



DAGESTAN: STABLE INSTABILITY

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The Republic of Dagestan: general characteristics

The Republic of Dagestan is the most multi-ethnic region in Russia. There are 14 'indigenous' peoples whose languages are supported by the state. The total number of indigenous peoples is actually more than 30. The largest groups are:

Ethnic group	2002, thousands	2010, thousands
Avars	758,4 (29,4 %)	850,0 (29,4 %)
Dargins	425,5 (16,5 %)	490,4 (17,0 %)
Kumyks	365,8 (14,2 %)	431,7 (14,9 %)
Lezgins	336,7 (13,1 %)	385,2 (13,3 %)
Laks	139,7 (5,4 %)	161,3 (5,6 %)
Azerbaijanis	111,7 (4,3 %)	130,9 (4,5 %)
Tabassarans	110,2 (4,3 %)	118,8 (4,1 %)
Russians	120,9 (4,7 %)	104,0 (3,6 %)
Chechens	87,9 (3,4 %)	93,7 (3,2 %)
Nogais	36,2 (1,4 %)	40,4 (1,4 %)
Aguls	23,3 (0,9 %)	28,1 (1,0 %)
Rutuls	24,3 (0,9 %)	27,8 (1,0 %)

According to data from 1 January 2009, Dagestan's population was above 2.7 million people.¹ Currently, Dagestan is awaiting the birth of its 3 millionth inhabitant.² Around 95 percent of believers are Muslims (most are Sunnis, up to 4 percent are Shiites), around 5 percent are Christian (mostly Orthodox), fewer than 1 percent are Jews. Dagestan is situated in the North Eastern part of the Caucasus and is flanked by the Caspian Sea in the East. Dagestan is divided into three zones: mountainous (39.9 percent of the territory), piedmont (15.8 percent) and flat plain (43.3 percent).

Dagestan is a democratic republic within the Russian Federation. Political power is exercised by the president, the National Assembly, the government and courts. A special feature of Dagestan's political system is the system of ethnic quotas in the power structure, a system inherited from Soviet days. According to the system specific nationalities must be represented in different levels of power, consistent with their proportion in the population. The highest echelons of power are held by three or four large national groups in the republic in various proportions: Avars, Dargins, Kumyks and Lezgins.

Unemployment is a major problem for Dagestan. In Russia, 5 percent of the population is unemployed; according to most recent data, Dagestan's unemployed population is 12 percent.

¹ Dagestan. Material from Wikipedia. <http://ru.wikipedia.org/wiki/Дарестан>, accessed 1 October 2011.

² Interview with D. Kurbanov, employee of the analytical department of the Makhachkala City Administration, 19 September 2011.

In reality it is probably closer to 20 percent (economists say that there are 300,000 unemployed).³ In rural areas, unemployment is even higher – in Tsuntinsky and Tsumadinsky districts it reached 75–80 percent⁴, and 86 percent in Tabassaransky district.⁵ Demand for work significantly outstrips supply. In May 2009 there were more than 16 applicants per vacancy, and the situation is not any better today.⁶

The lamentable employment situation leads to serious social tension in the republic, which is being reduced by labour migration of Dagestanis out of the republic. The result of high unemployment in the republic, which is not so dangerous in an agricultural region, and low incomes, is the low standard of living for the majority of the population. This creates a favourable atmosphere for spreading social dissatisfaction.

Local outbursts of violence, even though frequent, have not yet reached a level where the term 'war' can be used. At the same time, an uneasy tone has developed in the republic, which is coloured by almost daily violence, explosions, murders, shootings etc.

Key social divides / sources of social tension

Ethnicity / Identity

The ethnic factor has always existed in Dagestan and will remain a key point in the foreseeable future given the republic's many nationalities. Dagestanis acquired a high level of ethnic awareness from the Soviet era. Peoples of the republic possess high degree of ethnic consolidation. In Dagestan, ethnic identity is one of the main mobilising factors. In the Russian Federation, the republic is probably one of the leaders by the number of interethnic conflicts, both open and smouldering, ready to flare up at any moment. However, according to the majority of experts, none of these conflicts is based solely on ethnic resentment.

“Any conflict between the nationalities is somehow related to questions about land, or governance or the redistribution of resources. The essence of the conflict between the Kumyks and the Avars in the Khasavyurt region is based on the fact that the native population is in a losing situation when it comes to the realisation of their interests. Why are the Kumyks unhappy? Because Avars were given subsidies during the resettlement and preferential treatment. And the Kumyks weren't given anything. For example, during the resettlement of Andis in the Aksai settlement, local people were given 400 square meters for individual construction and the Andis were given 10,000 square meters.”⁷

³ Interview with Abbas Shapiyevich Akhmeduyev, Head Research Officer at the Institute of Socio-economic Research DNT RAN, 16 September 2011.

⁴ Interview with Zaid Magomedovich Abdulagatov, Head of the Sociology Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 14 September 2011.

⁵ Ibrahimov M R A 'Demographic processes in modern Dagestan, in Archeology, ethnography and folklore of the Caucasus: materials of the international academic conference 'New archaeological and ethnographic research in the Caucasus'' O M Daudov (Makhachkala 2007), p 262.

⁶ Russian job market. Observation of current tendencies. Monitoring of the job market. May 2009. p 17.

⁷ Interview with Sh. Shihaliyev, Head of Department of Eastern Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

However, there are no conflicts between Kumyks and Lezgins, who are moving to flat regions just as actively. According to the opinion of an expert, this does not happen because there are no open collisions of interest between Kumyks and Lezgins.⁸

At the same time, ethnic identity is a limiting concept; it cannot be a unifying factor for Dagestan. The Avars are relatively dominant in Dagestan, but they account for less than a third of the population. However, during the presidency of Mukhu Aliev, an Avar, a huge number of people rejected him, around 40 percent.⁹ Dagestanis saw the threat of domination by the largest ethnic group in his presidency. The social mood calmed quickly when a new nationality came to the presidency. "It would be good for social peace if Avars did not come to the presidency in the next 10 years. This would be good."¹⁰ In other words, the variety of ethnicities in Dagestan, combined with the absence of an obviously dominant ethnic group, creates a situation where ethnic elites must reach compromises with each other, and relative minorities unite against a relative majority, in order to prevent domination. The representative of the ethnic group which has reached the top of the power structure must take account of the interest of the representatives of other ethnic groups, in keeping with the ethnic quota system in government.

The system of ethnic quotas as a stabilising factor

The system of ethnic quotas, which functions effectively, was created in the Soviet era. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) tried to maintain relative proportions in the highest echelons of power, taking into account the proportions of nationalities within the population. Mukhu Aliev was the first secretary of the Dagestan *obkom* (oblast committee) of the CPSU in the Soviet time. Since the Soviet era, Dagestanis have grown used to carefully monitoring the maintenance of the correct proportions in various different spheres, although the main one is of course the structure of power – the most important resource in Dagestan.

The ethnic factor is also relevant to business, although not as openly. By convention, oil is in the hands of the Avars, gas is with the Kumyks and within organisations favour is given to the nationality of the leader. This is important because it is difficult to find a job in Dagestan. Practically all the experts and representatives of different social groups who participated in this research pointed out the difficult economic conditions in the republic.

Ethnicity plays a serious role in these conditions. Of course, the leader of the enterprise will pay attention to the nationality of potential recruits when hiring. It is important to know that other factors will also have a major role in the search for a job – first and foremost, connections. When property is being divided, leaders, while pursuing their purely economic aims, can inflame ordinary people using the ethnic factor. In other words, the ethnic factor hardly ever has an independent role.¹¹

As strange as it may sound, the ethnic factor actually assists stability in Dagestan, according to most Dagestanis and experts. The majority even approves of the ethnic quota system. It has a

⁸ At the institution mentioned above.

⁹ Interview with Mahach Musayev, Head of the Oriental Studies department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

¹⁰ At the institution mentioned above. The actual expert is an Avar.

¹¹ Interview with Musa Musayev, correspondent of *Kavkazki Uzel* in Makhachkala, 24 September 2011.

calming effect at the grassroots level: “The ethnic diversity of Dagestan is a stabilising factor.”¹² However, in the opinion of the report’s author, this is a serious brake on the path towards democratic and stable development of the republic in the long term. The ethnic quota system consolidates the division of power, economic and other resources based on ethnicity, and not on professional qualities. In any case, such a system will cause discontent among talented young people, who cannot find a place for itself in this faulty system, and thus it will strengthen the popularity of Islamist slogans, which call for the equality of all Muslims. The ethnic quota system is against federal and republic laws and was established as a result of an informal silent agreement of ethnic clans, elites and main power structures of the republics. These types of ‘agreements’ are never transparent and are hidden from the people and thus further strengthen the non-legal character of Dagestan’s political space and society.

Pan-Dagestan identity

“For me it’s obvious that a process of gradual formation of a pan-Dagestani identity is taking place.”¹³ It is based on the experience of representatives of different ethnic groups living together within the framework of one administrative unit and with the existence of Russian as a language for interethnic communication. This, together with the the combination of Caucasian and all-Russian cultural characteristics, creates a unique Dagestani cultural and historical community. Back in the Soviet era, a special variation of the Russian language developed in Dagestan, which uses a wide variety of all of Dagestan’s languages and Arab/Persian words which are known to all. The words “His *hasiy’at* is like that” will not be understood by those not from the republic, but a Dagestani will understand that the phrase is about a man’s character; a translation would be “His nature and character are like that.”

It is important to note that a pan-Dagestani identity has not yet become entrenched – it is in the process of being formed. It is gaining momentum especially among Dagestanis who are away from the republic, in places where there are significant groups of Dagestanis. Even a widely used name for Dagestanis outside its borders has come into being: ‘Dag’.

An important point is that previously, pan-Dagestani identity was formed on the basis of positive experiences of living together, common history, culture, religion and a common language. In recent years, especially among the youth, pan-Dagestani identity is formed as an opposition to all-Russian identity, as a result of the negative experience of living with the increase in Caucasus-phobia and anti-Dagestani attitudes.

The growth of nationalism in Russia

The growth of nationalism and chauvinism in Russia is causing real dissent among the people of Dagestan. They associate themselves with Russia and many are proud of being the country’s citizens. Events which took place after anti-Caucasus demonstrations on Manezh square are perceived by Dagestanis as Russia’s counter-posing to Dagestan. The seriousness of the problem is evidenced by the fact that around 90 percent of the people interviewed during the field study mentioned this situation in some way. People see a threat to themselves and their

¹² Interview with Sh. Shihaliyev, Head of Department of Eastern Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

¹³ Interview with Mahach Musayev, Head of the Oriental Studies department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

loved ones in this process. It is obvious that people are overfilled with emotion and they have been pulled by their heartstrings. Here are some quotes from focus groups with representatives of Dagestan's NGOs:

“Zhirinovsky openly talks about separating the Caucasus from Russia, and he has been given the Friendship of the Peoples Medal.” “Admissions of our graduates is limited, this is especially true of the judiciary, the police academy and security sector agencies, where admissions of Dagestanis are limited by 90 percent.” “The army is conscripting ten times fewer Dagestanis! Now our people are giving bribes so they can get into the army!”¹⁴

All these opinions were summarised by Saparbeig Abdullaev, Deputy Chairman of the Public Chamber of the Republic of Dagestan: “Zhirinovsky's problem is that he is the Vice Speaker of the Parliament. It's as if Goebbels was hired to do the same job in today's Germany.”¹⁵

Dagestanis blame the federal authorities for the growth in nationalist sentiment which, in their opinion, is condoned by the authorities. In conversations, people blame Putin, who made several curtseys/bows to radical football fans. Andrei Malakhov has become a negative figure of central mass media, whose programme 'Let them talk' has not been forgiven after a story about Rasul Mirzayev.¹⁶ The conclusion is unambiguous: “Unfortunately the federal centre has a very bad grip on the republic, it does not understand the Caucasus, it does not understand Dagestan, it does not understand that it has a nationalities component.”¹⁷

Tradition and identity crisis

Dagestan's society today is a patchwork of colours. Dagestanis are not easily to distinguish culturally, the republic's towns are becoming more and more like Middle Eastern towns, Cairo for example, from the behaviour of its population and traffic organisation. However, this is not due to the conservation of traditions and traditional characteristics. Traditions are largely adhered to in rural areas, but even there, the younger generations are less and less involved in the structure of traditional relationships. Their mechanism has been disrupted. The previous arrangement, when traditions functioned within the framework of the entire *jama'at*, uniting rural society, is now broken. There is a sharp limiting of the sphere of using traditions reducing them to the framework of families and clans.¹⁸ A young man feels free outside their limits! One official complained to me that his nephew in a mountain village goes to the mosque every Friday, because he is being closely watched there, but as soon as he goes to Makhachkala he stops praying. Roughly the same is happening with a part of Dagestan's youth when they leave the confines of their *jama'ats*. Limits are lifted and their behaviour can sometimes cause conflicts with those around them.

¹⁴ Focus group with NKO representatives, the Common Chamber of the Dagestan Republic, 23 September 2011.

¹⁵ At the institution mentioned above.

¹⁶ The TV programme 'Let them talk' with Andrei Malahov was aired on 22 August 2011 on Channel One of Russian television. The one-sided discussion with the participation of offensive politicians like Zhirinovsky, was very much disliked by the Dagestanis, who saw the programme as inflaming anti-Caucasian and anti-Dagestani attitudes.

¹⁷ Interview with Dagestani journalist (anonymous), 24 September 2011.

¹⁸ Interview with Mahach Musayev, Head of the Oriental Studies department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

First and foremost young people are suffering from an identity crisis; this crisis has also been noted by sociologists. Dagestani sociologist Zaid Abdulagatov talks about the paradoxical duality of the young generation's consciousness: during surveys, more than half of young Dagestanis talk about belonging to an Eastern culture, based on Islam. "When asking them which laws are higher: Sharia or secular, the majority says Sharia, but they do not obey it themselves!"¹⁹ The changes taking place in Russia as a whole, including anti-Caucasian sentiment, further push young Dagestanis to search for themselves in all-Russia society, thus further sharpening the already existing identity crisis.

The land question

"Dagestan's main problem is not militants, it's land."²⁰ Land in Dagestan has always been scarce. In conditions where many people had little land, especially in the mountains, Dagestanis were forced to develop other occupations, aside from agriculture, and hunting has been historically widespread. In the Soviet era, the flat plains of the former Tersk *oblast* were joined with Dagestan into one administrative formation, and later, in 1956–60, organised resettlement of mountain peoples to flat plains began.²¹ In the 1980s, when planned resettlement was stopped, this process became uncontrolled. Today, Dagestan is getting over the consequences of resettlement and various violations connected to them. The main question and driver for conflict is land, and since the resettlers come from different ethnicities, these conflicts have an interethnic character.

The variety of views on land can be wide. Indigenous peoples of the plains often call on the fact that lands were taken away from them and demand justice. However, few now talk about ejecting those who have been resettled in the Soviet era. There are no complaints about them, and good neighbourly ties have been established with them. The long-standing inhabitants have a problem with those who came to the plains, above the quota, and are now trying to establish themselves in the flat lands, avoiding legal procedures. Mainly, they accuse these settlers of using the lack of legal regulation of the status of pastures.

As a result of the policy carried out in the second half of the twentieth century, the inhabitants of flat lands feel at a disadvantage: people from the mountain regions ended up getting more land in the flat lands, because it was distributed to them during resettlement. For example, those who live in Gunibsky district have 10 times more land than those who live on the plains. In the Kumtorkalinsky district, 88,000 hectares out of 120,000 hectares are being used by people from the mountains, and 44,000 of those are from Gunibsky district.²²

Inhabitants of flat lands believe that it is necessary to tidy up the system of distant pasture lands use and solve the status of their lands. According to them, many lands designated for pastures have not been used for that purpose for a long time.²³ They believe that this land is

¹⁹ Interview with Zaid Magomedovich Abdulagatov, Head of the Sociology Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 14 September 2011.

²⁰ Interview with Abseliddin Azimovich Murzayev, Managing Director of the non-commercial partnership 'Tolerance', 15 September 2011.

²¹ Adiyev A Z *The land question and ethno-political conflict in Dagestan*, Rostov on Don, 2011, p 49.

²² Interview with Abseliddin Azimovich Murzayev, Managing Director of the non-commercial partnership 'Tolerance', 15 September 2011.

²³ Illegal settlements are being built on these lands, and cattle is out to pasture throughout the year, because herds of mountain cattle are often not taken back to the mountains etc.

viewed not for its “potential as an agricultural resource, but as an object of territorial approbation.”²⁴

By not solving old land disputes and problems the authorities are weakening the faith of the people and are making investments in agriculture more difficult. Farmers from Nogai district are troubled by the fact that programmes which work in the neighbouring Stavropol krai, do not work in Dagestan. “Dagestan does not help us. The saying goes: you have to help beginners, but we are being squeezed by taxes; they are strangling us instead. In neighbouring Stavropol krai they help beginners and small business owners, but not here. There, if you buy technical equipment, 50 percent is paid for by the state, they are giving support. We don’t have that here. The laws don’t work! We have developed the impression that they are intentionally hurting us.”²⁵ Farmers have drawn a political conclusion from this: “Our universal programme is to separate from Dagestan. While we are a compound of Dagestan, we cannot develop!”²⁶

In other words, behind every conflict linked to land and ethnicity, there are old unsolved problems, linked to land use, rather than questions of ethnic differences and inability to live together; and much of the time, different levels of authority are to blame. The plains inhabitants pose the question about justice with good reason. However, old problems lead to a stronger prominence of the ethnic aspect and ties between ‘land and blood.’ Farmers declared in their focus group that “the main problem is land! Without land ...we will dissolve!”²⁷

Religion

Dagestan is the most Islamised region of Russia; the vast majority of the population practice Islam, which is one of the main foundations of Dagestani identity.

Dagestan’s Islamic patchwork

Dagestan’s religious development since the early 1990s has been far from peaceful. The Muslim renaissance began with the struggle surrounding the separation of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of the North Caucasus and continued with further fragmentation along ethnic lines. The era of ethnic *muftiyats* when each ethnic group had been establishing its own Spiritual Board is in the past, although the now-united spiritual leadership of Dagestan’s Muslims is not viewed as legitimate by at least half of the republic’s Muslim communities. Their motivations for this vary, most of the complaints focus on the narrow Sufi characteristics of the republic’s *muftiyat*, which is represented by the *Murids* of one sheikh, Said-afandi Chirkeyev, and on the clan system – key jobs are controlled not simply by the ‘Avars’, but specifically by members of the Gumbet [Avar] clan.

Islam is not limited by only two schools of Sunni Islam – Shafia and Hanafi, Shiite and Sufi. It is much more of a patchwork, where various groups are represented, including radical groups of the Salafi persuasion (so called ‘forest people’, ‘*Wahhabis*’ and the moderate group ‘Akhlu sunna’), different schools and traditions of Sufism, as well as marginal and small groups of

²⁴ In the same place.

²⁵ Focus group with farmers (translation from Nogai). Dagestan, Nogai district, Karagas village, 16 September 2011.

²⁶ At the same place. The discussion is about the Nogais’ autonomy, which was brought up yet again in the summer of 2011, during the Nogais’ protests against plans to build a sugar factory in the Nogai district.

²⁷ At the same place.

supporters of Hizb ut-Tahrir, Fethullah Gulen and a peculiar sect called 'Krachkovtsy'. All this is simmering and has a direct influence on the situation in the republic. In the absence of unity, Islam does not play a significant role in reducing tension and solving social problems. On the contrary, often religion becomes a way of expressing protest and is therefore a destabilising factor.

The potential for protest

There is a simplistic view that protest Islamic groups in Dagestan only consist of Salafis, *Wahhabis* and 'people of the forest.' However, even among 'traditionals' and loyal Sufis there are those who express feelings of protest, including Sufi figures who oppose Said-afandi, the most influential sheikh,²⁸ who limit contact with the authorities and the current regime. They include Avars of Khasavyurt, followers of Sheikh Tadjuddin (from the line of Paraul sheikhs), as well as Akushi and Levashi *alims*. Their position is built on the premise that power is held by the infidels. They cannot change the current situation, as they have a ban on armed struggle and cannot forcefully rise against the authorities, but minimising contact with them is permissible. "They minimised their contacts with the existing authorities. This is also a form of protest."²⁹

In other words, the Salafis are not the only ones to represent a protest line in Islam. It is true that they do not like the government and want to establish their own political system. However, serious change has taken place among the Salafis, and they are also losing out to the Sufis. The problem is that in the last 20 years, Salafis lost intellectuals who had a political platform, who knew what they wanted and how to get it. Today they do not have a significant figure on the level of the early Salafi leader Akhmadkadi Akhtayev.³⁰ On one hand, this could be viewed positively – a success for the security forces in fighting the battle against the ideology of radical Islam. However, the ideology has not been defeated, Salafis and *Wahhabis*, their extremist wing, have been deprived of their intellectuals, not of their ideology. This leads to the rise of unsystematic violence from them, and the simplification of their battle to the level of terror against security and power structures. Another unpleasant fact which the republic's authorities have been forced to encounter is that there is nobody left on the radical side with whom they can have a serious dialogue and co-operate.

Problems of dialogue

This became obvious in connection to the authorities' 180-degree turn from heavy-handed suppression within the republic to attempts to support inter-Islamic dialogue. The new leader of the republic Magomedislam Magomedov initiated discussions between different Islamist groups, as a result of which the moderate Salafi group 'Akhlu sunna' developed as a political force representing the interests of opposition Muslims. The order to stop the use of force

²⁸ Said-afandi Chirkeyevsky (born in 1937) is a Sufi sheikh of the Nakshaband, Kadir and Shazili *tariqas*. It is estimated that he is followed by around 50 percent of the republic's Sufis. His *Murids* are also controlled by the Muslim Spiritual Leadership of Dagestan.

²⁹ Interview with Sh. Shihaliyev, Head of Department of Eastern Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 14 September 2011.

³⁰ Akhmedi Akhtayev (1942–1999) was one of the leaders of the Islamic Renaissance Party and was elected to be the Chairman of the *ulemas* and a *sharif* of the party in 1990, at the first congress of USSR Muslims in Astrakhan. Akhtayev was known as a moderate leader of the Salafi movement in Dagestan, he spoke out against *takfir* (accusation of not being faithful), and participated in community and political life. In 1992 he was elected into the High Council of Dagestan.

against peaceful Salafis was given, and as a result Salafi mosques are now openly functioning in Shamkhala, Gubden, Buinaksk and there are Salafi groups existing openly in Makhachkala. Salafi businessmen, who mainly work in retail, services and property, have come out from the underground and, at least in Makhachkala, their offices are working openly, which the report's author has confirmed himself. Their offices appear in large shopping centres in the city. Although experts view sceptically results of the work done by, and future potential of, the Commission to aid adaptation of reformed terrorists and extremists into civilian life – created by Magomedislam Magomedov under the Office of the Head of the Republic of Dagestan – its establishment indicates the desire to move forward in establishing dialogue with the extreme opposition. At the same time, moderate Salafis, while welcoming the authorities' initiatives and carefully co-operating, are ready for the authorities and official Muslim leadership to put an end to this dialogue. "We are open and we have emerged from the underground. But we are ready to go underground again at any moment, because we are not confident in the fact that the new policy is serious and will be long-lasting."³¹ Secular parts of society also criticise the new policy, because they are worried that the authorities are demonstrating their religiosity more and more, and the Head of the Republic openly goes to the main mosque on Fridays.³²

Verbally, the official Spiritual Board of Muslims of Dagestan (DUM) supports the authorities' initiatives,³³ but according to the views of experts, they see these new initiatives as a type of betrayal, because they fought Wahhabism and Salafism so zealously that it would be almost impossible for them to find a common ground.³⁴

Secular / Religious: problems of inter-relations

The high level of Dagestanis' religiosity is reflected in the socio-political life of the republic. Religious figures feel the support of the conservative religious part of society and are actively engaging in polemics with secular figures and try to become involved in areas which are not necessarily related to religion. For example, religious leaders participate in scientific discussions, try to impose the monitoring of literature and influence what Dagestanis read by banning certain books. Dagestanis have already forgotten about concerts by Russian pop stars, thanks to the active resistance to this by official Muslim figures.³⁵ Following the initiatives of Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) Muslim leaders are actively pushing forth the issue of introducing lessons on Islam in schools, justifiably pointing out that they did not begin the discussion in the first place. In fact, ROC's actively-promoted idea of teaching the foundations of Orthodox culture in schools makes it significantly easier to push forth ideas about teaching Islam in schools.

The discussion is not only limited to education programmes. More and more often the issue of allowing Islamic clothes into schools arises, as well as the issue of separating education by gender etc. The supporters of secularity become victims of rising passions, like Patimat

³¹ Interview with a representative of the Salafi community of Makhachkala (anonymous), 23 September 2011.

³² Interview with Zaid Magomedovich Abdulagatov, Head of the Sociology Department at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 14 September 2011.

³³ Interview with Ramazan Shakhbanovich Ramazanov, Deputy Mufti for Youth of the Republic of Dagestan, 21 September 2011.

³⁴ Interview with Sh. Shihaliyev, Head of Department of Eastern Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

³⁵ In the 1990s, the tours of several Russian pop performers were disrupted, including that of Boris Moiseyev. For example: 'Entertainer Boris Moiseyev was not allowed into Makhachkala', Dagestan's media review. IA Regnum <http://www.regnum.ru/allnews/256041.html/> accessed on 5 November 2011.

Magomedova, a headmistress in the village of Shahmal, who was shot dead in September 2010 for her unshakeable position on wearing the hijab at school and physical education lessons for girls.³⁶ In a strange way, Sufis and Salafis, who are sworn enemies, find themselves on the same side of the barricades on this issue. When they can, Sufi activists impose practices which are not always consistent with the official secular character of Dagestan.

Of course, when the actions of religious activists breach the framework of the Republic of Dagestan's Constitution, which proclaims it as a 'secular state', a push back is necessary from the secular part of society. However, according to experts, in some cases, the criticism of religious activists is not always fair. In particular, the question of Islamic education is often raised, which is supposedly attempting to displace the secular. In reality, there are few communities in Dagestan which favour a system of Islamic education, and even they are disappearing. This was a real threat in the 1990s; however it is now obvious that this tendency has not developed. The prestige of secular education is not doubted by anybody. Moreover, according to the views of experts and even government officials, actively-criticised Muslim universities in Dagestan play an important social role, keeping busy those who have not got the money to go to secular universities. These young people get shelter and food, and are educated in the Islamic Sufi moral code, which prohibits armed struggle and extremism.³⁷

The generation gap

The generation gap problem is aggravated to the limit. Traditional society, which regulated communication between the generations and the passing of knowledge, customs and values from one to the other, is being diluted under the influence of globalising processes, which are taking place in the whole world, and also the peculiarity of 'Islamic globalisation', the idea gaining momentum among Muslims of a universal Islam, which must be free from differences in interpretation and direction. The young generation of Dagestani Muslims is getting more and more involved in extra-territorial communities, where it is not important to go to the same mosque. The internet opens access to an amazing collection of *fatwas* by so called 'electronic Muftis', who are becoming the new idols for the Muslim youth. These fatwas do not correspond to a context and do not take account of local realities, but they attract the youth with their universality. Official religious leaders, who are hanging on to old traditions, are increasingly losing their authority in the young generation's eyes.

The young react especially strongly to the modern problems of Dagestan's society; they experience its flaws on their shoulders, especially corruption. Completing school and doing exams is accompanied by giving bribes, which then accompany the student at university: a considerable amount is needed to get into university, and then every text and exam has its price. The completion of education and subsequently getting a job also requires money. Even to get a state-financed place with a salary of 5,000 roubles a month, a bribe of 20,000 roubles is needed. Once a young person starts working, they understand that, firstly, if somebody gives a bigger bribe than they do, they may be fired, and secondly, the children of all the rich and

³⁶ Oleg Ionov. Makhachkala headmaster became a victim of contract killers, *Kavkazkii Uzel* <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/174704/>, accessed on 24 September 2010.

³⁷ Interview with Murtazali Gazhiyavovich Yakubov, Head Specialist of the Department of co-operation with religious educational institutions and humanitarian co-operation; the management of government-faith relations, at the Ministry for National Policy, Religion and External communications of the Republic of Dagestan, 23 September 2011.

influential people have already occupied all the more or less prestigious niches in the republic. Even if he is talented and works hard, it will be very difficult for him to make something of himself in these conditions.³⁸

The entrenchment of the 'corruption of consciousness' should probably be recognised as the most dangerous tendency. At the focus group, students of Dagestan's university expressed their extreme pessimism as to the prospect of fighting corruption. They denied a possibility of their own contribution to this fight. Here are the voices of Dagestan's future elite: "It is more realistic to come to terms with corruption. You must think of your own future: when we break the law, and this is unavoidable, we need to have ways to avoid being punished." "When we manage to get into the structure of power, we will also take bribes. It is impossible to say no to money."³⁹

Total corruption, and the lack of potential for self-development and growth, lead to the increase in feelings of dissent among the young generation. The idea that Sharia law is the only way to solve problems in Dagestan's society is widespread even among Dagestan's educated youth. Solutions from the centre are called 'reform from the top', from Moscow.⁴⁰ A small but very active section of young people ends up in the forest, among militants.

Migration

Migration flows

A significant number of young people prefer labour migration. In Soviet years Dagestan supported the inter-republic migration through systematic resettlement of people from the mountains to the flat plains. The late Soviet era was also characterised by the system's attempts to encourage the migration of Dagestan's specialists to other regions of Russia. In the 1980s, workers from collective farms from Russia's provinces had been coming to Dagestan, where there were not enough specialists and workers, especially in the livestock breeding sector.

The fall of the USSR led to the end of migration controls. As a result, in the last 20 years, inter-republic migration is growing faster and faster, but still travels in the same directions: from the mountains to the plains, from villages to towns. According to economists' data, Dagestan's towns have grown by 40–45 percent.⁴¹ Urban population growth is happening against the background of the stagnation of industry; the republic has not even reached the level of 1990's industrial output. Employment is not being created, towns are growing as a result of a significant inflow of people from rural areas, thus creating massive tension in towns.

Of course, ruralisation has its place in these conditions. In one of Dagestan's papers, the author came across the phrase 'town cows.' This year, as well as cows, goats were also observed happily grazing in town junk yards. This process is lowering the general cultural level in towns, which do not manage to swallow the large inflow of migrants in time. The high tolerance of

³⁸ Interview with Sh. Shihaliyev, Head of Department of Eastern Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Ethnography DNT RAN, 15 September 2011.

³⁹ Focus group with students of Makhachkala's universities, 20 September 2011.

⁴⁰ At the same institution.

⁴¹ Interview with Abbas Shapiyevich Akhmeduyev, Head Research Officer at the Institute of Socio-economic Research DNT RAN, 16 September 2011.

urban dwellers to recent migrants, who are not viewed as '*limita*',⁴² but are instead 'one of us',⁴³ leads to the lack of problems in relations between people.

In conditions of labour oversupply Dagestan has a negative balance of labour migration: every year 10,000 people⁴⁴ go to large Russian cities outside the Caucasus. Migration of the post-Soviet period is markedly different from migration of the Soviet era. Post-Soviet migrants come across unpleasant and sometimes antagonistic attitudes, and then live together, thus creating Dagestani enclaves (both in cities like Astrakhan and in rural areas, like the Rostov oblast). This behaviour is born of necessity, but also is an obstacle to assimilation, and in the medium term has a subversive effect on all-Russia political nation, and worsens its fragmentation. The appearance of ethnic quarters in towns, inhabited by Dagestanis and other peoples of the North Caucasus, together with their occupation of specific niches in the market and their limited contact with the city's original population, restricts their consolidation into an all-Russia political nation.

Dagestanis complain about changes which are taking place in Russia as a whole and in Dagestan's neighbouring regions, such as the Stavropol Kray. The policy of Stavropol authorities, aimed at limiting official residential registration, hiring and disputes with Dagestanis over pasture lands designated for livestock breeding, Dagestanis call 'the policy of dislodgement.'⁴⁵ This strengthens the feeling of estrangement and being second-class citizens and pushes Dagestanis into further isolation.

The problem of the return of Russians

Dagestan is a region with a very low proportion of Russians in the population, and it keeps on falling. Despite the fact that the outflow of Russians was especially visible in the difficult 1990s, it is worth noting that, in the author's opinion, nobody aimed to push the Russians out of Dagestan. Russians left firstly due to the state of general ruin, having lost their jobs. The proximity of Chechnya, where a war was raging, also played its part. The Terek Cossacks were the last to leave, who simply could not compete with Dagestanis, who, in the author's opinion are more entrepreneurial and active.

The republic's authorities understand the importance of keeping Russians present in the republic. Programmes providing guarantees for representation in the structures of authority in areas of compact Russian settlement have been implemented to support the Russian population, as well as other benefits and preferential treatments. However, it has still been impossible to stop the outflow of Russians from the republic.

The Ministry of Regional Development has developed a framework to select Dagestanis in order to send them to other regions in the Federation and the reverse movement of 'Russian' specialists into Dagestan. However, economists seriously doubt the feasibility of this project. In principle, this exchange is possible, but even in the Soviet Union the inflow of specialists into

⁴² Derogatory term inherited from the Soviet era applied to newcomers who arrived into cities according to work quotas, or '*limity*.'

⁴³ Interview with D Kurbanov, employee of the analytical department of the Makhachkala City Administration, 19 September 2011.

⁴⁴ Interview with Abbas Shapiyevich Akhmeduyev, Head Research Officer at the Institute of Socio-economic Research DNT RAN, 16 September 2011.

⁴⁵ Focus group with NKO representatives, the Common Chamber of the Dagestan Republic, 23 September 2011.

Dagestan only happened in the 1920s and after the Second World War, and this process was accompanied by the parallel preparation of local skilled workers.⁴⁶ This is quite an expensive project, because it is impossible to bring specialists to an empty space; it is necessary to create living conditions for them, make an infrastructure. In the opinion of Abas Akhmeduyev, one of the most authoritative economists of the republic, it would be better to train skilled workers in Dagestan, simultaneously creating employment for them, rather than importing them from elsewhere. It would be impossible to bring specialists to Dagestan, the timing is not right, and to simply bring in Russians makes no economic sense.⁴⁷

Therefore the task of returning Russians to the republic only has a complex solution – through the creation of a favourable climate in Dagestan through economic development, job creation and improving security.

The people and political institutions

Dagestan still has a priceless resource in the North Caucasus – the relatively free print press and the professional and responsible journalist community – which is important for dialogue between the people and political institutions. Dagestan's newspapers, among them *Novoye Delo* (New Cause), *Molodyosh Dagestana* (the Youth of Dagestan), *Svobodnaya Respublika* (Free Republic), *Nastoyasheye Delo* (The Real Cause), *Chernovik* (Scrap book) and others publish sharp reporting and highlight problems in society and politics. They also publish citizens' appeals to the authorities and their opinions about the power structures and the situation in the republic. All of this is undoubtedly good for the condition of public discussion.

Nevertheless, the journalists note serious problems. According to them, the freedom of the press is being curtailed more and more. There was great freedom during Mukhu Aliev's presidency, but the current president is building a regional 'vertical,' which is accompanied by the limitation of freedoms, according to the journalists. There is mounting pressure on the newspapers, and journalists often get threatened.⁴⁸ Journalists, who play a mediator role between the people and the authorities, are the first to suffer from the latter's closed nature. Dagestan's authorities are not in a hurry to give information, and officials often nod to their bosses, who 'don't permit'. They use methods like not inviting journalists to meetings or inviting only those who are known to be loyal.⁴⁹

In general, interviews and focus groups showed a high level of distrust in Dagestan's society, most of which is aimed at the authorities. Corruption, kickbacks, inability to bring adopted programmes into life, non-transparency – all of this creates an atmosphere of distrust and even the total lack of faith in the state. Here is what teachers and social workers said in focus groups:

“You are asking us about problems. But we don't even believe that it's worth talking about them, that anything will change. We are not even interested in programmes, because we already know that they won't happen in Dagestan!” “The authorities are

⁴⁶ Interview with Abbas Shapiyevich Akhmeduyev, Head Research Officer at the Institute of Socio-economic Research DNT RAN, 16 September 2011.

⁴⁷ At the same institution.

⁴⁸ Interview with a Dagestani journalist (anonymous), 24 September 2011.

⁴⁹ Focus group with NKO representatives, the Common Chamber of the Dagestan Republic, 23 September 2011.

unable to defend us. People only rely on themselves.” “Our authorities, on any level, do not live for the people’s problems.”⁵⁰

The dislike of law enforcement authorities typical to Russia also has a place in Dagestan. Dagestanis often accuse the law enforcement authorities of abusing their powers, reprisals outside the court system and abductions. At the same time they are accused of inability to do their job: protecting the people.

The political system does not satisfy the Dagestanis. It is interesting that farmers expressed a high level of political consciousness, and independently raised the question of elections at the focus group. In their opinion, the party list electoral system, which is currently being introduced, is harmful and does not leave any opportunity for the people to express their wishes. It is obvious to them that all of the people must participate in choosing the heads.⁵¹

A review of efforts to decrease social tension

Officials do not remember many programmes; in general, the ones they do remember are republic programmes, which are carried out through Dagestan’s Ministry of National Policy, Religion and External Relations. Among them are the ‘Integrated programme to counteract religious and political extremism in the Republic of Dagestan.’ Officials did not mention federal programmes and sometimes recall the participation of international foundations in giving individual grants to support the languages of peoples with small populations.

Community representatives do not even realise that there are special programmes to resolve issues of social tensions. More often, people note something that has had a direct impact on them, rather than abstract programmes, which exist on paper. Initiatives by the Head of the Republic Magomedislam Magomedov are seen as particularly significant; he organised a Congress of the Peoples of Dagestan⁵² and initiated an inter-Islamic dialogue, as well as dialogue with Salafis. These types of initiatives resonate quite widely and are important for peacebuilding in the republic. Out of international projects and initiatives Dagestanis only remember some UN initiatives, which helped mainly during the years of conflict in Chechnya. Unfortunately, none of the European Union’s initiatives are remembered by the local people.

Conclusions

Contrary to frequently-expressed assessments of the situation in Dagestan in the categories of ‘civil war’, ‘terrorist war’ etc, we must note that although there is a very high level of dissatisfaction with the state of affairs, the local outbursts of violence – however relatively frequent – still do not reach the level which would justify the application of the term ‘war.’ Problems common to all of Russia are exacerbated in Dagestan. Moreover, the multi-ethnic character of the republic brings with it many challenges, which can be a distraction from the main issues for researchers and the authorities.

⁵⁰ Focus group with teachers and social workers, Terekli-Mekteb village, Nogai district, Dagestan, 16 September 2011.

⁵¹ Focus group with farmers (translation from Nogai). Dagestan, Nogai district, Karagas village, 16 September 2011.

⁵² Third congress of the peoples of Dagestan at the initiative of Magomedislam Magomedov was called on 15 December 2010. 3,000 delegates were sent. The congress attracted a wide spectrum of Dagestani society and gave a platform to religious opponents for the first time.

The North Caucasus: Views from Within

Violence can develop in several directions. Firstly, the religious factor, which has become the main ideological banner to unite different dissatisfied groups under one wing. Today this sphere remains the leader in destabilising the republic. Secondly, problems surrounding land, which can grow into serious interethnic clashes. Thirdly, the widening gap between the authorities and the people, which creates social tension, is fraught with the possibility of an explosion of popular dissatisfaction. In general, this tension is also being increased by other serious problems, including those in the economy, municipal leadership, education etc.

This case study is part of a wider research project implemented by Saferworld in the North Caucasus.

The main report, 'The North Caucasus: views from within. People's perspectives on peace and security' is available at:

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