and both proposed that these entities be transferred back to the jurisdiction of Stavropol' Krai. The Russian national movement, *Rus'*, also suggested that as a result of the failure to produce a new constitution and elect a new parliament, Karachaevo-Cherkessia no longer existed as a legal entity and should be dissolved, with the territory reverting back to Stavropol'. In February 1995, a transitional government in the form of a Coordinating Council was created by a joint session of all the Peoples of the Republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia in an effort to guide the republic through the constitutional minefield, minimize the radical demands of the national movements, and keep the republic together.<sup>100</sup>

### **Krasnodar:**

Since the dissolution of the USSR, Krasnodar has become the key Russian-dominated territory on the Russian Federation's southern border and its only outpost on the Black Sea. Russia's five remaining Black Sea ports are in Krasnodar Krai, including Novorossiisk and Tuapse, the termini of the Caspian-Black Sea oil pipeline. Krasnodar is also Russia's border with Georgia and the troubled republic of Abkhazia.

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administrative workers and also as the directors of collective farms. See Evgeny Kritskii and Vladimir Bolshov, "Karachaevo-Cherkessia: An Analysis of Ethnopolitical Problems," *CMG Bulletin* June 1995, pp. 45-47.

<sup>100</sup> The Coordinating Council comprises three representatives from each of the five main ethnic groups. See Kritskii and Bolshov, *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995.

The Krai's ethnic composition is, however, complex. Although Russians account for 85% of the population according to the 1989 Soviet census, a good number of these Russians identify themselves as Cossacks—around 27% of the total Russian population.<sup>101</sup> In addition, Ukrainians comprise 3.9%,<sup>102</sup> Armenians 3.6%,<sup>103</sup> and Adygeis 2.3%, with these three groups concentrated in specific districts. Krasnodar is also densely populated, with a density of 60 people per square kilometer in contrast to 8.4 per square kilometer in the Russian Federation as a whole. The population pressure in the Krai has been increased by a steady flow of predominantly Russian migrants and refugees—for example, 203,878 between 1988-1991 and almost 80,000 in 1993.<sup>104</sup>

The territorial disputes that are a feature of the intensifying competition for land and housing in Krasnodar are the legacy not of the deportations but of the settlement of Russians and Cossacks in the Tsarist period and the division of the North Caucasian peoples in the 1920s and 1930s.

### Adygeia:

Adygeia was formerly an AO within Krasnodar Krai until it was upgraded to an autonomous republic in July 1991 and transferred from the Krai's jurisdiction. Although the republic is the titular territory of the Adygei people, the Adygei account for only 22% of the total population with ethnic Russians comprising 68%. In part because of their minority status within their own republic, the Adygei national movement proposes the unification of the Circassian peoples of the western North Caucasus (collectively referred to as the *Adyge* in Russian sources), of which the Adygei, Shapsug, Cherkess, and Kabardinians were all part from Tsarist times until the late 1930s when they were

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<sup>101</sup> Figures for those Russians identifying themselves as Cossacks in Krasnodar Krai (i.e. by having one or more ancestor who belonged to the Cossack military caste) are based on the results of a public opinion survey carried out in the Krai in the summer of 1992, the results were published in *Kubanskii Kur'er*, September 18, 1992 (Krasnodar). Those who carried out the survey estimated that as many as 80,000 people were actively affiliated with Cossack organizations based on the region's history as the traditional base of the Kuban Cossacks. The Kuban Cossack leader, Ataman Gromov, has also claimed 341,000 registered members of his organization (this information was obtained in an interview with Brian Boeck in 1993).

<sup>102</sup> Before the Russian Revolution, approximately 80% of Krasnodar's population was Ukrainian-speaking—due to the fact that a Ukrainian dialect was the language used by what was then a predominantly Kuban and Don Cossack population with strong ties to the Ukrainian *steppe*. Soviet Russification policies in the 1930s have been largely responsible for the dramatic decline in Ukrainian language use in the region. There are presently no mass Ukrainian national movements in the Krai, although there is a small Ukrainian cultural organization in Krasnodar.

<sup>103</sup> Although they are not directly involved in any territorial disputes, relations between the Armenians and Cossack have been particularly strained, especially after an influx of Armenian refugees into the Krai as a result of the war in Nagorno-Karabakh and the increasing economic crisis in Armenia. The Armenians are concentrated in the Black Sea region around Tuapse and Sochi where they account for 20% of the population. Cossack groups accuse the Armenians of attempting to 'infiltrate' the region and of being heavily involved in crime and land speculation. See, for example, reports on the increasing tension between Armenians and Cossacks in *Severnoi Kavkaz*, July 1, 1992.

<sup>104</sup> See *Severnoi Kavkaz*, No.130, July 30, 1992, and Alexander Kritskii, "Krasnodar: Ethno-Demographic Situation," in *CMG Bulletin*, October 1994, pp.30-33. The 1994 figures for migrants and refugees are not yet available.

formally sub-divided.<sup>105</sup> Such a unification would imply territorial change at the expense of Krasnodar, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria.

The major promoter of unification, the pan-Circassian *Adyge* bloc has consistently used the KNK to push its demands, but has not taken radical action. The proposal for unification has also been rejected by the Russian government. In the meantime, the draft Constitution of the republic of Adygeia permits the *Adyge* diaspora both within and outside the Russian Federation to become citizens of the republic and the Russian Federation. This provision directly contradicts the Constitution of the Russian Federation which does not permit subjects of the Federation to make decisions on citizenship. Given the size of the *Adyge* diaspora—there are 600,000 *Adyge* (Circassians) in Russia and several thousand more in Turkey, Jordan, Syria who still retain their distinct identity—it also poses a threat to the status of the ethnic Russians living in the republic.<sup>106</sup>

In spite of its abstention from radical action, the pan-Circassian movement is a major force in the western North Caucasus, and, as noted in the preceding sections, there are also significant *Adyge* blocs in Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

### **Shapsugs:**

The Shapsugs, part of the now fragmented Circassian peoples, are concentrated in the Lasorevsky, Tuapse and Sochi districts of Krasnodar.<sup>107</sup> Their national movement has pushed for the restoration of a Shapsug autonomy on the basis of these districts. The Shapsug population of the region is extremely small—approximately 10,000 people or only 5% of the total population—and is very close to assimilation. Without the creation of an autonomy and an active program of cultural development that this would bring, the Shapsugs will find it very difficult to maintain their identity as a distinct ethnic group.

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<sup>105</sup> Prior to the Caucasian Wars (also known in English as the Circassian Wars), the Sunni Muslim Circassians dominated the western portion of the Caucasus, numbering approximately 3 million. (The Abkhazians in Georgia and the Abazins in Karachaevo-Cherkessia are also closely related to the Circassians although they consider themselves to be separate peoples.) The majority of the Circassians emigrated to the Ottoman Empire during and immediately after the wars as a result of Russian pressure. In the 1920s, the Circassians were divided into two branches, the Cherkess to the west and the Kabardinians to the east. At this juncture, the Adygei were considered to be part of the Cherkess. In the late 1920s and 1930s, the Shapsugs were distinguished as a sub-division of the Adygei. Finally, in the 1930s, the Circassians were divided into three distinct territorially-based ethnic groups: the Adygei in the west, the Cherkess, and the Kabardinians in the eastern portion of their geographic range. The frequent ethnic sub-divisions were combined in the 1930s with the development of separate languages and literary traditions by the Soviet government to complete the dissolution of the Circassians as a unified people.

<sup>106</sup> See Larisa Khaperskaya, “The Constitutional Processes in the Northern Caucasus,” *CMG Bulletin*, February 1995, pp.48-51 (p.50).

<sup>107</sup> As mentioned above, the Shapsugs were distinguished from the Adygei in the late 1920s. They were the largest of the western *Adyge* tribes and were settled along the Black Sea coast on the southeast slopes of the Caucasus. During the Caucasian wars, the Shapsugs suffered particularly heavy losses as the Russian Empire secured its position on the Black Sea. The Soviet government briefly granted the Shapsugs their own autonomous oblast between 1925-1945 but then reclassified them as Adygeis in administrative reforms.

Other Circassian peoples and the KNK support the Shapsugs' aspirations for political and cultural autonomy. Although the Shapsugs received some support from Ruslan Khasbulatov and Ramazan Abdulatipov in Moscow for the consideration of their request by the Russian government, the administrations of Krasnodar and the city of Sochi, and the general population of the region are openly opposed to Shapsug autonomy. Like the Adygei, however, the Shapsug have refrained from taking radical action and have focused on the promotion of their cultural autonomy and development through official channels and their own socio-political organizations.

### **Cossacks:**<sup>108</sup>

The Cossacks are at the center of a number of territorial disputes across the North Caucasus as a result of the 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples. Cossack territorial demands represent a significant threat to the existing borders of the region and encourage confrontation with the seven national republics. Furthermore, Cossack demands for rehabilitation and the restoration of their traditional way of life seek to tilt the balance of political and economic power in their favor even in areas where they comprise a minority of the Russian-speaking population.

In contrast with the other repressed peoples mentioned in the 1991 Law, and the other North Caucasian peoples with territorial claims, the Cossacks have been extremely successful in capturing the attention of Moscow and in having their grievances addressed. In part this is the result of the potentially destabilizing effects of their territorial and political demands. The primary factors behind Moscow's attentiveness are, however: the Cossacks' long association with the Russian state; their role as the vanguard of the Russian Empire in the North Caucasus; and the problems faced by the North Caucasus Military District in maintaining the requisite force levels. In addition, there are a number of prominent officials with Cossack ancestry in the Russian Government, including Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai, and the former head of Krasnodar Krai and erstwhile Nationalities Minister Nikolai Yegorov, who was appointed as aide to President Yeltsin for nationalities and regional policy in August 1995.<sup>109</sup>

### **History of the Cossacks in the North Caucasus:**

In the late middle ages, Cossacks, or "free warriors" were multi-ethnic raiding bands that roamed the Eurasian *steppe* region outside the jurisdiction of Poland, Muscovy and the Crimean Khanate.<sup>110</sup> Although, at first, they were predominately Turkic in origin, by the sixteenth century

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<sup>108</sup> This section is based on N.V. Dzutsev, E.V. Frolova, M.M. Magomedkhanov, "Problemy vozrozhdeniya severokavkazkikh kazachestv v posttotalitarnom obschestve," (unpublished manuscript, 1994); Brian J. Boeck, "Kuban' Cossack Revival (1989-1993): the Beginnings of a Cossack National Movement in the North Caucasus Region," (unpublished manuscript, 1995), and Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*, pp.27-32. For a general treatment of the Cossack question see Institute of Ethnography, *Kazaki Rossii: proshloe, nastoyashchee, budushchee*, Russian Academy of Sciences (Moscow, 1992).

<sup>109</sup> "Yeltsin Appoints Yegorov as Aide," *OMRI Daily Digest*, August 18, 1995.

<sup>110</sup> For the early history of the Cossacks see G. Stokl, *Die Entstehung des Kosakentums*, (Munich, 1953). The term "Cossack" is semantically and phonetically linked to that of "Kazakh"—the nomadic Turkic group native to the *steppe* of modern-day Kazakhstan. Both terms derive from the Turkic word "Qazaq" or "free man."

Cossack groups with significant Slavic elements had formed. Since these early Cossack bands were composed largely of males, Slavic Cossacks often took native women from the nomadic peoples of the *steppe* as brides. Gradually, Cossack groups became Slavic-speaking as mass flight from serfdom and central control in Russia sent large groups of Slavs into the *steppe*.

The first scattered Cossack settlements in the North Caucasus began as early as the sixteenth century in the Terek region (present-day Dagestan, Stavropol', Chechnya, Ingushetia, North Ossetia and Kabardino-Balkaria), and later, in the eighteenth century, in the Kuban (present-day Krasnodar, Adygeia and Karachaevo-Cherkessia). Gradually the Russian imperial government co-opted the Cossack elites into the Russian state, and incorporated the Cossack military political organizations (the hosts) into the military structure of the empire. Cossacks became a special military caste within the Russian empire and were granted corporate privileges in land-holding and local self-rule in exchange for a universal military service requirement.<sup>111</sup>

Although they loyally served the Russian state, Cossacks rarely considered themselves to be Russians. Instead, a dual identity developed over time in which a Cossack group identity and an identity as servants of the Russian state and Tsar coexisted. Cossacks tended to define Russians as *inogorodnye* (those from another place or clan) and maintained group cohesiveness by shunning intermarriage with outsiders. In addition, Cossack cultural traditions, which had developed as a result of centuries of interaction with native peoples of the *steppe* and Caucasus, were unique and differed sharply from those of other Slavic groups. As the age of the 'free Cossacks' ended, Cossack identity became closely linked to their existence as members of a military caste.

In spite of the fact that Cossacks played a major role in the formation of the Russian Empire, Cossacks were often forcibly resettled without their permission. After the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, mass Cossack settlement in the North Caucasus was directed by the Tsarist government, for example, to complement the construction and settlement of lines of fortification in the region. Indeed, in the Russian-Caucasian Wars, Cossacks became the instruments of Russian imperial expansion in the Caucasus. After the wars, Cossack enclaves provided a counter-weight to the native populations in almost all the present North Caucasian republics: Kizlyarsky district in Dagestan; Shelkovsky and Naursky districts in Chechnya; Sunzhensky okrug between Chechnya and Ingushetia; Mozdok in North Ossetia; the Prokhladninsky and Maisky districts in Kabardino-Balkaria; and the Batalpashinsky (present-day Cherkessk) and Zelenchuksko-Urupsky Cossack districts in Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

When strict Tsarist controls were loosened during the chaos of the Russian revolution and Civil War, Cossack republics were formed in the Don, Kuban and Terek regions of the North Caucasus. Cossack national movements promoted the Cossacks as a distinct Slavic group and asserted their independence. The Bolshevik victory, however, brought about the destruction of the Cossack military caste and in the 1930s the Soviet collectivization of agriculture completed the virtual elimination of the Cossack way of life.

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<sup>111</sup> For a general history of the Cossacks and their relations with the Russian state see Philip Longworth, *The Cossacks*, Constable (London, 1969).

## **The Revival of the Cossacks in the North Caucasus:**

The revival of Cossack activity in 1989-1990 was catalyzed by the rise of non-Russian nationalism in the republics of the North Caucasus, and the corresponding demands of the North Caucasian peoples for increased political status and territorial change. In addition, an influx of refugees and migrants into Krasnodar and Stavropol' from other areas of the former Soviet Union in the same period encouraged a 'nativist' reaction from those who perceived themselves to be besieged by 'new-comers.'

Cossack clubs first began to spring up in Russia and in the North Caucasus in 1989, with Kuban Cossack clubs formed in Krasnodar, and Don Cossack clubs in Stavropol'. The first Congresses of Cossacks in Russia convened in 1990 and the first Congress of North Caucasian Cossacks took place in December 1991. At first, the Cossack clubs focused on ethno-cultural revival, encouraging a dual Russian-Cossack identity among the region's Slavic inhabitants, and promoting Cossacks as indigenous inhabitants of the North Caucasus on a par with the non-Russian "titular nationalities."

By 1991, however, with the passage of the Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples, Cossack leaders felt that they had been given the right by the Russian government to restore previously existing Cossack territories. The Cossack Congresses thus formulated political demands, including the transfer of Cossack enclaves from the republics to the jurisdiction of the 'Russian' territories of Krasnodar and Stavropol' and restrictions on migration into the region. However, there was considerable dissent among the Cossack leadership as to what ultimate status they should achieve from the satisfaction of these demands: the status of a military caste subordinate to the Russian government and state, or the status of a distinct ethnic group with its own national-territorial autonomy.

As a result, since 1991, Cossack leaders have melded the two goals together, playing a dual game that appeals simultaneously to two different constituencies. At times, to both mollify its aggrieved non-Russian neighbors and strengthen its case for political attention, the Cossack movement has distanced itself from inept Russian policy in the region by claiming to be a distinct North Caucasian people equally repressed by the Russian imperial center and the Soviet regime. At others, it has attempted to win support from the Russian government by stressing the association with Russia and Russians, and linking the Cossack revival to the Russian national revival and the defense of the Russian state.<sup>112</sup> Both approaches have achieved results.

## **Cossack Territorial Demands in the North Caucasus:**

Specifically, since 1990 Cossack territorial demands have included:

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<sup>112</sup> For example, in 1991, on behalf of all the Cossack hosts of the Russian Federation, the Union of Cossack Armies of Russia expressed its willingness to work actively with the Russian government on issues such as the patrolling of borders, manning of customs posts, and local policing.

- The restoration of Terek Cossack autonomy in the Mozdok district and its transfer from the jurisdiction of North Ossetia to Stavropol’.
- The restoration of the pre-Revolutionary Cossack districts of Zelenchuksko-Urupsky and Batalpashinsky in Karachaevo-Cherkessia.
- The restoration of Cossack autonomy in the Maikop district of Adygeia.
- The creation of a Kuban Cossack republic in Krasnodar Krai, the entire territory of Adygeia, and portions of Stavropol’ and Karachaevo-Cherkessia.
- The restoration of the Cossack oblasts of the Don, which extend across Krasnodar and Stavropol’ Krai and also imply territorial claims on historic Don Cossack lands within Ukrainian borders.
- The restoration of the territory of the Sunzhensky Terek Cossacks in Chechnya, Ingushetia and North Ossetia to its pre-1928 borders, and the transfer of the enclave to Stavropol’.
- The transfer of the Kargalinsky, Naursky and Shelkovsky districts, received by Checheno-Ingushetia in 1957, back to Stavropol’ Krai as traditional lands of the Terek Cossacks.
- The restoration of other Terek Cossack lands and the creation of an autonomous republic under the jurisdiction of Stavropol’.

The period between the summer of 1992 and the winter of 1993, saw the peak of the confrontation between Cossacks and the governments and peoples of the North Caucasus republics. In January 1992, representatives of the Union of Cossack Armies of Russia had held meetings in Moscow with top Russian officials, including Sergei Shakhrai (himself of Terek Cossack origin), to push for the creation of a federal commission that would draw up a law on the political and economic rehabilitation of the Cossacks in Russia. After this meeting, the Union of Cossacks of Southern Russia was established, bringing together the Terek, Kuban, Don and Stavropol’ Cossacks in a loose coalition in the North Caucasus.

The Union of Cossacks of Southern Russia presented itself as a direct competitor to the KNK and issued a set of general demands, ranging from the recognition of the Cossacks as a repressed people, to the creation of national-territorial formations headed by an elected *Ataman* with representation in organs of local government at all levels. The Cossacks also demanded that the federal government and local authorities give concrete guarantees that land in the region would not be sold or transferred as a result of privatization without the permission of local Cossacks. In particular, this applied to any proposed sale of land to individuals from the non-Russian North Caucasian groups. Cossack leaders stressed that communal land ownership by Cossack communities was essential to Cossack cultural and social distinction. In addition, the Union of Cossacks of Southern Russia offered to form a Cossack military force to guard Russia’s international borders in

the region. These meetings and of increasingly radical demands and statements from Cossack leaders grabbed the attention both of Moscow and the North Caucasian republics.

### **Moscow's Policy Toward the Cossacks:**

Following the earlier example of the Russian Empire, Moscow sought to co-opt the Cossacks of the Russian Federation, harness their military traditions, and channel their energies away from confrontation with the state.

In June 1992, Russian President Boris Yeltsin issued a decree supporting “the Cossack revival movement and the restoration of Cossack economic, cultural and patriotic forms of self-government” in the Russian Federation. The decree recognized the rights of Cossacks to practice traditional forms of local administration and land ownership in areas that would be defined by plebiscite. Under the provisions of the decree, Cossacks were to be given grants of land and Cossack regiments were to be created by the Ministry of Defense to defend international borders and maintain law and order. In March 1993, President Yeltsin signed an additional decree creating Cossack units as part of the Russian Federation’s armed forces in the North Caucasus.<sup>113</sup>

The March 1993 Decree was specifically intended to address personnel shortages in the Russian forces of the North Caucasus Military District by taking advantage of Cossack desires to perform military service. Since the formation of the military district in 1992-1993, the Russian army had experienced considerable difficulty in creating the necessary infra-structure and in maintaining the requisite level of forces. In 1993 alone, 1,500 men deserted from units of the North Caucasus Military District, and the assessed strength of the ground forces was 38,000—20,000 men short of the district’s established strength of 58,000. In response to these shortages, a number of Russian military experts urged the creation of Cossack contingents to supplement the forces in Stavropol’ and Krasnodar under the jurisdiction of the military district’s headquarters.<sup>114</sup>

President Yeltsin’s decrees, and reports that Cossack volunteers from villages around Vladikavkaz and Mozdok in North Ossetia had offered their services to the North Ossetian National Guard in its action against the Ingush, caused a stir among the North Caucasian national groups. The KNK made attempts to accommodate the Cossacks as an “indigenous people” of the region. A series of meetings were held and a flurry of agreements were signed between the KNK and the Cossacks. In Ingushetia, after the de-escalation of the conflict with North Ossetia, Ingush President Ruslan Aushev actively sought to co-opt the Cossacks to push his agenda for increased regional autonomy with the Russian government. President Aushev recognized the status of the Cossacks in the North

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<sup>113</sup> Decree of March 15, 1993 “On the Reforming of Military Structures, Frontier and Interior Forces on the Territory of the North Caucasian Region of the Russian Federation and State Support for the Cossacks.”

<sup>114</sup> For a discussion of the problems of the North Caucasus Military District and the role of the Cossacks, see Lyudmila Leontyeva, “Where do Russia’s Southern Borders Pass?” *Moscow News*, No. 46, November 12, 1993; and also Michael Orr, “The Regional Military Balance: Conventional and Unconventional Military Forces Around the Caspian,” presentation at conference on *Oil & Caviar in the Caspian* (School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, February 23-24, 1995).

Caucasus as a separate and distinct group worthy of rehabilitation and a took a prominent Cossack leader, P. Kosov, as his Adviser.<sup>115</sup>

Since March 1993, however, the Russian government has continued to elevate the status of the Cossacks in the North Caucasus and develop them as a potential military force. In April 1994, the Russian Government adopted a further resolution “On the Conception of State Policy Regarding Cossacks” which proposed the revival of the Cossacks’ former military-agricultural structures, and the use of Cossack formations in the army, internal troops and customs authority in the Russian Federation. The resolution stipulated that land should be set aside for Cossacks in the form of a state land fund which would be allotted to the Cossack community in return for state service. In spite of the presence of Cossacks in all of the frontier regions of the Russian Federation, the North Caucasus was again singled out as the first region for the implementation of the new Cossack policy.

In December 1994, President Yeltsin also established a Council for Cossack Affairs to develop policy toward the Cossacks further. The Council was headed by the President and included the Deputy Defense Minister, the Deputy Minister of the Interior, the Deputy Director of the Federal Counter Intelligence Service, the Deputy Secretaries of the Security Council and the Commander-in-Chief of the Russian border guards.<sup>116</sup> The composition of this Council indicated the perceived importance of the Cossacks from a military and strategic point of view. The creation of the Council and the fact that the North Caucasus were singled out in the April 1994 resolution also suggest that the Cossacks are seen as Moscow’s buffer against the demands of the non-Russian peoples in the region for increased autonomy and territorial change.

### **The Status of the Cossacks in the North Caucasus:**

Although the Russian government clearly sees the Cossacks as an instrument of its policy in the North Caucasus, general interest in Cossack heritage among the Russian population of the region has waned since 1993. A top local official from Stavropol’ Krai, interviewed by the SDI Project in July 1995 on the issue of the Cossacks in the region, noted that the Russian population in Stavropol’ and Krasnodar had become disillusioned with the Cossacks as a group, and few new people were registering themselves with the organized hosts which were riddled with internal divisions.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> For Cossacks in the border region between Ingushetia and Chechnya, Ingushetia is now seen as a possible ally and a counter-weight to Chechnya’s radicalism. In June 1995, for example, Cossack residents of the Chechen village of Assinovskaya on the border with Ingushetia held a general meeting in which they resolved to secede from Chechnya and join Ingushetia. The Cossack leaders noted that only Ingushetia could protect them from arbitrary action by “the Dudayev regime and indifference on the part of the federal authorities,” and appealed to President Aushev to petition the Russian government for the modification of the Ingushetian-Chechen border. See Natalya Gorodetskaya, “Cossacks of Assinovskaya Village Decide to Secede From Chechnya,” *Segodnya* (in English), June 14, 1995.

<sup>116</sup> See Issa Kostoyev, “Should Cossacks be Regarded as a People?” *Moscow News*, No. 10, March 17-23, 1995. Kostoyev writes: “With the decrees and laws on the status of Cossacks in the army, on Cossack land tenure, on Cossack associations and councils under the President, and on the state fund to support Cossacks, it seems that no other problem in our country has aroused such bureaucratic enthusiasm.”

<sup>117</sup> In contrast, a survey carried out by the Center for Sociological Studies in Vladikavkaz in North Ossetia, at the end of 1994, among Terek Cossacks in North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan, showed that Cossack identity in these republics was relatively high. The Russian population was also extremely

The Cossacks are now perceived by the non-Cossack Russian population of the North Caucasus as a retrograde and conservative group—harking back to a pre-modern past, demanding and receiving subsidies and special privileges from the government, and interested only in seizing land for themselves. Their focus on agrarian issues has alienated the urban Russian population and those in the region interested in promoting entrepreneurial activity, industrial development and economic reform. The fact that the Cossacks form an almost exclusively male society has also complicated their claims to be an ethnic group and led to the active opposition of women's groups.

The official from Stavropol' noted that, since the Russian government's decrees on Cossack revival, the Stavropol' and Krasnodar authorities have also become less interested in the Cossack movement. They resent the attempted interference of Cossack *atamans* in local politics and the repeated proposals from Cossack Congresses to create North Caucasian Cossack republics that would concentrate power in Cossack hands. In addition, there have been no Cossack secessions from administrative units and no direct clashes with local authorities, in spite of radical claims. Cossack militancy is thus now seen in the region as narrowly-focused and concentrated on the protection of the Cossacks' individual and communal property and their new privileges from Moscow.

It would seem, therefore, that even if the Cossacks have not been completely neutralized as a factor in North Caucasian politics, they have been bought off by the Russian state. The question remains one of how successful this purchase has been and whether the Cossacks will be completely absorbed into state structures or will instead prove to be a maverick organization operating on the fringes of the state. The outcome of the conflict in Chechnya and its impact on the political situation in the North Caucasus are key in this regard, as the next section of the report indicates.

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supportive of the Cossack movement and Cossack revival (see Dzutsev, Frolova and Magomedkhanov, "Problemy..."). In all of these republics, those surveyed noted that they felt threatened by the general political and economic situation. The general conclusion from this is that where the Russian population feels threatened by the other ethnic groups of the North Caucasus, the Cossacks are seen as the defenders of Russian national interests. In Krasnodar and Stavropol', where the Russian population far outweighs the other North Caucasian groups, the perception of threat is not so great and a more critical attitude towards the Cossacks is thus adopted.

## SECTION 5

### Chechnya<sup>118</sup>

#### **The failure of Moscow's regional policy:**

Chechnya's struggle with Moscow, like that of Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Tbilisi, is the result of the structural legacy of the USSR. As such, Chechnya is the most extreme example of Russia's *ad hoc* regional policy run aground. The struggle centers on the question of whether the current state of dissolution of the Soviet Union is final. Chechnya, Abkhazia, South Ossetia and other would-be secessionist regions of the successor states of the USSR, such as Transdnier and Crimea, claim that it is not. Radical nationalist leaders in these regions argue that the successor states have inherited all the ethno-political contradictions that brought down the Soviet Union. As a result, a further round of national-territorial change is necessary.

In the Chechen case, the republics of the North Caucasus all shared a perception that their small nations had been cheated by the administrative structure of the USSR. As a result of being designated as autonomous republics and oblasts, rather than fully-fledged union republics, they had been deprived of influence and status. At the same time other peoples, such as the Georgians, Armenians, Azeris and the Balts, who were hardly more numerous than North Caucasians, and had not enjoyed such a long period of independence from Russian rule, had been granted union republics and all the associated privileges.

Indeed, the North Caucasus was the last strategic region to be incorporated into the Russian Empire in the 19th century as Russia consolidated its position on the Black and Caspian Seas. In the Caucasian Wars, the peoples of the North Caucasus held out against Russia for almost 40 years and it was not until 1865 that the region was fully 'pacified.' From the end of the 18th century, Chechnya was at the heart of this opposition to the expansion of the Russian Empire. The movement of Sheik Mansur at the end of the 18th century, the struggle of Imam Shamil in the first half of the 19th century, the *abrechestvo* at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century,<sup>119</sup> the establishment of the emirate of Uzun-Khadzh during the Civil War, the anti-Bolshevik rebellions of the late 1930s and early 1940s, and the partisan wars of the latter half of the 1940s were all part of a long tradition of Chechen struggle for national liberation.

The collective trauma of the deportations of 1944 was simply one in a sequence of events that shaped the psychology of the republic and its attitude towards Moscow. Significantly, Dzhokhar Dudayev, the Chechen leader, was born the year of the deportation and spent his early years in exile

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<sup>118</sup> This section is based on Hill and Jewett, *Report on Ethnic Conflict*, pp.45-52. Vasil'eva and Muzaev, pp.58-67; research conducted by Dr. Magomedkhanov prior to the war in December 1994; and interviews with North Caucasian officials and those close to the governments of Russia and Chechnya, conducted by Dr. Magomedkhanov, Fiona Hill, and other members of the SDI Project's Working Group on the North Caucasus between Spring 1994 and July 1995.

<sup>119</sup> A movement of "Robin Hood"-type partisans.

in Kazakhstan. The 1991 Law on the Rehabilitation of Repressed Peoples was thus seen by many Chechens as official recognition of their right to restore lost independence and create their own statehood.

The dispute between Chechnya and Moscow is thus about the ultimate political status of the republic: whether it will become an independent state like the former union republics, or remain part of the Russian Federation. If it is to remain part of the Federation, then an additional question must be addressed: what form will this federation take? Will the Russian Federation be a 'real' federation with certain key powers devolved by the constituent entities to the center, or will it be a unitary state with some superficial trappings of sovereignty granted by the center to a handful of distinct entities. Chechnya, the other republics, krais, and the majority of the larger oblasts of the Russian Federation are opposed to the recreation of a unitary state. As noted in Sections I and III, this question is the crux of the debate between Moscow and the Russian regions.

When Russia launched the war against Chechnya in December 1994, this debate over the structure of the Russian Federation was still in full swing. No final decision had been reached on how to approach the issue. As outlined above in Section III, a gradual process of concluding treaties with the Federation's key constituent units had been introduced in February 1994, with the first treaty between Moscow and Tatarstan, but the end point of this process and the kind of federation that might emerge were still unclear. In addition, the entire treaty approach had evolved in Moscow long after Chechnya's secession. It was a response to the fact that Tatarstan, a strategically-important oil-producing republic in the heart of the Federation, had joined Chechnya in rejecting the 1992 Federal Treaty, and that other key republics, such as the diamond producing area of Sakha-Yakutia, had only signed the Federal Treaty under protest. The treaty process was, therefore, designed to stop the rest of the Federation from unraveling. It maintained a dialogue between Moscow and the periphery on the most critical economic and political issues, while putting off the issue of the ultimate form of the Federation until the confrontation had de-escalated. Chechnya, however, was not prepared to put this all-important issue off. It rejected the treaty process out of hand, and demanded that Russia immediately tackle the question of its political status in the Federation.

Thus, in December 1994 when Moscow launched the military attack on Chechnya, there was no strategy for achieving a particular status for Chechnya within the Russian Federation. Prior to intervention, the general political goals had been instead:

- to get rid of Dzhokhar Dudayev, who had proven to be a particularly intransigent and tenacious opponent;
- to install a government that would be more amenable to accommodation with Moscow;
- to prevent any dramatic changes to the post-1991 borders of the Russian Federation.

The initial state of unpreparedness of the Russian military for the war that emerged, and the fact that no maps of Grozny were even available to distribute to the troops,<sup>120</sup> are symbolic of the overall conceptual lag on the future of both Chechnya and the Russian Federation. Those in Moscow who took the decision to launch a full-scale attack on Chechnya were moving into uncharted waters and immediately foundered on a sandbank. In August 1995, when this report was written, after eight months of destructive conflict in Chechnya, the question of the ultimate status of Chechnya remained unchanged and the future structure of the Russian Federation was still in doubt.<sup>121</sup>

After December 1994, what began as a political conflict over the structural legacy of the USSR between the Russian Federation and one of its “subjects,” assumed the dimensions of an inter-ethnic conflict. This has had serious repercussions for ethnic Chechens living in the rest of the North Caucasus and the Russian Federation as a whole, many of whom were expelled from their homes in the summer of 1995. The evolution of the political dispute into an ethnic conflict was as much the direct result of the propaganda of the Chechen leadership as it was a consequence of the Soviet association of specific territorial-administrative units with a “titular nationality.” From 1991, Dzhokhar Dudayev and his associates repeatedly stressed that it was the *sovereign Chechen people*, embodied in the republic of Chechnya-Ichkeria, as opposed to the multi-ethnic people of the political-territorial entity of Chechnya, who had exercised their right to self-determination and seceded from the Russian Federation. Prior to the outbreak of war in December 1994, however, this sole identification of Chechnya with the Chechen people did not translate into violence against the Russian population of the republic. Indeed, after secession, the sovereign Chechen people proved to be much less than a unity and were more likely to perpetrate violence against each other than against ethnic Russians.

### **The Structural Legacy of the USSR and the Crisis of Leadership in Chechnya:**

In addition to the conceptual lag in Russia’s regional policy before December 1994, several other elements contributed to the escalation of the conflict between Chechnya and Moscow. The most significant of these was a direct result of the structural legacy of the USSR and the fact that prior to 1991 Chechnya had been an autonomous rather than a union republic. This fact meant that Chechnya had none of the government institutions enjoyed by the Russian Federation and the other union republics that might have enabled it to build an independent state. Its Soviet-era leadership lacked experience in self-governance as a result of the symbolic nature of its autonomy up to 1991.

The new Chechen elite that rose to power after the collapse of the USSR was composed of radical nationalists from the political fringes with no prior administrative experience; leaders of the so-called ‘Chechen Mafia’ who specialized in extra-legal activities; members of the Chechen diaspora from outside the borders of the USSR who had little idea of the environment in which

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<sup>120</sup> See Fred Hiatt, “Russian Military Machine Revealing Rust and Wear: Forces in Chechnya Ill-Equipped, Ill-Trained,” *Washington Post*, January 17, 1995.

<sup>121</sup> See for example, Alessandra Stanley, “Russian Assault Recaptures Police Station in Chechnya,” *New York Times*, August 22, 1995. Stanley writes: “The peace negotiations in Grozny have bogged down over the issue of Chechnya’s future political status. Russia wants Chechnya to remain part of the Russian Federation, but Chechen leaders continue to demand independence.”

Chechnya was operating;<sup>122</sup> and a handful of educated young idealists whose proposals for reform were thwarted at every turn. They were all woefully ill-equipped to deal with the multiple challenges of creating a new Chechen nation state and creating a functioning market economy.

Although there was a university, a pedagogical institute, a medical institute, and an oil and gas institute in Grozny, none but the latter—given the importance of the oil industry in the region—could compete with facilities in the Russian Federation. Throughout the Soviet period, there was a consequent brain-drain of ambitious Chechen youth toward the Federation center. The most highly-skilled political cadres and economic specialists in Chechnya were, therefore, trained outside the republic and were often Russians assigned to work there by Moscow. Ethnic Russians, for example, accounted for around 20% of the total population and were the dominant group in Grozny and other key urban centers. Dzhokhar Dudayev himself was educated in elite Soviet military schools in Tambov and Moscow, and was assigned to a strategic bomber base in Tartu in Estonia until 1990. He came to Chechnya only on retirement from the Soviet airforce.<sup>123</sup>

The Chechnya that Dudayev and the new elite inherited was an impoverished one. In the 1980s, the rural regions of Checheno-Ingushetia where ethnic Chechens and Ingush predominated, had experienced a gradual economic decline as state resources were diverted towards industrial development and the booming oil industry. By the late 1980s, in spite of promises by the Soviet authorities to create jobs in the construction and food processing industries, rural unemployment had increased dramatically. According to unofficial estimates it reached as high as 30% of the total labor force in 1991 (20% in official estimates).<sup>124</sup> This unskilled Chechen and Ingush labor force was diverted beyond the borders of the republic to find seasonal work elsewhere, while skilled workers from the central regions of Russia were brought in to work in the oil industry. This create

ased not only on its own total oil reserves of approximately 30 million tons, but also on the receipt from Russia of an average of 17-19 million tons of crude oil a year for processing at its refineries. As a result of Dudayev's mishandling of the relationship with Moscow, by 1994 crude oil refining in Chechnya had dropped to an all time low of

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<sup>122</sup> Such as Yusef Shamsedin, the erstwhile Chechen Foreign Minister, who was born in Jordan.

<sup>123</sup> See for example, Steven Erlanger, "Chechen Warrior Chief: Soviet Army Credentials," *New York Times*, December 15, 1994.

<sup>124</sup> See Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.58-59.

1.2 million tons.<sup>125</sup> This was in stark contrast to the situation in Tatarstan, another major oil-producing region, where a relationship with Moscow was carved out and oil production was maintained. In this respect, Tatarstan benefited from the considerable experience and political acumen of the former Soviet party boss and new political leader, President Mintimer Shaimiev, who was able to chart a moderate political course between the opposing demands of the radical Tatar nationalists on the one hand and of Moscow on the other.

In Chechnya, poor leadership after 1991 exacerbated the difficulties of the 1980s. President Dudayev's background and training in the Soviet military academy prepared him admirably for the job of creating the Chechen armed forces, as attested by the Chechen success in keeping the Russian army at bay for several months in 1994-1995, but it did not provide him with the fundamental knowledge for building a new state.

During the Dudayev period, the social structure of Chechnya was severely distorted with practically the entire male population under arms and the republic's income generated by the comparatively small number of Chechens engaged in commerce in Russia and the former Soviet Union and the Chechen diaspora. Industrial and agricultural production, the education system and health care all collapsed. Unemployment rose precipitously.<sup>126</sup> Chechen groups began to engage in bandit attacks on trains on the Baku-Rostov main line, steal cattle from neighboring Dagestan, hijack airtransport in Krasnodar and Stavropol', and engage in a range of other illegal activities. These groups were all lumped together under the general rubric of the 'Chechen Mafia' by the local population, increasing the unpopularity of the Chechens as a group and feeding into a broader and extremely negative Russian stereotype of "People of Caucasian Nationality" and their relationship to organized crime. One prominent Chechen Historian, Professor Yavus Akhmadov, described life under Dudayev in an article in a regional newspaper in 1995 in the following manner: "The people were left with only three options to sustain themselves: war, robbery and petty trading."<sup>127</sup>

General Dudayev's political naiveté and bad judgement compounded the economic difficulties. In swearing his oath of office on the Koran, as acknowledgement of the support of the Muslim clergy and Islamic nationalist parties in his bid for power, Dudayev fed into Russian fears of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the North Caucasus. These fears grew in step with the increasing political influence of the Chechen clans or *teips*, and the Chechen Muslim clergy.

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<sup>125</sup> See Elaine Holoboff, "Oil and the Burning of Grozny," *Jane's Intelligence Review*, Volume 7, Number 6, 1995 (pp.253-257).

<sup>126</sup> There are no reliable figures for unemployment in this period. As far as industrial and agricultural production are concerned, however, they fell by 30% and 46% respectively in 1992 alone. This information on the collapse of the Chechen economy and society is based on Dr. Magomedkhanov's interviews in the North Caucasus and his own travels to Chechnya in the period leading up to December 1994. For another view of the problems faced by Chechnya in this period see Stephen Handelman, "The Guns of Grozny," in his book *Comrade Criminal: The Theft of the Second Russian Revolution*, Michael Joseph (London, 1994), pp.192-208. Handelman suggests that by 1993, for example, there were an estimated 150,000 firearms in Grozny, for a population of 400,000.

<sup>127</sup> Yavus Akhmadov, "Vinovaty okazalis' vse ...," *Novoe Delo* (Makhachkala) March 3, 1995.

As modern civil society ceased to function in Chechnya, the Chechen political culture came into play. This political culture was traditionally highly-decentralized and non-hierarchical, rooted in territorially-based extended family units, the *teips*. Once Dudayev dissolved the Chechen parliament in 1993, the role of the legislative branch devolved by default to the traditional structures. Issues of state significance began to be decided in meetings of the *teips* rather than sessions of parliament. Instead of analysts and experts as presidential advisers, Dudayev turned to the elders of the *teips* and to religious leaders. With no parliamentary representatives on hand, those outside the *teip* system had few options for making themselves heard other than protest.

As a result, there was an exodus of Russians from the republic to Stavropol' and Krasnodar. These were the oil-industry workers, engineers, teachers, and doctors. In 1992-1993, for example, approximately 150,000 Russians left Chechnya.<sup>128</sup> Their numbers were swelled by skilled Chechens, starving the republic of the majority of its administrators and those who kept the economy functioning.

In the period before December 1994, therefore, Dudayev's popularity had plummeted—not only among the political elite but also among the population as a whole. As the unfolding of events in Chechnya from late 1991-1994 illustrates, only the general anti-Chechen policies of Moscow, as opposed to its specifically anti-Dudayev policies, kept President Dudayev in place as the perceived guarantor of national interests and of the sovereignty of Chechnya-Ichkeria. These policies included two other attempted direct military interventions, and the financial and indirect military support of numerous coup attempts by the Chechen opposition.

### **Chechnya's secession and the evolution of the dispute with Moscow:**

The sequence of events leading up to the war between Moscow and Chechnya is complicated. It was initially sparked by the gradual realization in 1989 and 1990 that Moscow would not raise the political status of the peoples of the North Caucasus within the USSR. In 1989, even the Chechen representative to the Soviet Congress of People's Deputies, Ruslan Khasbulatov, who would later become the Speaker of the Russian Parliament, denied that the small ethnic groups of the Russian Federation had any particular right to national autonomy. In addition, the conservative Soviet parliaments of the North Caucasian republics were anxious to retain their positions and privileges and were not prepared to confront Moscow on the issue.

#### **1. The Chechen Revolution:**

In November 1990, 1,000 Chechens from across the Chechen-Ingush republic convened at the first All-National Congress of the Chechen People (ANCCP) in Grozny. Here Air Force Major-General Dzhokhar Musaevich Dudayev, the commander of the Soviet air force base in Tartu, Estonia, was elected as the chair of the Executive Committee of the ANCCP. Dudayev's prestigious title, impressive service record and connections in the upper echelons of Soviet society were the key factors in his election.

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<sup>128</sup> See Valery Tishkov "The Ambitions of Leaders and the Arrogance of Power," *CMG Bulletin*, February 1995, p.4.

Radical nationalist groups, including the Vainakh Democratic Party, the Islamic Way, the Green movement, and the Caucasus Society joined the Executive Committee. In addition to Dudayev, the Committee's First Deputy Chairman was Yusup Soslambekov (a member of the council of the Vainakh Democratic Party). The other key deputies were Zemlikhan Yandarbiev (Chairman of the Vainakh Democratic Party), and Khusein Akhmadov (a former deputy of the Checheno-Ingushetia parliament). During the congress, representatives issued a declaration stating that the Chechen republic should be restored as a sovereign entity—The Chechen Republic-Ichkeria—which should have equal status with the Russian Federation in the USSR.

The ANCCP quickly emerged as the most powerful political organization in the republic. It was heavily supported by those in the Chechen 'black market' who hoped to replace supporters of the Soviet-era Chechen leader Doku Zavgayev in key economic positions, especially in the oil sector. Black marketeers became the primary funders of the ANCCP's and later Dudayev's Chechen National Guard.<sup>129</sup> The ANCCP also won backing from nascent radical Islamic movements among the Muslim clergy, and the elders of the *teips*.

As a result of its widespread support, the ANCCP's actions elicited an immediate response from the local government. The day after the ANCCP congress, the parliament of Checheno-Ingushetia also adopted a declaration of sovereignty. It refused, however, to sanction the idea of secession from the Russian Federation. Consequently, the ANCCP denounced the parliament for political cowardice and demanded its dissolution. On May 25, 1991, Dudayev, as the Chairman of the ANCCP's Executive Committee, announced that, as a result of the declaration of sovereignty, the Checheno-Ingushetia parliament had lost all legitimacy and the ANCCP and the Executive Committee had become the only legitimate power in the republic.

The critical juncture came in August 1991, when the conservative parliament of Checheno-Ingushetia wavered over whether to support the abortive putsch in the Soviet Union. Dudayev and the Executive Committee seized the opportunity to win both the support of the republic's population and the Russian leadership to overthrow the parliament and its Chairman, Doku Zavgayev. Ruslan Khasbulatov's call, as acting Chairman of the Russian parliament, for the removal of all those leaders of the Russian Federation's republics who had supported the putsch spurred Dudayev into action. Members of the ANCCP national guard seized control of the television and radio stations, enabling General Dudayev to appeal directly to the Chechen population to overthrow the old Soviet *nomenklatura*.

The fact that the Russian government was anxious to be rid of Zavgayev was a major factor in Dudayev's initial success. At this juncture, the view in Moscow was that the ANCCP's declarations were largely demonstrative and that Dudayev would establish an essentially pro-Russian government in Grozny.<sup>130</sup> In late August, the Russian government sent a member of the Presidium of the Russian parliament, General Aslanbek Aslakhonov, and the deputy to the Chairman of the Russian Council of Ministers, Inga Grebesheva—both prominent Chechens—to Grozny to attend an

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<sup>129</sup> See Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.60.

<sup>130</sup> This view was confirmed by a prominent Russian official interviewed by the SDI Project in early 1995.

emergency session of the Checheno-Ingushetia parliament. Moscow's envoys warned Zavgaev publicly that he should not use force to resolve the political crisis in the republic. This warning demoralized the supporters of the parliament and galvanized the ANCCP, which put up barricades in the center of Grozny and effectively seized control of the city.

Nevertheless, the parliament refused either to dissolve itself or to dismiss Zavgaev. In response, on September 1, 1991 the ANCCP unilaterally declared the Checheno-Ingushetia parliament disbanded and created its own temporary legislative body. On September 6, the ANCCP National Guard stormed and seized the building where the parliament met and forced Zavgaev to sign a letter of resignation and flee Grozny, thus completing the 'Chechen Revolution.'

## **2. Confrontation with Moscow:**

Confrontation with Moscow, and other Chechen organizations, was immediate. Although Russian President Yeltsin and acting Chairman Khasbulatov had initially expressed support for the dissolution of the Checheno-Ingushetia parliament, the radical tactics of Dudayev and his organization in September were cause for concern. Events had spun out of Moscow's control.

As a result, President Yeltsin now announced that all Soviet bodies that had supported the August putsch should be abolished only in accordance with the Russian Constitution. A rapid series of flying visits to Grozny by prominent officials was launched. On September 11, a delegation headed by Russian State Secretary Gennady Burbulis traveled to Grozny to convince the parliament to disband itself voluntarily and hold elections in an orderly manner. On September 14, Ruslan Khasbulatov also arrived in Grozny. In response to these direct interventions, the parliament finally stepped aside on September 15, and a 32-member Provisional Supreme Soviet (comprising members of the former parliament, Russian deputies and various political parties) was created. Elections were scheduled for November 17 and the Soviet was instructed to serve as an interim legislative organ.

However, as many of the members of the Soviet were former deputies of the disbanded parliament, the ANCCP opposed its creation. Dudayev and the ANCCP Executive Committee announced that they would not conform to a *diktat* from Moscow, and proceeded to try to assert control over the Provisional Soviet by having ANCCP members included in prominent positions. When the Soviet failed to yield, the Executive Committee denounced it as "provocative and subversive" and declared its dissolution. On October 6, Russian Vice-President Aleksandr Rutskoi flew to the republic to intercede with both the ANCCP and the Provisional Soviet. Rutskoi's directives were ignored. On the night of October 7-8 the ANCCP National Guard stormed the Checheno-Ingushetia Council of Ministers and KGB buildings. In the chaos, a KGB officer was injured, and the Provisional Supreme Soviet went into hiding. On October 9, the Russian parliament passed a resolution on the political situation in Checheno-Ingushetia. They demanded that all armed formations disband and hand in their weapons by October 10 and that the Provisional Supreme Soviet be reinstated as the sole authority in the republic.

At this juncture, Dudayev raised the stakes even further and proclaimed Russia's move a "virtual declaration of war on the republic." He proceeded to announce the mobilization of all men between the ages of 15 and 55. Yeltsin countered this by threatening to take measures to "normalize

the situation” in the event that the ANCCP did not comply. Yeltsin’s ultimatum simply strengthened the resolve of Dudayev’s supporters who ignored the threat. Opposition movements to Dudayev and the ANCCP did, however, spring up around the republic, centered on the Provisional Supreme Soviet, liberal-democratic parties, and those elites threatened by Dudayev’s assumption of power. Rival demonstrators thus clashed in the streets of Grozny.

On October 27, 1991, in the face of official protests from the Yeltsin government and the Checheno-Ingushetia Provisional Supreme Soviet, Dudayev and the Executive Committee of the ANCCP held presidential elections. The Executive Committee claimed that 77% of the electorate had participated and, of these, 85% had elected Dzhokhar Dudayev as president.<sup>131</sup> On the basis of this election, Dudayev declared the Law on the State Sovereignty of the Chechen Republic on November 2, which was Chechnya’s *de facto* secession from the Russian Federation. He simultaneously convened a session of the KNK in Grozny under the slogan of overturning the imperial forces of Russia to emphasize the rupture with Moscow.

The opposition to Dudayev refused to accept both the elections and Dudayev’s declarations and vowed to press ahead with the elections originally scheduled by Moscow and the Provisional Supreme Soviet for November 17. As a result, Chechnya seemed likely to split into two parallel state formations. This was changed, however, by the actions of the Russian government.

### **3. The First Russian Military Intervention in Chechnya:**

Ignoring warnings from his advisors that the situation was explosive, on November 8, 1991, Russian President Yeltsin declared a state of emergency in Checheno-Ingushetia and ordered a total of 2,500 interior ministry troops to the region. Dudayev responded by declaring martial law, and mobilizing volunteers to the Chechen National Guard to protect the sovereignty of the republic. His supporters surrounded the Interior Ministry building, hemming in an estimated 600 Soviet interior troops that had already been airlifted into Grozny. Faced by the threat of Russian federal troops descending on the republic, political groups which had previously opposed Dudayev now rallied round and declared support. The resistance of the Provisional Supreme Soviet immediately dissolved.

Fearing that attempts to implement the state of emergency would lead to bloodshed, the Russian parliament voted to repeal Yeltsin’s decree. Soviet television subsequently showed several hundred Russian troops leaving Grozny in tourist buses, as Chechen national guardsmen fired automatic weapons in the air in celebration. To the Chechens, Moscow had capitulated before the Chechen Revolution. Dudayev’s position as the protector of national interests was thus secured.

With the withdrawal of the Russian troops, the situation in Grozny stabilized. Dudayev lifted martial law on November 21, 1991 and ordered his National Guard to withdraw. However, he adhered to a November 26 deadline for the commencement of general conscription for a Chechen army and granted every man over the age of 16 the right to bear arms, including automatic weapons. In 1992, the complete withdrawal of Russian troops from Chechnya left behind large arsenals of

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<sup>131</sup> There is no independent confirmation of this and opposition groups claim that the participation was low.

Soviet weaponry, including tanks and armored personnel carriers which allowed Dudayev to build up his military forces.

#### **4. The Beginning of the Opposition Movement to Dudayev:**

After November 1991, Dudayev set about creating the state structures of government—including a new parliament. Authority was, however, concentrated in the hands of the President. This resulted in the first of a series of political rifts within the former Executive Committee of the ANCCP. The internal power struggle between President and Parliament in Moscow, that began in 1992, was mirrored in Grozny in the same period. In the initial phases of the struggle, Yaragi Mamodaev, who became Chechen Prime Minister in May 1992, pushed for the executive branch to be strengthened, and rejected parliamentary control over the activity of the government and its ministers. The parliamentary majority, however, headed by Parliament Chairman, Khusein Akhmadov, demanded that the government be formed only with the agreement of the parliament, and that the executive branch be accountable to the legislature.

In the summer of 1992, contradictions within the Chechen government increased as a result of a dispute over the distribution of proceeds from the sale of Chechen oil and petroleum products. New political factions coalesced around Prime Minister Mamodaev and the Chairman of the Grozny Municipal Assembly Beslan Gantamirov; and around the head of the President's Council on External Economic Relations, Ruslan Utsiev, and the Minister of the Interior, Sultan Albakov. The Democratic opposition in Chechnya also reasserted itself to demand changes in the power structure and new elections.

As far as relations with Moscow were concerned, in March 1992, Chechnya joined Tatarstan in refusing to sign Yeltsin's Federal Treaty for the Russian Federation. The Russian government made considerable efforts to persuade Dudayev to sign on, holding negotiations in Dagomys in Krasnodar Krai in May 1992, bringing Chechen parliamentary delegations to Moscow to discuss a separate draft treaty, sending delegations from Moscow to Grozny, and continuing to subsidize the Chechen economy from the Russian budget, to the tune of 7.5 billion rubles in 1992.<sup>132</sup> These efforts were, however, complicated by the outbreak of conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in October 1992.

#### **5. The Second Russian Military Intervention in Chechnya:**

Following the imposition of a state of emergency in the contested Prigorodny district of North Ossetia, Russian troops were deployed to separate the warring parties. They were also ordered into Ingushetia to prevent Ingush from Chechnya from joining the fighting, and to block reported arms shipments by the Chechens. In the absence of a clearly demarcated border between Chechnya and Ingushetia, Dudayev perceived the arrival of the Russian troops in Ingushetia as “an act of aggression.”

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<sup>132</sup> See EPIcenter (Center for Economic and Political Research), “The Political Situation in the North Caucasus,” in the series *The Political Situation in Russia*, No.2 (3), (Moscow January 1993), p.16.

In early November 1992, Russian forces moved east across acknowledged Ingushetian territory into areas claimed by Chechnya. Confrontation between Chechnya and Russia seemed inevitable. The KNK, led by Chechnya, demanded the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops, threatening to send in a confederation force to defend the republic, and the opposition rallied around Dudayev. To avoid another politically damaging military stand-off, and a potential North Caucasus-wide crisis, Yeltsin ordered the Russian troops back to designated Ingush territory. Again, it seemed that Moscow had backed down.

## **6. The Rise of the Opposition Movement to Dudayev:**

Once the Russian threat evaporated, the deterioration of the republic's economy, coupled with Dudayev's inability to overcome the republic's political divisions, reactivated the opposition. In early 1993, a three-way power struggle erupted—between the Chechen Prime Minister and President Dudayev, between the Parliament and President Dudayev, and between the opposition and President Dudayev erupted.

Moscow seized the opportunity to exploit the contradictions within the Chechen leadership. The Head of the Russian Constitutional Court, Valery Zorkin, met with representatives of the Chechen opposition in Moscow, who alleged that most of the citizens of the republic opposed General Dudayev's "criminal clan regime" and were not in favor of Chechnya's secession from the Russian Federation. In January 1993, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Shakhrai, and First Deputy Chairman of the Russian parliament's upper chamber Ramazan Abdulatipov also held talks in Grozny with the Chechen opposition.

These talks coincided with the publication of the Russian Security Council's December 1992 reports on the need to bolster pro-Russian forces in the North Caucasus. The reports provided the rationale for refusing to find a *modus vivendi* with Dudayev's Chechen government, and for promoting Chechen opposition movements. Thus a pattern was established of meetings between top Russian officials and prominent members of the Chechen opposition. The juncture marked the end of attempts to negotiate with the Chechen leadership around Dudayev, and the beginning of attempts to put pro-Russian forces in power in place of Dudayev.

Ignoring his opponents, Dudayev subsequently produced a draft constitution which would greatly extend the role of the President and allow him to control all remaining autonomous government structures. Recognizing that the new draft constitution would imply the introduction of presidential rule in the republic, parliament immediately protested and proposed, in turn, the abolition of the Presidency.

The situation became acute on April 14th, 1993 when the Chechen parliament issued a vote of no confidence in the Council of Ministers headed by Dudayev and attempted to limit presidential authority. The Chechen opposition staged a series of demonstrations in support of the parliament. The Chechen Constitutional Court, the Grozny Municipal Assembly, and the group around the Prime Minister also supported the parliament. In response, on April 17, Dudayev abolished the parliament, the Constitutional Court and the Grozny Assembly and instituted presidential rule. He dismissed Prime Minister Mamodaev in favor of the former head of the Vainakh Democratic Party, Zemlikhan Yandarbiev, who was made Vice-President. The members of Dudayev's regime now

consisted of the most radical factions of the Chechen nationalists opposed to any accommodation with Moscow, with the more moderate forces pushed into opposition.

Chechnya therefore lost its weak parliamentary democracy, and many of the leaders of the original Chechen revolution. Dudayev did subsequently try to convene an alternative parliament headed by a relative, Isa Idigov, and absent the most implacable opposition. He also created a new Constitutional Court in the form of a Constitutional College with seven judges which would be appointed directly by the President. But in spite of these efforts, Chechen politics focused in on the person of Dzhokhar Dudayev.

The abolished parliament, which was now supported by a significant segment of the population, denounced Dudayev's actions as unconstitutional and continued to hold sessions. Members of parliament duly amended the constitution to deprive the president of real power. On May 13, 1993, they "released" Dudayev from his post and began impeachment procedures. Yaragi Mamodaev was re-appointed Prime Minister and head of the government by the parliament and dispatched to Moscow to discuss the possibility of a bilateral treaty with the Russian Federation.

To test the popularity of Dudayev's presidency, a referendum was scheduled by the parliament for June 5. However, on June 4, armed clashes occurred in Grozny between supporters and opponents of Dudayev. Fifty people were killed and two thirds of the ballots were destroyed, leading to inevitable questions about the legitimacy of the referendum. Nevertheless, of the 36,000 who participated, 98% voted against presidential rule and Dudayev.

After June 5, 1993, Chechnya effectively began to unravel as a state. A cleavage emerged between the mountain regions which tended to support Dudayev and the lowlands where the opposition had its stronghold. Later in June, three of Chechnya's 18 administrative districts, Nadterechny, Urus-Martanovsky and Gudermess (which are not contiguous territorially), announced that they would secede from "the criminal regime in Grozny." The Nadterechny district, which is the home base of former Chechen leader Doku Zavgayev, and the village of Urus-Martan became the focus of the radical opposition to Dudayev. Prime Minister Yaragi Mamodaev; Yusup Soslambekov, the former First Deputy Chairman of the ANCCP and the Chairman of the KNK; Beslan Gantamirov, the Head of the Grozny Municipal Assembly; Umar Avturkhanov, Head of Administration of the Nadterechny district; and Saslambek Khadzhiyev, a former Dudayev adviser, were all acknowledged as the leaders of the opposition. In July and August 1993, there were repeated clashes in these districts with Dudayev's forces.

Given the number of leaders, the opposition to Dudayev was itself completely divided by internal squabbles and contradictions in approach. Attempts were made in early 1994 to unify the opposition on the basis of the Nadterechny district and to push for the resignation of Dudayev and new elections were not successful. The disunity of the opposition enabled Dudayev to keep control of the core of the republic.

### **7. Moscow's Decision to Back the Opposition to Dudayev:**

The growing opposition movement in Chechnya, was the prelude to the war with Moscow in December 1994. The war came after Moscow decided to back the Chechen opposition, providing

arms and financial aid for their increasing military activities in the summer of 1994. Moscow's assistance culminated in what proved to be an ill-fated decision to secure clear military superiority for the opposition in November 1994. More than 70 tanks, helicopters, combat aircraft and Russian officers recruited by the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service (FSK) were sent to join the opposition forces in Nadterechny. After a failed assault on Grozny on 26 November, 70 Russian servicemen were captured by Chechen forces, revealing the hand of Moscow, and prompting a sudden upsurge in support for Dudayev.<sup>133</sup> With Dudayev's support increased again, it seemed to Moscow that its whole policy of supporting the Chechen opposition had failed miserably.

The decision to back the opposition in Nadterechny was the logical outcome of the policy of promoting pro-Russian forces enshrined in the December 1992 Security Council report. It was also in keeping with a general trend in Russian policy towards the former Soviet republics in 1992 and 1993. Here, financial and indirect military assistance was given to nominally pro-Russian forces in Moldova, Azerbaijan and Georgia; and destabilizing economic and political pressure was successfully exerted on the Baltic States, Ukraine and Central Asia to bolster Russia's strategic position.<sup>134</sup>

In the absence of some new internal or external frame of reference, Moscow's approach was conditioned by the old Soviet practice of "divide and rule" in the North Caucasus. Internally, there were no constitutional mechanisms or instruments in place for dealing with a crisis like Chechnya, and with the ultimate structure of the Russian Federation still unresolved Moscow had nothing concrete to offer the republic in terms of guaranteed rights.<sup>135</sup> Externally, the international system has no protocol for dealing with such a complex situation where a nationally-defined administrative unit secedes from a state that is itself the newly-recognized successor state to a large multi-ethnic Empire—apart from to discourage it. The general political environment, therefore, consigned both Russia and Chechnya to operate in legal limbo. The initiative was thus with the side that could bring the most force to bear to break-out of the impasse—Russia.

## 8. The Third Russian Military Intervention in Chechnya:

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<sup>133</sup> See for example, John Thornhill, "Chechnya Threat to Russian Lives: Breakaway republic warns that captured fighters face execution," *Financial Times*, November 29, 1994.

<sup>134</sup> See Hill and Jewett, *Back in the USSR* for a discussion of Russia's political and economic intervention in these republics.

<sup>135</sup> Chechnya had seceded before the dissolution of the USSR and, therefore, when the old Soviet Constitution was still in place. Under the provisions of the Soviet Constitution, as outlined in Section I on the structural legacy of the USSR, as an ASSR (autonomous republic) rather than an SSR (union republic), Chechnya did not have the right to secede. Its declaration of independence was, therefore, illegal in 1991. However, the old Soviet Constitution was later rendered invalid by the 1992 Federal Treaty and the 1993 Russian Constitution, which became the two primary documents for regulating relations between the Russian Federation and its constituent units. Chechnya rejected both of these documents, and refused to conclude an interim bilateral treaty with Moscow. This meant that, in the post-Soviet period, there was no common body of legislation for Moscow and Grozny to refer to in their dispute.

In 1992-1993, the opposition's repeated reversals against Dudayev's National Guard drew Russia further into Chechnya's internal conflict. Once the opposition's final assault on Grozny failed, the next step became the use of direct military force to bring the situation under control. This marked a clear break in previous Russian practice. Russia's prior activities in the former Soviet republics and the continued support of the opposition forces had shown that Moscow favored covert action and political and economic pressure, not the kind of full-scale military operation that had been carried out with disastrous results in Afghanistan. In this case, however, for the first time in the post-Soviet era Russia's indirect military assistance had failed and the capture of Russian mercenaries had resulted in public humiliation for Moscow. To now sit by passively and wait for the Dudayev regime to fall under the weight of its own ineptitude would be tantamount to admitting defeat. Drastic action was therefore discussed in Moscow.

As laid down in the November 1993 Russian Military Doctrine, Russia could deploy its troops within the border's of the Federation to suppress unrest. In December 1994, at a meeting of the Russian Security Council to discuss the crisis in Chechnya, Defense Minister Pavel Grachev asserted that he could carry out a surgical operation against Dudayev's forces and restore order in the republic in a matter of days with a handful of troops. Grachev's assertion tipped the balance in the Council in favor of direct intervention. The Russian Security Council's decision was supported by the Interior Ministry, the Federal Counter-Intelligence Service, and the Ministry of Defense. It was hoped that a small and successful war would cover up the succession of mistakes that had been made in assisting the Chechen opposition. Other options for dealing with the Chechen crisis in December 1994 were thus ruled out, although they were certainly on the table during the meetings of Russia's Security Council on the crisis.

This is not the place to go into the vagaries of Russian domestic politics and the power struggles in Moscow that prompted the decision to go to war but had little to do with the actual political situation in Chechnya.<sup>136</sup> The Russian military debacle and the details of the war have also been covered in the Western press since December 1994. Suffice it to say that once the final decision to intervene had been made a number of corporatist goals were also riding on the successful overthrow of Dzhokhar Dudayev and the installation of a more amenable Chechen government.

For the Russian Ministry of Defense, the appeal of a short, sharp war was heightened by the United States' success in Haiti in September 1994, where a similarly recalcitrant regime was overturned in a slick and limited invasion. In interviews, Russian officials frequently made the comparison between Chechnya and Haiti. A similarly slick and limited invasion of Chechnya was seen as a means of reviving the flagging spirits of a Russian army suffering from underfunding and undermanning. In addition, the restoration of law and order in Chechnya would make a case for successful Russian peacekeeping in the former Soviet Union which was a major bone of contention

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<sup>136</sup> For a discussion of these issues see, for example, Michael McFaul, "Eurasia Letter: Russian Politics after Chechnya," *Foreign Policy*, No.39, Summer 1995; Richard Sakwa, "The Chechen Crisis and Russian Political Development," *Briefing Paper* No.18, March 1995, The Royal Institute of International Affairs; and M.A. Smith, *Chechnya: the Political Dimension*, Conflict Studies Research Center (Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, May 1995).

at the OSCE meeting in Budapest in December 1994 and had been the key feature in political debates between Russia and international institutions such as the UN and OSCE in 1992-1993.<sup>137</sup>

For the Yeltsin government, an invasion of Chechnya could be presented as a strike against the Chechen Mafia and the bandit groups plaguing Southern Russia. In the fall of 1994 the government had launched a general drive against crime and corruption as a prelude to the 1995-1996 parliamentary and presidential election campaign. With nationalist forces gaining strength in Russian politics after the 1993 elections to the Russian Duma, it was becoming increasingly important for the Yeltsin government to show a strong hand in dealing with Russia's manifold crises in order to raise the President's poor electoral rating.<sup>138</sup>

### **The impact of the war in Chechnya on the political situation in the North Caucasus:**

The war between Chechnya and Moscow has had a considerable impact on the political situation within the region and on the attitude toward the North Caucasus republics in the rest of the Russian Federation. In Moscow, those forces in favor of a unitary state have been strengthened by the increased influence of the Ministry of Defense and the federal security services in decision-making. The vacillation of Sergei Shakhrai on the issue of concluding treaties between Moscow and the Federation's republics, noted in Section III, and increasing discussions in political circles of restoring the old Tsarist *gubernia* underscore this. Progress toward resolving the question of the future structure of the Russian Federation has thus been made increasingly difficult by the war in Chechnya.

The war and the bombing of Grozny has also wrought further destruction on an already ailing Chechen economy. The security blockade, the severance of communications and transport, and the diversion of resources to the military forces in the region have severely disrupted the economy of the North Caucasus as a whole in addition to straining the federal Russian budget.<sup>139</sup> In Dagestan, for example, in the first few months of the war an almost complete blockade was imposed on the republic preventing transit by road and rail. The Baku-Rostov highway and the North Caucasus railway, which had prior to December 1994 been the main targets of Chechen bandit attacks, were both closed completely, compounding Dagestan's economic difficulties. The airport in Makhachkala was also closed for several weeks in December and January completing the republic's isolation. The Dagestan government had to appeal directly to the Russian government to get flights restored to Moscow and St. Petersburg.

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<sup>137</sup> See for example the discussion of this issue in "Russian Peacekeeping in the Caucasus," *New York Times* Editorial, December 6, 1994.

<sup>138</sup> This section of the report is based on a series of confidential interviews with top Russian officials by members of the Working Group in early 1995. Other options for bringing Chechnya in line included: imposing a total economic blockade on the republic and strict passport controls to isolate it; expelling all Chechens from the rest of the Russian Federation and sending them back to Chechnya, where protest would have been inevitable and thus political change; and encouraging all Russians to leave Chechnya thus depriving it of all remaining skilled workers.

<sup>139</sup> See Thomas Sigel, "Reduced Gold Reserves Indicate Possible Funding of Chechen War," *OMRI Daily Digest* August 10, 1995.

In the North Caucasian republics, the level of violence in the war in Chechnya has prompted feelings that the non-Russian population is completely dispensable as far as Moscow is concerned. The war has also had a sobering effect on the movements for national self-determination. The marked lack of protest from the international community over Moscow's heavy-handed military action has demonstrated that would-be secessionists will now be given short-shrift and that as far, as the United States and other major powers are concerned, the dissolution of the USSR is over. In launching the war, Moscow also demonstrated that it was more likely to respond to requests for territorial-administrative change with force than with constitutional reform. To the North Caucasian republics, regional policy in Russia seems to have been replaced by military might, and compromise by subjugation. The parallels with the 19th century Russian-Caucasian Wars and the brutal suppression of the region are not lost on North Caucasians.<sup>140</sup> In May 1995, as a direct consequence of Chechnya, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev made a statement during a visit to the United States about Russia's right to use force in suppressing conflicts on its periphery.<sup>141</sup> The fact that this statement came from the Foreign Minister extended the anxiety of the North Caucasus to the former republics of the Soviet Union beyond the Russian Federation's borders.

In terms of specific responses to the war, the reaction of Dagestan, Chechnya's most important neighbor has been extremely negative. Initially, radical groups in the Dagestani mountains called for the creation of an Islamic Guard and *Gazavat* or holy war. The majority of the population were, however, indifferent at first as a result of three years of cross border crime by Chechens, robberies on the railways and major roads, and the theft of goods and cattle.<sup>142</sup> As the war dragged on and the level of violence against the Chechen civilian population intensified, this indifference changed to concern. Dagestanis became worried that the Russian military activities might spread across the border, especially given the Chechen-Akkinty population in the western districts of the republic and the fact that Dagestan was used as a transit route for troops at the beginning of the conflict in December 1994. Pressure was exerted on the Dagestani government to appeal to Moscow to halt the military action and begin negotiations. The Dagestani government, itself, became increasingly concerned about the destabilizing effect of the war on the republic's delicate ethnic balance. Prior to March 1995 when Dr. Magomedkhanov left the republic for the United States, Dagestan had become the largest recipient of Chechen refugees—almost 150,000 by government estimates, the majority of whom were housed with relatives and friends in the western provinces or in Makhachkala.

The war has also had a further detrimental effect on relations between North Ossetia and Ingushetia. Repeated bombardments of Ingush villages across the Chechen border—by mistake according to the Russian military—and North Ossetia's open support for Moscow's action have been considerable cause for alarm in Ingushetia. President Aushev of Ingushetia has been accused of

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<sup>140</sup> This information is based on interviews conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov in the North Caucasus between December 1994 and March 1995.

<sup>141</sup> *ITAR-TASS*, April 28, 1995.

<sup>142</sup> This section is based on interviews by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov in Dagestan between December 1994-March 1995.

giving support to Chechen gunmen and sees himself as the next victim of Russian aggression. If Ingushetia becomes embroiled in the conflict, the return of Ingush refugees to the Prigorodny district will be postponed indefinitely.<sup>143</sup>

Of the North Caucasus republics, only Kabardino-Balkaria and North Ossetia have supported Russia's policy in Chechnya. Both of these republics concluded Tatarstan-style treaties in 1994-1995 to affirm their association with Moscow—North Ossetia's treaty was signed after the war had broken out and after Mozdok had become the forward base for the Russian military assault in Chechnya. According to sociological surveys conducted at the end of December, 55-60% of the North Ossetian population supported the Federal government's action in Chechnya, with 35-40% opposed.<sup>144</sup> This highlights the ever increasing divisions within the region, and seems to sound the death knell for the KNK's attempts to promote the integration of the non-Russian republics.

As far as the Russian population of the North Caucasus is concerned, the seizure of the city of Budennovsk in the heart of Stavropol' Krai by a group of Chechen fighters led by Shamil Basayev in June 1995, has been the seminal event. While Budennovsk galvanized the Russian government to negotiate with Chechnya, it also hardened the attitude of the Russian territories toward the Chechens. Basayev's calls for a *Gazavat*, or holy war, during the attack, and rumored support from Turkey<sup>145</sup> and Iran, have increased expectations of the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism across all of the North Caucasus. Ethnic Russians in the region now anticipate that the North Caucasian republics will band together against Russia and ethnic Russians.<sup>146</sup>

In the aftermath of the attack on Budennovsk, and with the knowledge that Basayev's forces were capable of seizing any major city in the region, the authorities in the North Caucasus demanded action. A prominent official in Stavropol' Krai, interviewed in July 1995 for this report, noted that the Krai was now demanding special status from Moscow, by virtue of its geographic centrality in the region, its importance as a major center for communications, and its complex ethnic mix with populations of all the major North Caucasus groups within its borders. This special status would enable Stavropol' to form its own National Guard and address regional security issues without having to first turn to Moscow. Along with other North Caucasian republics, including Dagestan, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Krasnodar, Stavropol' has also demanded direct involvement in any peace settlement in region.

The official noted that the local police and interior ministry forces in Stavropol' had been woefully ill-equipped to deal with the Budennovsk crisis, and had had to wait for assistance from

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<sup>143</sup> See Rodion Morozov, "General Prosecutor's Office is conspiring Against Aushev," *Obshchaya Gazeta* (in English), No.21 (97), 25-31 May 1995.

<sup>144</sup> See Alexander Dzadziev and Artur Tsutsiev's report from Vladikavkaz in *CMG Bulletin*, February 1995.

<sup>145</sup> The Chechen diaspora in Turkey is actively raising money in Ankara and Istanbul for the war in Chechnya, as witnessed by Brian Boeck during a extended visit to Turkey in June 1995.

<sup>146</sup> This information was obtained in an interview with a prominent Russian official from Stavropol' Krai conducted by Fiona Hill in July 1995. (See also Appendix 2 on the Islamic Factor in the North Caucasus for a discussion of the role of Islam in the region.)

Moscow. Since Budennovsk, the knowledge that the local authorities could not protect the population in the case of another attack had encouraged the formation of illegal militias beyond the control of the local authorities. The official was concerned that the general availability of firearms and the high level of tension in the North Caucasus would create a situation where armed bands would take matters into their own hands. He was particularly worried that there would be serious repercussions for Stavropol's indigenous Chechen population.

These concerns were echoed in the Russian press immediately after the Chechen attack on Budennovsk by Dmitriy Kamyshev of *Kommersant Daily*, who wrote: "Clearly, in areas bordering Chechnya, and not only there, not a few will be willing to use the terrorist act as a cause to crack down on Caucasians. Considering the rampant violence in Budennovsk, it can be assumed that the initiators of 'Caucasian pogroms' will find sympathy both with the general public and law enforcement bodies wishing to take revenge for their killed comrades. And it will be politically difficult for Moscow to make a decision to use force to stop the pogroms in a situation when the role of 'people's avengers' is taken on by, say, the Cossacks (who have already threatened the Chechens with vendetta)."<sup>147</sup>

Indeed, on June 24, *Kommersant Daily* reported that Kuban Cossack atamans in Krasnodar Krai had called for all Caucasians to be resettled by July 1 or be repatriated forcibly by Cossack contingents. Krasnodar's administration had immediately rejected this ultimatum in an attempt to try to keep the situation under control. However, in August 1995, *Moskovskiye Novosti* confirmed that some ethnic Chechens had already been deported from Stavropol' and Krasnodar, and that Cossack meetings had demanded the eviction of all Chechens from Stavropol'. The paper indicated that, so far, the Stavropol' authorities had managed to avert large-scale pogroms, but the Cossacks had been especially brutal in the Budennovsk district. Here 100 Chechen families out of approximately 500 had already fled their homes after threats and arson attacks.

Reports from Moscow in August 1995 also suggested that a territorial division of Chechnya was planned by circles close to the Russian government.<sup>148</sup> These reports were based on statements by Aleksei Kulakovsky, the Head of Administration of Mineral'nye Vody and the President's representative in the Stavropol' Krai Administration, and an important player in the region with aspirations to become the next Head of the Krai. Kulakovsky was close to the Russian negotiations over Chechnya, and in the course of the negotiations he demanded that the territory on the left bank of the Terek River in Chechnya be transferred to Stavropol' Krai. Stanislav Govorukhin, a prominent Russian nationalist and the chairman of the parliamentary commission investigating the war in Chechnya, also admitted in July 1995 that a package of legislative proposals were pending in the Russian parliament on the return of the Shelkovsky and Naursky districts of Chechnya to Stavropol'. These were the districts included in Checheno-Ingushetia in 1957, and the two sets of statements seem to indicate yet another round of territorial divisions in the North Caucasus to compound the existing problems.

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<sup>147</sup> Dmitriy Kamyshev, "Budennovsk as Prologue," *Kommersant Daily* (in English), June 16, 1995.

<sup>148</sup> See Lyudmila Leontyeva, "A New Redivision?" *Moskovskiye Novosti* (in English), No. 51, 30 July-6 August 1995.

The Cossack Atamans of Stavropol' also renewed their appeals to the Russian President for the return of these districts to Stavropol' in the summer of 1995. In July 1995, Aleksandr Traspov, a Russian Duma Deputy from Stavropol' Krai interviewed by *Moskovskiye Novosti* noted in response to the appeals that "when not only pure Russian territories but also ethnic formations are involved in this process, then everybody in the region will be committed to a common idea: against Chechnya." *Moskovskiye Novosti's* reporter confirmed that Chechens in the region feared that there would indeed be a territorial redivision of the republic which would address the contradictions of the structural legacy of the USSR by giving parcels of land to Stavropol', Ingushetia and Dagestan, and leaving Chechnya with only a tiny ethnic core.

## The War in Chechnya and Implications for the Future:

As stated in the introduction to this report, the final political status of Chechnya within the Russian Federation still the main issue in the conflict with Moscow. It will not be resolved until Moscow decides what the future structure of the Russian Federation will be. Likewise, any interim agreement on Chechnya that creates some kind of provisional status for the republic will set a precedent for the structure of the Federation. Thus, the future of Russia's regional policy hinges on Chechnya and *vice-versa*.

The major problem in finding a solution is the fact that there is no unity in decisionmaking in Moscow and that there are too many opposing ideas for the structure of the Russian Federation. It is likely, therefore, that Moscow's contradictory and vacillating approach toward Chechnya and the North Caucasus will continue for the near future. Moscow's current proposal for Chechnya is that a transitional government must be created, elections held, and legitimate government authorities formed, before the status of Chechnya can be negotiated.<sup>149</sup> The Chechens have countered that the status of the republic must be negotiated first.

In terms of even implementing its current proposal, Moscow has the additional problem of finding Chechen leaders acceptable both to it and the broad mass of Chechens. It is not clear that the members of the opposition singled out by Moscow—Umar Avturkhanov, Saslambek Khadzhev and Beslan Gantamirov—are those leaders. After the brutality of the Chechen war, it will not be an asset for these men to have been chosen by Moscow. One alternative leader is Ruslan Khasbulatov, the former Chairman of the Russian parliament and erstwhile highest-ranking Chechen in the Russian Federation. Khasbulatov formerly enjoyed considerable popularity in Chechnya. After his return to the republic in spring 1994, following an official pardon for his role in the October 1993 confrontation between President and Parliament in Moscow, he became for a while the focus of anti-Dudayev opposition in his home region of Tolstoi-Yurt. Khasbulatov has kept face with the Chechens because he stood up to Yeltsin in 1993 and has since not been directly implicated in the Moscow-supported opposition that brought war to the republic. In the summer of 1994, prior to the Russian military intervention, many Chechens believed that based on his considerable experience in Moscow, Khasbulatov would be able to bring them out of the confrontation with the Russian Federation.<sup>150</sup> Khasbulatov is, however, as unacceptable to Moscow as Dudayev precisely because of Yeltsin's October 1993 debacle with the parliament.

In the dual absence of any resolution of Chechnya's status and of convincing alternative leaders to Dudayev, the fighting in Chechnya looks set to continue. Contradictions within the Chechen negotiating team, its lack of experience in high-level negotiations and the continued divisions within the Chechen opposition suggest that a third party mediator and guarantor of a settlement will ultimately be required to push things through. However, although Russia has allowed

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<sup>149</sup> For a discussion of Moscow's proposal see interview with new Russian Nationalities Minister, Vyacheslav Mikhailov, in Yelena Dikun, "A Problem Has Found a Specialist," *Obshchaya Gazeta* (in English), No. 31, 3-9 August 1995.

<sup>150</sup> This section is based on extensive interviews conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov in Chechnya in 1994.

OSCE observers to sit in on the talks, it is opposed to outside intervention from the international community.<sup>151</sup>

In sum, the war in Chechnya has enhanced all the internal divisions of the North Caucasus. It has exacerbated the cleavage between the North Caucasian and ethnic Russian peoples of the region, created a refugee crisis of enormous proportions, and encouraged the use of force rather than negotiation to resolve political disputes.

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<sup>151</sup> This information was obtained from confidential interviews with sources close to the Chechen and Russian governments.

## Conclusion

As the discussion in the report has shown, the structural legacy of the USSR provides the basic framework for conflict over political power and access to resources in the Russian Federation and the other successor states to the Soviet Union. The main features of this legacy are the politicization of ethnicity as a consequence of the creation of national-territorial administrative units with “titular nationalities;” disputes over the configuration of old administrative and new international borders from frequent territorial divisions and modifications; and weak national leadership and the absence of regional political institutions as a result of a lack of training facilities for local cadres in the autonomous units and the over-centralization of the Soviet state.

In the North Caucasus, a number of other factors have exacerbated the structural legacy to make the region the most volatile in the Russian Federation. These factors include the North Caucasus’ extreme ethnic diversity; religious cleavages both between ethnic Russians and North Caucasian peoples and among the North Caucasian peoples; a high population density with accompanying shortages of land and housing, especially in the mountainous areas of the republics; a general economic collapse across the region and the concomitant rise in unemployment and fall in living standards; the long history of struggle against Moscow’s rule; and the repression of the North Caucasian peoples by both the Tsarist and Soviet regimes. The combination of these factors and the overall structural legacy have produced political, economic and territorial disputes in every republic and krai of the North Caucasus region and have encouraged confrontation between the region and Moscow.

Since 1991, Moscow has not addressed the factors for conflict in the North Caucasus and has instead adopted an *ad hoc* approach toward the region, vacillating between policies and failing to follow-through on the implementation of crucial pieces of legislation. In individual republics such as Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Karachaevo-Cherkessia conflicts have been defused and large-scale violence avoided only by virtue of the willingness of the republican leadership and socio-economic organizations to make significant political and economic concessions to placate aggrieved groups. In other republics such as North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Chechnya, where the leadership has been unwilling to find a basis for compromise or to make concessions, violence has erupted.

In none of the republics have either the concessions or the violence resulted in the resolution of the basic disputes. Nor are the disputes likely to be resolved unless there is a fundamental change in the structure of the Russian Federation inherited from the USSR and unless Moscow formulates a coherent policy for all the North Caucasus republics. Although political forces in Chechnya and other republics have called for the intervention of international institutions in regional disputes, there is little that international organizations such as the OSCE or the UN can achieve within the existing political framework.<sup>152</sup> They cannot bring about a change in borders, or an elevation in political status, or introduce new mechanisms for power-sharing between groups in individual republics without the complicity of the Russian government. The most that the international community can

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<sup>152</sup> Appeals for international intervention in the North Caucasus were a constant feature of the interviews conducted by members of the Working Group for this report.

do is to strengthen the efforts of indigenous groups such as the Muslim clergy to mediate in inter-group conflicts and assist the local governments in finding ways to manage the disputes and minimize violence. A number of Western non-governmental organizations such as the London-based International Alert and the Conflict Management Group in Cambridge, Massachusetts have already held small conflict management workshops in the region to train local mediators.

Absent an evolution in Russian political structures that simultaneously addresses the problems of the contested configuration of existing borders, the identification of state structures with a single ethnic group, the perception among groups that the current political arrangements deny them access to economic resources, and inadequate regional leadership, conflict in the North Caucasus is doomed to continue.

## APPENDIX 1

### The Refugee crisis in the North Caucasus

The collapse of the USSR and the outbreak of violent ethno-political conflicts across the whole of the Caucasus have drastically altered the basic demographic profile of the North Caucasus.<sup>153</sup> The number of refugees and “forced migrants” who have both fled from and found refuge within the North Caucasus since 1988 exceeds one million people.<sup>154</sup> This figure includes refugees from the wars in Chechnya, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, North Ossetia and Ingushetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh; and those escaping the ethnically-motivated discrimination and crime, and difficult economic conditions prevalent throughout the Russian Federation and the former Soviet Union. The effects of these conflicts on the population of the North Caucasus are comparable in scale to the effects of the deportations by the Soviet Government in 1943-1944, in which approximately one million North Caucasians were relocated to Central Asia.<sup>155</sup>

Before the outbreak of war in Chechnya, the most serious demographic dislocation in the region was associated with the influx of refugees and forced migrants from the former Soviet republic of Georgia, where violent ethnic conflicts assumed a permanent and protracted character from 1991. According to official statistics released by the Migratory Service of the Republic of North Ossetia, for example, approximately 100,000 Ossetians refugees fled to North Ossetia at the beginning of the South Ossetian conflict in January 1991, and 41,300 still remained in North Ossetia in April 1995.<sup>156</sup> A further 256,000 refugees fled from the conflict in Abkhazia into Georgia and the

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<sup>153</sup> Material for this section is taken from Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov and Khasan Dzutsev, “The Refugee Problem in the North Caucasus.” An edited and shortened version of this paper has also been published in the June 1995 CMG *Bulletin*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>154</sup> According to the Russian Federation’s legal code, a “Refugee” is a person who has sought refugee in Russia but is not a citizen of the Russian Federation, or is not entitled to apply for citizenship. A “Forced Migrant,” on the other hand, according to the preamble of a February 1993 law, is “a citizen of the Russian Federation who has been forced to leave his or her place of permanent residence in another state or in the Russian Federation, because violence or other forms of persecution have been committed against him or her, or members of his or her family—or because there is a real danger of being subjected to persecution on the basis of race, nationality, religion or language, or because he or she belongs to a certain social group or holds certain political convictions—as a result of hostile campaigns against individual persons or groups of persons, mass disturbances of public order, or other circumstances that significantly infringe on human rights.” See the Russian Federation law On Refugees, and the Russian Federation Law On Forced Migrants, *Rossiiskaya Gazeta*, No. 54, March 20, 1993, p.4. This means that in accordance with Russian terminology most of the people displaced by ethnic conflicts within the North Caucasus fall under the category of “forced migrants” rather than refugees.

<sup>155</sup> Source of figures: Minority Rights Group, *The North Caucasus: Minorities at a Crossroads* (London, 1994), p.21.

<sup>156</sup> This figure includes 34,400 Ossetians officially registered as refugees and 6,900 who have not been granted refugee status by the government and are expected to be repatriated to South Ossetia. See CMG *Bulletin*, June 1995, p.50. The total figure is equivalent to approximately 5% of the population of South Ossetia, and 6% of the North Ossetian population.

Russian Federation in 1992-1993.<sup>157</sup> In addition, approximately 2,000 Avar “forced migrants” left Georgia’s eastern border districts of Lagodekhy and Kvarely for Dagestan after 1991.<sup>158</sup>

The influx of refugees from Georgia into the North Caucasus was compounded by the outbreak of armed conflict between North Ossetia and Ingushetia in the autumn of 1992, which resulted in the further displacement of approximately 30,000 Ingush refugees from the Prigorodny district of North Ossetia into Ingushetia, and the internal migration of 3,300 Ossetians within the borders of North Ossetia.<sup>159</sup> The general instability and the influx of North Caucasian refugees into the region also encouraged the out-migration of the ethnic Russian population of the republics in the same period. In Dagestan, for example, by 1995 only 50,000 ethnic Russians out of a pre-1991 population of 200,000 were left in the republic.<sup>160</sup>

In contrast with the repercussions from the conflicts in Georgia and North Ossetia, the influx of refugees into the North Caucasus from the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh has been comparatively small. This is in spite of the protracted nature of the conflict and its obvious catastrophic effects on Armenia and Azerbaijan. While recent statistics gathered by Dagestani research institutes suggest that the entire pre-1989 North Caucasian population of Armenia (approximately 1,500 people) has been induced to return to the North Caucasus, the North Caucasian population of Azerbaijan has remained in place. Even what is generally considered to be the fraught relationship between Azerbaijan and its Lezgin population has not encouraged large-scale out-migration from Azerbaijan since 1989.

While many North Caucasian youths have avoided the Azerbaijani draft by seeking refuge across the border in Dagestan, this is generally seen as a temporary phenomenon encouraged by their national organizations. Since the outbreak of war in Nagorno-Karabakh, North Caucasian organizations, such as the Lezgin national movement *Sadval*, have portrayed the war as an internal ethnic conflict between Azeris and Armenians and not as an inter-state war. As such, they have ruled that Azerbaijani citizens from other ethnic groups are neither morally nor legally required to participate.

The relative stability of Azerbaijan’s North Caucasian population is explained by the fact that the population consists primarily of Dagestanis living on what is considered to be their historic territory. Although Azerbaijan’s official policy towards its Dagestani population was marked by cultural and ethnic discrimination during the leadership of Gaidar Aliev<sup>161</sup> in the 1970s, this course

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<sup>157</sup> See Valerian Vashakidze, the Chairman of the Georgian State Committee on Refugee Affairs, in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, p.22.

<sup>158</sup> A figure which accounts for almost half of the total Avar population in Georgia.

<sup>159</sup> These figures are from the Migratory Service of the Republic of North Ossetia, cited in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, p. 50.

<sup>160</sup> This figure was provided by the Ministry of Nationalities and External Affairs of Dagestan in August 1995 during interviews with Nicholas and Ruth Daniloff.

<sup>161</sup> Gaidar Aliev is now the current Azerbaijani President, having been restored to power in June 1993 following the overthrow of Abulfaz Elchibey.

was reversed in the late 1980s.<sup>162</sup> In addition, confessional and cultural links between the former Soviet republic and the majority of the North Caucasian republics tend to mitigate against inter-ethnic conflict between North Caucasians and Azeris.

### **The Demographic and Political Implications of the Refugee Crisis:**

A survey in March 1995 by Khasan Dzutsev of 2,000 Ossetian refugees from the conflict in Georgia now resident in North Ossetia illustrates the causes of migration and the problems associated with the refugee crisis across all of the North Caucasus.

As the tables below show, the vast majority of Ossetian refugees left South Ossetia in response to persecution on an ethnic basis, including the threat of losing their jobs. Less than one quarter of the refugees are now willing to return to their former homes. As a result, they face the associated problems of obtaining residency in North Ossetia and finding housing and employment. Both housing and employment are dependent on permanent resident status in the Russian Federation.

**Table 1. Causes of migration identified by Ossetian respondents**<sup>163</sup>

<b>Causes</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
Persecution on ethnic an basis	84.9%
Threats of dismissal from job	53.0%
Threats of violent reprisals	51.0%
Violent reprisals against close relatives	51.0%
Experience of violent reprisals	45.0%

**Table 2. The most acute problems facing refugees and forced migrants in North Ossetia**<sup>164</sup>

<b>Problem</b>	<b>Percentage of respondents</b>
Housing	63.9%
Resident status	60.2%
Employment	49.5%

<sup>162</sup> The attempt to redress the balance is reflected in the census of 1989. For example, the official population of Avars in Azerbaijan in 1989 grew by 22.5% in comparison with 1979 (from 36,000 to 44,000), of Tsakhurs by 55.8% (from 8,500 to 13,300), and of Lezgins by 8.4% (from 158,100 to 171,400). These dramatic increases were not the result of natural factors but of new accuracy in registering North Caucasians with their ethnic group rather than as Azeris.

<sup>163</sup> Table also published in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, p.43.

<sup>164</sup> Table also published in *CMG Bulletin*, June 1995, p. 43.

**Table 3. Current status of refugees and forced migrants in North Ossetia**

Status	Percentage of respondents
Planning to return to Georgia	22.0%
Planning to stay in North Ossetia	66.0%
Without resident status	74.0%
With temporary resident status	20.0%
With permanent resident status	6.0%
Without permanent housing (i.e. living with relatives and friends, in hotels and dormitories)	91.0%
With permanent housing	8.0%
Dependent on state financial assistance, charity and relatives	44.0%
Living on savings or the sale of belongings	16.0%
Experiencing serious material difficulties	47.0%
Living on the edge of starvation with insufficient funds for proper nutrition	34.0%

**Table 4. Reasons cited by refugees for the failure to resolve their problems**

Reason	Percentage of respondents
The state's lack of financial resources for resolving the refugee problem	49.8%
The lack of legal provisions for regulating the status of refugees	37.0%
Bureaucracy of local authorities	15.5%
Bureaucracy of central executive organs and general unwillingness to deal with the refugee problem	12.5%

Significantly from the political point of view, 77% of the refugees who took part in Dzutsev's survey were aged between 20 and 59 years, accounting for the most economically viable segment of the population, while approximately half of all those surveyed were without any kind of employment in North Ossetia.<sup>165</sup> Of these unemployed refugees, 50% expressed a willingness to be completely retrained for a new occupation and 14% were prepared to change professions in order to find work. In spite of this willingness, however, the general economic crisis in the North Caucasus

<sup>165</sup> Figures from the Migratory Service of the Republic of North Ossetia, suggest that only 6,000 out of 30,000 Ossetian refugees and forced migrants of working age have found jobs, which implies that 80% of the 20-59 age group are out of work. See CMG *Bulletin*, June 1995, p.51.

and the already high levels of unemployment suggest that the majority of the refugees will not be integrated into the North Ossetian economy.

The refugee crisis in the North Caucasus has exacerbated the general problems posed by high rates of unemployment in the region. These include: the strain on local housing and infrastructure; the accompanying threat of epidemics; the rise in crime and social unrest that results from the enforced idleness of young, healthy males; the threat perceived by residents of the republics from newcomers ‘stealing their jobs;’ and the additional burden placed on the state and the welfare system at a time of economic crisis. The inability of local governments to deal with the scale and the seriousness of this problem owing to a lack of resources and trained cadres is a consequent threat to regional stability. Discontent with the government and the frustration among refugees, registered in Dzutsev’s survey, has led to the establishment of opposition movements among refugees agitating for the resolution of their status in North Ossetia and other republics.

The frustration among the Ossetian refugees is shared by their hosts. At a time of economic and political crisis and fierce competition over scarce resources, common ethnic heritage is no guarantee of harmonious relations. This is confirmed by recent reports from North Ossetia which suggest that residents of the republic associate the deteriorating economic situation and its attendant rise in crime with the influx of refugees.<sup>166</sup> In February 1995, under pressure from the indigenous population, the Central Electoral Commission of North Ossetia denied forced migrants and refugees the right to vote in the March 1995 parliamentary elections, depriving several former refugees who were already registered as candidates of critical support.

Pushing the refugees to the margins of the political process in such a manner seems more likely to encourage the polarization of North Ossetian society and politics than to assuage the fears of the ‘indigenous’ Ossetian population—especially given the fact that the majority of Ossetian refugees show no desire to return to South Ossetia and there is, in any case, no official provision for their repatriation. In this regard, North Ossetia serves as a mirror for all those republics and krais in the North Caucasus that have taken in large numbers of refugees from the region’s many conflicts.

### **The War in Chechnya and the Problem of Refugees:**

The refugee crisis in the North Caucasus has been greatly aggravated by the war in Chechnya. By June 1995, according to the Russian Federal Migration Service, the war in Chechnya had added 380,000 refugees and forced migrants to more than 130,000 already officially registered in the North Caucasus before December 1994 (of whom over 80,000 were already from Chechnya). By the end of April 1995, an estimated one third of the Chechen population (450,000) had become refugees, most of them (360,000) scattered throughout the North Caucasus and elsewhere in the Russian Federation.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> CMG *Bulletin*, June 1995, p.51.

<sup>167</sup> OMRI *Daily Digest*, No. 86, 3 May 1995.

In 1995, 100,000 people were reported to have left Chechnya for Dagestan,<sup>168</sup> 160,000 for Ingushetia,<sup>169</sup> and 50,000 for Krasnodar Krai.<sup>170</sup> Over 10,000 refugees were also officially registered in Kabardino-Balkaria.<sup>171</sup> Although a number of these wartime refugees have already begun to return to Chechnya (including 33,000 from Dagestan,<sup>172</sup> and 80,000 from Ingushetia), many more have yet to be registered with the authorities. In general, therefore, the available figures do not reflect the true dimensions of the refugee problem created by the war in Chechnya.

### **The Regional and International Response to the Refugee Crisis:**

The scale of the refugee problem in the North Caucasus is indicated by the fact that many local governments have taken measures to combat migration. For example, the Parliament of Kabardino-Balkaria specifically set up a Migratory Committee in the fall of 1994 to control the flow of refugees into the republic and passed additional measures on migration in May 1995.<sup>173</sup>

In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also created an office in Vladikavkaz in March 1995 with a Coordinator to cover those North Caucasian republics hardest hit by the general refugee crisis and the influx of refugees from the war in Chechnya—North Ossetia, Ingushetia and Dagestan. The UNHCR plans to coordinate the activities of federal and local agencies and international organizations in the region.<sup>174</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Press conference on April 28, 1995 with Yuri Vasilyevich Roshchin, First Deputy Head of the Russian Federal Migration Service. *Official Kremlin International News Broadcast*, April 28, 1995.

<sup>169</sup> According to Vice-President Boris Agapov of the Ingush Republic, as cited in the *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, July 10, 1995.

<sup>170</sup> See “‘Russia is our Home’ opens branch in Krasnodar” in *Segodnya*, June 7, 1995. The majority of the 150,000 ethnic Russians that left Chechnya in 1992-1993 also sought refuge in Krasnodar and Stavropol’. In addition, several hundred thousand refugees from other areas of the former Soviet Union have resettled in Krasnodar and Stavropol’ Krai because of the favorable climate and high agricultural productivity of the territories.

<sup>171</sup> TASS, July 2, 1995.

<sup>172</sup> TASS, July 28, 1995.

<sup>173</sup> CMG *Bulletin*, June 1995 p.44.

<sup>174</sup> CMG *Bulletin*, June 1995, p.51.

## APPENDIX 2

### The Islamic Factor in the North Caucasus

In spite of increasing ethnic Russian fears about the rise of Islamic Fundamentalism in the North Caucasus and the formation of a single Islamic bloc across all the Muslim republics, there have been no serious studies of the Islamic revival in the region since the collapse of the USSR. A few general observations can, however, be made on the basis of Dr. Magomedkhanov's research on the issue since 1991. His research suggests that these fears are greatly exaggerated.<sup>175</sup>

Russian fears about Islamic Fundamentalism are the result of a confluence of internal and external factors:

- The increasing identification of the Russian state with the Russian Orthodox Church.
- The long-term anxiety generated by the Iranian Islamic revolution and its seeming export to other Middle-Eastern and North African countries.
- The political influence of Muslim countries such as Turkey and Iran in the former Soviet Union.<sup>176</sup>

Beginning with the promulgation of a law in 1990 on the official celebration of the Russian Orthodox Christmas across the entire Russian Federation, the Russian government has moved away from the secularism of the Soviet period toward sponsorship of Russian Orthodoxy as the state religion. Frequent meetings between President Yeltsin and leaders of the Church have consolidated this relationship, and Russian nationalist parties now invoke the old Tsarist mantra of Russian nationalism and Orthodoxy. The elevation of the Russian Orthodox Church has squeezed out other Russian confessions, of which Islam is the most important. A total of about 12 million Muslims live in the Russian Federation as a whole, which is equivalent to 4% of Russia's population. Of these, approximately 4 million live in the North Caucasus, where they account for 25% of the total population of the region, including the Russian krais.<sup>177</sup>

The fact that the majority of the Muslim population of the former Soviet Union—including the population of the Central Asian republics—is concentrated on the southern border with Turkey,

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<sup>175</sup> See, for example, Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov, "The Revival of Islam and Islamic Publishing," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. II No.3, 1994, pp.493-497.

<sup>176</sup> See also Vasil'eva and Muzaev, p.27. In this regard, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia have been prominent in assisting local Muslims in the construction of religious infra-structure, the development of scriptural Islam, and the provision of scholarships for study abroad.

<sup>177</sup> This figure is based on the total number of the traditionally Muslim peoples of the Russian Federation in the 1989 census. Figures for those who actually identify themselves as practicing Muslims are not presently available.

Iran and Afghanistan is a key factor in encouraging Russian fears. Given the attempts of Iran and Turkey to extend their cultural and political influence into the Caucasus and Central Asia, and the ongoing conflict with radical Islamic militias on the Tajikistan-Afghanistan border, the Muslim peoples of Russia are now seen as a potential fifth column for disruptive foreign influence. Islam calls on Russia's Muslims to look to Mecca and the Arab, Persian and Turkish world and away from Moscow and the Russian world. It is thus a major threat to Russian interests at a time when the demise of Communism has left the former Soviet Union with no ideological basis for regional integration, and the only elements keeping it together are rapidly eroding economic ties and Russian political dominance.

As an organized religion in the North Caucasus, Islam came late to the region, carried by Sufi missionaries from the Sunni Muslim Ottoman Empire, rather than from the Shi'ite Iranian Empire. It did not take hold in the mountainous regions of Dagestan until the 16th century, and came even later to Chechnya, Ingushetia and the northwestern reaches of the North Caucasus in the 19th century—coinciding with the expansion of the Russian Empire in the region. In the Caucasian Wars, however, Islam played a unifying role for the disparate peoples of the North Caucasus against the Orthodox Christian Russian Empire.

As a result of the Russian invasion, the spread of Islam to the northwestern regions of the North Caucasus was interrupted and its practice was thus consolidated only in the north east. Here Dagestan became a focus for 'enlightened Islam' centered on a cult of books and scholars. Dagestan and Chechnya also became centers of "Sufism," which was practiced by individual brotherhoods under two main *tariqats* or orders, the *Naqshubandiya* and *Qadiriya*, headed by a religious leader. The orders demanded spiritual perfection from their members, but the brotherhoods, of which there were more than 50, operated largely according to their own rules and were often in conflict with each other over religious practice. Imam Shamil, the celebrated religious leader of Dagestan and Chechnya who led the resistance to Russian in the Caucasian Wars of the 19th century, was part of a Sufi brotherhood.

By virtue of its late arrival in the region, Islam also did not have a great impact on the social structure of the North Caucasus. The region's pre-Islamic features were retained, although religious ritual came to regulate the general conduct of public and private life. The Islamic law code, the *Shari'a*, was also not imposed on the region, but was assimilated into local customary law, or what the Russian invaders called "Mountain Law." In Dagestan this customary law was the *Adat* which was compiled in a law code for each khanate, or independent principality, in the 17th Century. The *Adat* codes often contradicted the *Shari'a*, and the religious leaders of the region were engaged in a constant struggle to assert the primacy of religious law. Discussions of the differences between the *Shari'a* and *Adat* law codes were a frequent occurrence in scholarly and public circles in Dagestan, contradicting any claims of "Islamic Fundamentalism" or the strict observance of Islamic law in the region prior to the Russian invasion.

In addition to these clear differences between religious practice and customary law, and the autonomy of the Sufi orders, the long co-existence of the North Caucasians with neighboring groups of different religions, including Mountain Jews and Georgian and Armenian Christians, prior to the advent of Islam, encouraged tolerance toward other confessional practices. Islam merely enhanced this tolerance by reserving a special place for Christians and Jews as kindred peoples and

incorporating their principle figures as the holy men who preceded Mohammed—the last prophet. Prior to the Russian-Caucasian wars, there was no campaign of forced conversion to Islam and no record of inter-group conflict on a religious basis. Dagestani leaders, for example, were in the habit of currying favor with their multi-ethnic and multi-confessional subjects by attending services at the local mosque, church and synagogue on the respective holy days.

As a major religion in the Russian Federation and North Caucasus, Islam declined precipitously after the Russian Revolution as a direct result of the Bolshevik drive against religion and the establishment of a secular Soviet state. Prior to the Russian Revolution, there were, for example, 2,060 mosques and 1,000 religious schools in Dagestan alone. By 1941, there was not a single mosque or religious school left in Dagestan. The Arabic language and script, on which Islamic teaching and Muslim culture were based, was also outlawed in favor of the local vernacular and the development of local literary languages using the Cyrillic script. By 1991, the majority of Muslim clerics in the Russian Federation were poorly educated and could not read Arabic. As it was intended to, this policy severed the links between North Caucasian Muslims, their traditional manuscripts, including the Koran, and the broader Muslim world. Of 30,000 religious manuscripts existing in Dagestan before the Revolution, only 10,000 survived the Revolution, the rest having been burned by the Bolsheviks. The process of secularization and increasing contacts and inter-marriage with ethnic Russians also encouraged entire North Caucasian ethnic groups to move away from Islam, including the Adygei, Cherkess, Nogais, Laks, Lezgins and Tabassarans.

Since 1991, Muslims in the North Caucasus have focused on restoring their links with the past. The Islamic revival has not been confined to specifically confessional issues, and the exploration of the region's cultural legacy has perhaps been the most important feature. Indeed, Islam for the North Caucasus is a way of life rather than a religion, shaping value systems and customs. The Islamic revival has been greatest in the eastern North Caucasus, in Dagestan and Chechnya where it was traditionally the most ingrained. Here efforts have concentrated on producing books on the basic tenets of Islam, including "How to Pray" manuals for the majority who have lost their religious connections. In 1994, Dr. Magomedkhanov noted that there were approximately 400 religious publications in Dagestan in the various languages of the republic's ethnic groups, which was equivalent to the total number of religious publications produced in Dagestan in these languages from the 1920s to 1991. New mosques have been built and religious schools have also been established in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria and Chechnya to prepare a new generation of Islamic clergy. The largest of these, the Grozny State Islamic Institute, was founded in Chechnya in 1991, with places for 420 would-be clerics, and a number of religious instructors from Middle Eastern countries.<sup>178</sup> In addition, pilgrimages to Mecca have been encouraged, with approximately 6,000 Dagestanis making the trip every year.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> See Paul Goble, "How Islamic is the War in Chechnya?" *Prism* (The Jamestown Foundation), Vol. 1. No.6, Part 2, June 2, 1995.

<sup>179</sup> This information was obtained from an interview conducted by Nicholas and Ruth Daniloff in August 1995 with Dibir Magomedov, the Head of the Shamil Fund of Dagestan and the Chair of the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Dagestan University.

In general, in the North Caucasus, however, the national factor seems to be more important than the Islamic revival and religious unity. Prior to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, religious affairs in the North Caucasus were under the direction of the Religious Board for Muslims of the North Caucasus which was subordinated to the CPSU. Once this body dissolved in 1988, Islamic religious administration in the region was dispersed among 12 Muslim Religious Boards in the various republics and 10 sub-organizations including 4 *Muftiates* and 6 *Mukhtasibats*. With this devolution of religious authority, there was increasing fragmentation on an ethnic basis—leading to the establishment of separate Dargin and Kumyk religious boards in Dagestan, for example. A number of Islamic political parties also emerged in the early 1990s in the individual republics, including the Islamic Democratic Party of Dagestan, and the Islamic Way in Chechnya, but no single Islamic party was created for the North Caucasus.

Since the revival of Islam, the most public role of the Muslim clergy in the North Caucasus has been in mediating the various inter-group conflicts in the region. As mentioned in Section IV, religious leaders have frequently intervened in conflicts in Dagestan to convene a *Maslahat* or meeting to conclude a peace agreement between opposing sides. As, for example, during the disputes between Laks and Kumyks, and Chechens and Laks in 1992. The clergy's influence is not only the result of religious factors, but is also based on North Caucasian traditions of the prominent role of clan elders. As the clergy are usually older men they command the traditional respect accorded to the elders. The Muslim clergy, therefore, plays an integrating rather than unifying role in North Caucasian society, exploiting both ethno-cultural traditions and religious beliefs to appeal to the different national constituencies.

In terms of a broader revival of Islam in the Russian Federation as a whole, an Islamic Cultural Center was established in Moscow in 1990 with some funding from the federal government. The aim of the center was to build a mosque, publish a newspaper for the Russian Muslim community, arrange conferences on religious issues, create a religious school, and provide religious education in the different native languages for the broader population. The Center has, however, been beset by financial difficulties and has had its construction projects in Moscow blocked by local residents. The Center's non-Muslim neighbors are frightened of the seeming appearance of a hotbed of Islamic Fundamentalism on their doorsteps, and have appealed to Russian nationalist groups for assistance.<sup>180</sup> As a result of the negative reaction to the revival of Islam in Russia, there is still no single organizational structure for Russian Muslims. The administration of Islamic affairs is subordinated to the All-Russian Center for the Coordination of Religious Administration, which was established in Moscow in 1993.

A number of pan-Islamic political parties have, however, been established in Russia, including the Islamic Renaissance Party based in Dagestan which has limited appeal outside the North Caucasus, and the Union of Muslims and the All-Russian *Nur* ("Light") movement which are competing for the same constituency. In August 1995, the latter two organizations announced that they intended to participate in the December 1995 parliamentary elections.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>180</sup> See, for example, Yelena Lebedeva, "Islamic Cultural Center Becomes the Eye of a Storm," *Moscow News*, September 30-October 6, 1994, No. 39.

<sup>181</sup> See Laura Belin, "Muslim Organizations Prepare for Elections." *OMRI Daily Digest*, August 1, 1995.

Since the war in Chechnya, and given the accompanying Russian nationalist propaganda about the need to combat Islamic Fundamentalism, inevitable questions have been raised by Russian Muslims about the state's attitude towards the Muslim population. Observers in the North Caucasus now fear that as a consequence of the brutality of the war and the general denunciation of Islam, the religion will indeed become the ideological basis for national-liberation movements by radical factions in Chechnya and Dagestan.<sup>182</sup> In the same way that Islam and Orthodox Christianity provided the opposing ideological bases for the Russian-Caucasian Wars in the 19th century, local Russian authorities now foresee a Muslim-Orthodox cleavage in the North Caucasus that will pit Orthodox Cossacks against the non-Russian population and lead to violent clashes. Shamil Basayev's invocation of Allah and *Gazavat* ("Holy War") during the Chechen attack on Budennovsk, and the fact that according to eye witness reports many of the Chechen fighters in the Russian city sported green Islamic headbands, has fed into the general Russian perception of militant Islam, irrespective of the facts of its hesitant revival and limited influence on the local North Caucasian population.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> This Interviews is from conducted by Magomedkhan Magomedkhanov between December 1994 and March 1995 in the North Caucasus.

<sup>183</sup> This information on Basayev was obtained from an interview conducted by Fiona Hill with a prominent Russian official from Stavropol' Krai in July 1995.

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