



**Counter-terrorism in the North Caucasus:  
a human rights perspective.  
2014 – first half of 2016**

**Report by the Memorial Human Rights Centre**

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## Introduction

For over quarter of a century, ever since the early 1990s, the North Caucasus has been and remains one of Russia's worst performing regions in terms of human rights protection. Although there are marked differences in terms of human rights among the various federal subjects (whether republics or otherwise), the factors which stand in the way of improvements in this respect are the same throughout large parts of the region. Some of these factors have diminished in importance over recent years whereas others have become more significant, but the overall list remains as yet unchanged, and can be broken down into three groups.

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The first group includes factors specific to the region of the North Caucasus:

- continuing armed hostilities between the State and fundamentalist insurgents who use terrorist methods to further their struggle;
- impunity for crimes committed by State officials during counter-terrorist operations;
- tensions between followers of the strain of Islam which is 'traditional' for the North Caucasus and adherents of the fundamentalist Salafi<sup>1</sup> branch of Islam, which is relatively new to the region.

It is impossible to achieve a full understanding of the current situation in the North Caucasus or to predict its future development without taking into account the importance of Islam as a social and political doctrine. The Koran and the Sunna contain precepts covering all aspects of a community's social, economic and political life. Given the obvious failure of the existing state model in certain North Caucasus republics (in particular Dagestan), Islam is starting to be seen by an ever greater number of its followers not only as a doctrine governing the relationship between an individual and God, but also as a methodology for the reconstruction of

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<sup>1</sup> The populations of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia have traditionally adhered to different tariqas ("paths") of the Sufi branch of Islam, and the majority of followers in these republics continue to do so. Sufis (tariqatists, sometimes known as "Sufists" in Dagestan) see themselves as disciples of their spiritual leaders – sheikhs, whom they venerate as saints. At the same time, the "practitioners of traditional Islam" respect the customs of their forefathers, whose religious traditions are enshrined in ancient adats and legends. Salafism or fundamentalist Islam, which is a new religious movement in the Caucasus, was only followed by certain groups in regions of Dagestan until the 1990s (those living in or originating from the Tsumadinsky district, for example), but then started to spread more vigorously. Salafists, who are sometimes (and not entirely accurately) called Wahhabis, do not recognise or respect "saints" or "teachers", believing that they violate the Islamic principle of the oneness of God. They call for a literal interpretation of the Koran and believe that religious practices should remain untainted by local national traditions, advocating the simplification of rituals which can become extremely burdensome for local populations.

The self-designation "Salafite" is not used by most followers of this branch of Islam, who generally use the neutral terms "Muslim" or "ahlu Sunna" ("people of the Sunna", which is a synonym for Sunni Muslim).

It is crucially important to note that although the "tariqatists" accept secular authority and are prepared to tolerate the *de facto* limitation of religion to the private sphere, the fundamentalists believe that all areas of public life should be directly subject to Islamic principles. The various groups of Salafites have different views on the extent to which and the structures and methods whereby these principles should influence and be integrated into public life.

public life. The authorities' desire to prevent this happening, paired with their unwillingness to embark on any democratisation of political life, results in a climate of reprisals and repression.

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The factors in the second group apply in many regions of the country but are exaggerated by the conditions prevailing in the North Caucasus:

- abuse of power by civil servants;
- high levels of unemployment and the stratification of society into the very rich and the poor;
- corruption, which stands at an extremely high level even in comparison to the rest of Russia, and a clan culture. The criminalised clans in the North Caucasus republics have traditionally taken charge of distributing the federal budget, as well as dictating economic and political life to a large extent.

The federal authorities have inflicted a number of blows upon the clan system in Dagestan under the banner of their fight against corruption, albeit with debatable success; some of the old clans have been broken up, but new ones have formed in their place. No such efforts have been observed in neighbouring Chechnya, however, where corruption has taken on grotesque proportions and the Kadyrov clan has seized every last shred of power.

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Finally, the third group of 'nationwide' factors apply throughout the entire country, but accentuate the effect of the factors listed above, given the particular circumstances of the North Caucasus region:

- the ineffectiveness of the electoral system and, as a result, of elected bodies at all levels, including municipal; the inability of elected bodies to settle conflicts (e.g. land disputes) means that they come to be seen as conflicts between religious or ethnic groups, with all the attendant consequences;
- the ineffectiveness of the judicial system and its dependence on the executive branch (for the same reasons);
- the ramifications of the 2014 economic crisis, which were particularly significant in terms of the subsidies received by the region.

Whereas the absence of a solution to any of the systemic problems listed above could previously be compensated, at least in part, by subsidies from the federal budget, a natural result of the current situation is an all-round escalation, with unemployment and poverty having an ever greater impact on conditions in the region.

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This report will examine the situation in North Caucasus primarily in the context of the 'fight against terrorism', which has been in progress since **1999** and which has had knock-on effects on all aspects of the situation. In the *Chechen Republic*, for example, additional powers were delegated to local administrations and their subordinate security forces from **2003** onwards as a result of the 'Chechenisation' of the armed conflict, or in other words the transfer of the bulk

of counter-terrorist operations to armed groups of Chechens. On the other hand, however, the stepping up of the fight against terrorism was also used as justification for significantly reducing the powers granted to local authorities in the remaining regions, and for the cancellation of direct elections for regional governors and members of the State Duma following the terrorist act in *Beslan* in **2004**. The fight against terrorism was also cited as the reason for changes in the judicial system, for example the removal of ‘terrorist’ crimes from the jurisdiction of jury trials in **2010**, on the eve of the start of hearings in the ‘Trial of the 58’ in *Nalchik*.

The years between **2014** and **2016** saw the sustained continuation of a trend which had emerged *after 2009* and had been clearly observed since **2012**, namely a significant reduction in activity by armed insurgents, who had been left leaderless following successful covert operations by security officials. The overall number of insurgent reserves also dropped, initially as a result of the use of ‘soft power’ methods by the leaders of certain North Caucasus republics. From **2012-2013** onwards, when the security forces reinstigated the use of State terror and the provocation of hostilities between followers of different branches of Islam, a significant proportion of the population suspected by the authorities of sympathising with the insurgents has simply moved outside the borders of the North Caucasus, either to the conflict zone in the Middle East or to Turkey.

## Developments in previous years

Over the course of 15 or so years, since the start of the Second Chechen War, the human rights community has attempted to make the Russian authorities understand that respect for human rights, far from undermining efforts to restore security in the North Caucasus, is a vital prerequisite for achieving this goal. Whereas adherence to due process is an indispensable foundation for stability, grave breaches of the law committed in the course of counter-terrorist operations will incite a surge in terrorist activities over the long term, since they expand the pool of insurgent reserves. This is firstly due to the fact that the propaganda machine of the insurgents gains new fodder each time someone detained by the security forces disappears without trace, each time a prisoner is tortured, each time a court hands down a guilty verdict in a clearly fabricated case and each time a criminal in uniform evades responsibility, on the basis that ‘the victims and their relatives have no way of defending their usurped rights other than taking up arms.’ Secondly, the widespread and systematic use of trumped-up criminal charges means that innocent people are sentenced while the real terrorists remain at liberty to continue their activities. Thirdly and lastly, the deliberately misleading information disseminated in connection with fabricated cases is given an official veneer, which is disorienting and ultimately counter-effective for anti-terrorist activities.

In the end the authorities too were forced to face these facts. From 2009 in Ingushetia, and from 2010 in Dagestan (and in Kabardino-Balkaria<sup>2</sup> to a lesser degree) a ‘new direction’ was adopted, involving dialogue with the different sectors of society, cooperation with human rights

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<sup>2</sup> Security officials continued to take an extremely tough line in Kabardino-Balkaria, where intra-confessional dialogue was entirely absent and the Committee for Reintegration only examined a single case (relating to a woman).

activists, respect for the rule of law during counter-terrorist operations and the reintegration into civilian life of insurgents ready to lay down their arms. A Committee for the Reintegration into Civilian Life of Former Terrorists and Extremists was set up in each of the four republics, although it only ever really operated in Dagestan and Ingushetia, and a dialogue between representatives of the various branches of Islam was launched with the assistance of the authorities.

This volte-face in policies adopted by the authorities in the North Caucasus did not extend to the Chechen Republic, where methods of State terror continued unfailingly to be employed, in what is essentially a totalitarian regime, not only in the fight against armed insurgents, but also in order to suppress any signs of opposition or dissidence.

The 'new direction' delivered positive results in a number of republics where the rising trend in deaths of security officials was reversed (this was particularly true for Ingushetia, which was transformed into perhaps the most peaceful region in North Caucasus, and to a lesser extent also for Dagestan). People started to hope that the 'new direction' chosen by the authorities, which involved the use of 'soft power' and a rejection of State terror, would continue to find favour.

At the same time, however, the authorities applied this new policy inconsistently, and it met with strong opposition both from State security agencies, which had no desire to abandon their methods of State terror, and from armed insurgents, since the 'new direction' led to a reduction in the number of fighters which could be mobilised at grass roots level.

Policies started to shift in **2012**, and in **2013** the 'new direction' was essentially abandoned, possibly in connection with the fact that the Winter Olympics were held in Sochi in **February 2014**, and security officials were able to persuade the Russian leadership that the use of force (frequently unlawful) was their most reliable tool. In **spring 2014**, against a backdrop of growing hysteria around the events in Ukraine, a return to methods of State terror became a marked trend in North Caucasus.

## **The condition and activities of armed insurgent groups**

### ***Some statistics***

Insurgent activity has declined inexorably since **2012**; the insurgents only rarely carry out large-scale operations and prefer to avoid open clashes, limiting themselves instead to shooting from ambushes and carrying out assassination attempts against security officials and official figures.

In order to evaluate the current status of terrorist underground groups on the basis of objective criterion, the Memorial Human Rights Centre records the number of military personnel and employees of the law-enforcement agencies killed or injured in clashes with insurgents or as a result of terrorist acts, collating information from media reports and publishing the results in

quarterly bulletins.<sup>3</sup> The information may not be exhaustive, but trends can be identified by comparing the different periods.

**Table 1. Security force losses due to insurgent attacks during counter-terrorist operations in the North Caucasus conflict zone in 2006-2015 (estimate by the Memorial Human Rights Centre on the basis of publicly available sources. Figures represent the total number of killed and injured security officials<sup>4</sup>).**

Years	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
<b>Republics</b>										
<b>Chechen Republic</b>	724	330	262	296	192	110	124	83	83	17
<b>Republic of Dagestan</b>	97	122	125	233	393	253	293	220	72	29
<b>Republic of Ingushetia</b>	81	90	309	356	172	47	80	39	18	3
<b>Kabardino-Balkaria</b>	3	17	40	43	78	64	50	31	9	3
<b>Republic of North Ossetia-Alania</b>	15	1	11	1	5	1	0	0	0	0
<b>TOTAL</b>	920	560	747	929	840	475	547	373	182	52

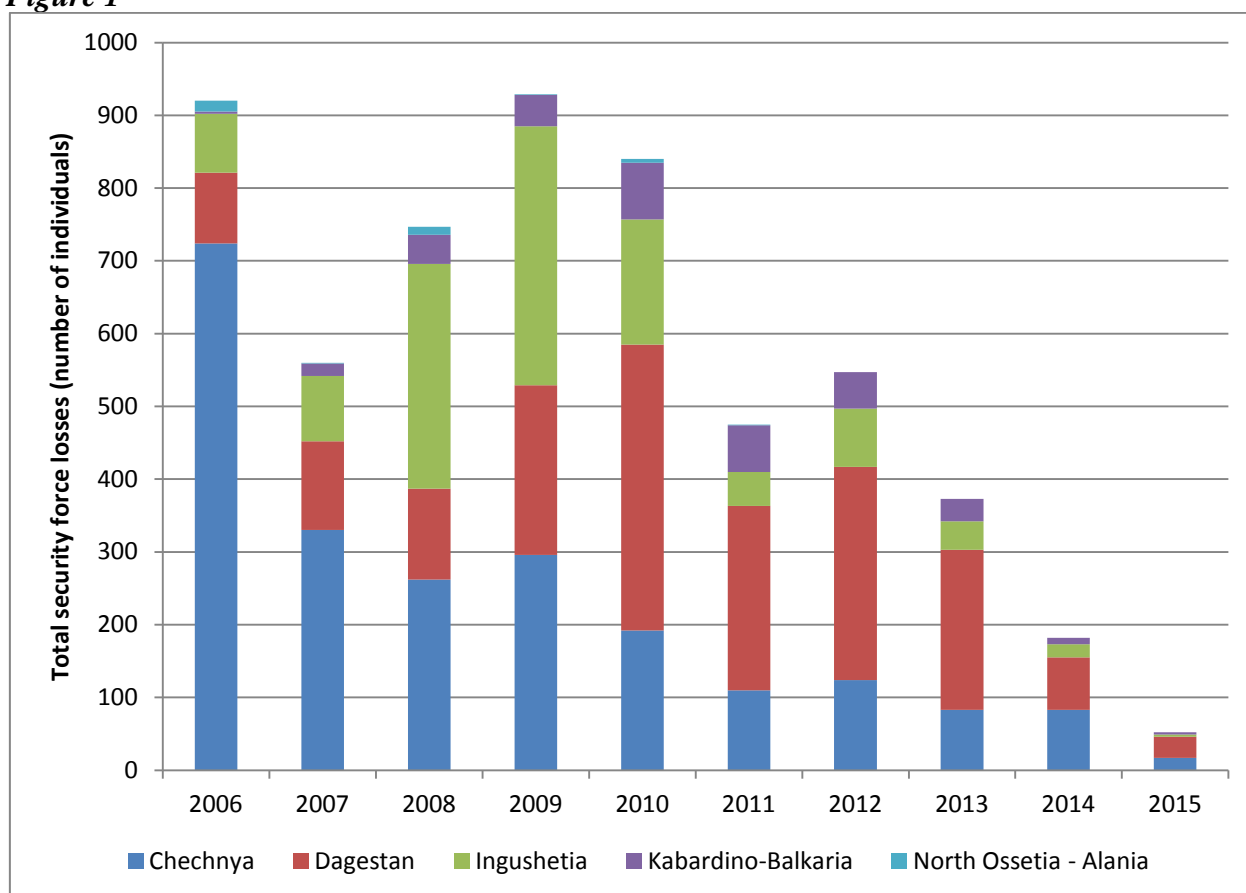
Table 1 shows that the total number of security force losses was one and a half times less in 2013 than in 2012, two times less in 2014 than in 2013, and three and a half times less in 2015 than in 2014.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. [http://memohrc.org/publications?field\\_program\\_tid=9](http://memohrc.org/publications?field_program_tid=9)

<sup>4</sup> The same table, with the figures broken down into fatalities and injuries, is published in the Bulletin of the Memorial Human Rights Centre: <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-zima-2015-2016-gg>

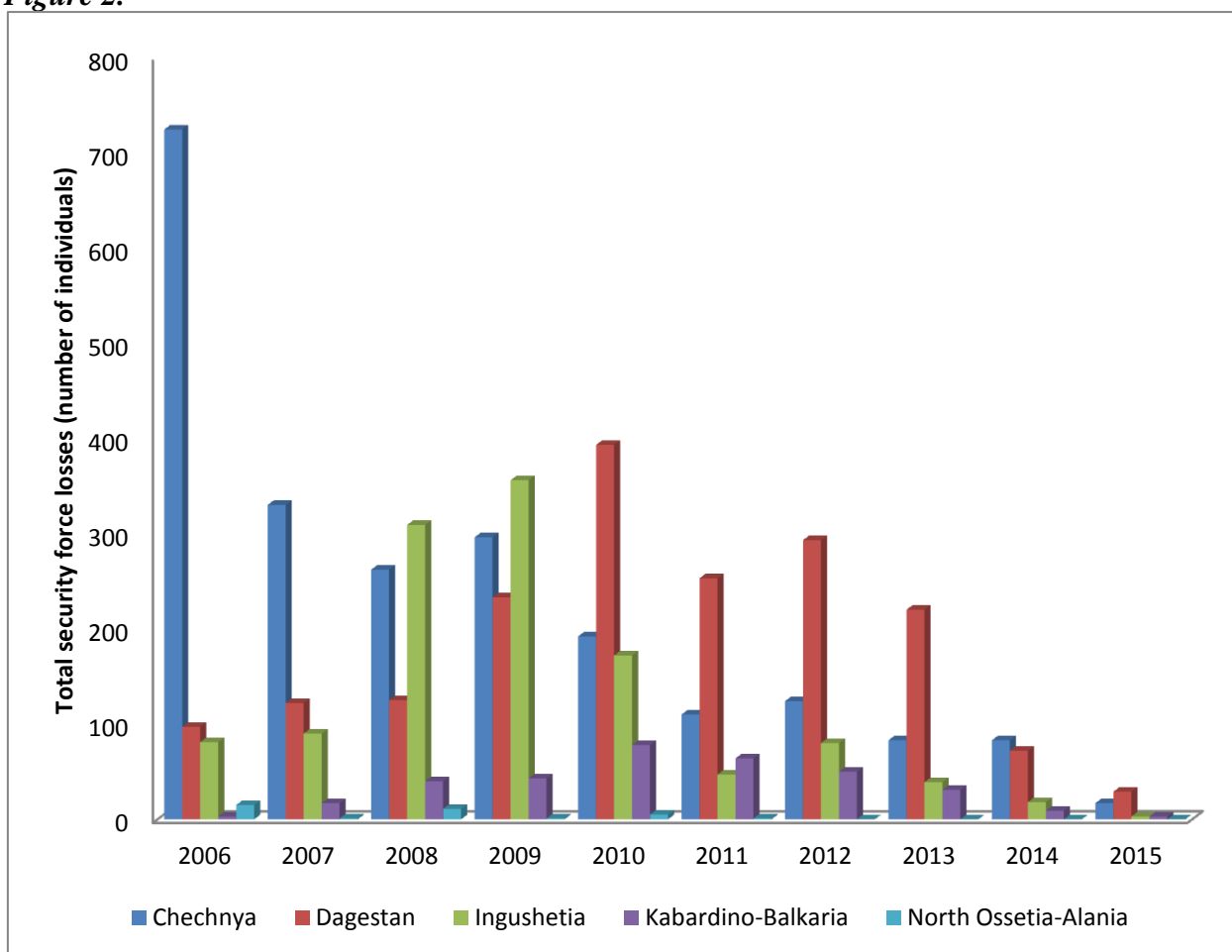
The overall trend in security force losses in North Caucasus is shown in the graphs in *Figures 1 and 2*.

**Figure 1**





**Figure 2.**



Something else is also obvious from the table, namely that this reversal in security force losses occurred not in **2012**, or in other words at the same time as the rejection of the ‘new direction’ and the return to brute force tactics, but on the cusp of **2009-2010**, when the ‘new direction’ started to be implemented in *Ingushetia* and in *Dagestan*.

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Although the Dagestani insurgents have been most active in recent years, they too have now significantly scaled back their efforts. According to reports from knowledgeable sources within the security forces, between 12 and 14 groups of insurgents (based around Makhachkala, Khasavyurt, Kizilyurt, Balakhani, Buinaksk, Gimry, Gubden, Gunib, Kadar, Khunzakh, Tsumadin, Tsuntinsk and Shamilsky and the south of the Republic) were active in Dagestan between **2014** and **2016**, but each only had a small number of fighters. The largest group, numbering only 15 according to the security forces, was based in Gimry and was defeated again in autumn 2015.

In Dagestan law-enforcement agencies suffered their greatest losses in 2015. As announced by the Minister for Internal Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan **Abdurashid Magomedov** on **20 January 2016** at the Ministry’s end-of-year briefing, 11 law-enforcement officials were killed

and another 28 injured during 2015<sup>5</sup>. According to collated media reports, however, 12 security officials were killed and 17 injured in Dagestan during this period. The 11 injured persons added to the official figures – a difference of 150%! – are yet another reminder of the deliberate incompleteness of media reports, and the need for caution when assessing the situation (when claiming that the law-enforcement agencies in a particular republic did not suffer any losses for several months, for example).

The authorities of the other North Caucasus republics have not published figures for security force losses over the past year.

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In **2014**, *Chechnya* (for the first time since **2009**, and against the backdrop of a significant overall drop in the intervening years) took the lead again in terms of security force losses as a result of two campaigns by insurgents in *Grozny*.

On **5 October 2014**, which is celebrated as City Day in Grozny and coincides with Ramzan Kadyrov's birthday, a suicide bomber blew himself up not far from the entrance to a concert hall. Five police officers died and twelve were injured (the number of victims could have been significantly higher if security officials had not attempted to apprehend the man on account of his suspicious behaviour).

On **4 December 2014**, insurgents in Grozny carried out their largest attack for many years. Armed with machine guns and grenade launchers, the insurgents drove into the city centre in vehicles, killing several police officers on the way, and then occupying the Press House building and a neighbouring school. The fighting continued for several hours, but the insurgents deliberately avoided harming any civilians.<sup>6</sup> The likelihood is that they had no intention of leaving the city again, and were merely aiming to cause as much damage as possible to the security forces before their deaths. According to official statements, 14 members of the security forces were killed and 36 injured, while 11 militants were killed.<sup>7</sup>

Insurgent activity dropped sharply in **2015** in Chechnya, as in the other republics, and instances of fatalities or injuries among security officials became one-off occurrences. The figures for **2016** are over 40 times lower than those for **2006** in *Chechnya*, 13 times lower than those for the peak year of **2010** in *Dagestan*, over 20 times lower than those for the peak year of **2011** in *Kabardino-Balkaria*, and over 100 times lower than those for the peak year of **2009** in *Ingushetia*.

According to the official statistics from the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation<sup>8</sup>, the level of terrorist activity in the North Caucasus region was reduced by a factor of 2.5 in **2015**. The National Anti-Terrorist Committee published a statement indicating that the

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<sup>5</sup> Website of the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Republic of Dagestan, 20.1.2016 <https://05.mvd.ru/news/item/7074085/>

<sup>6</sup> The insurgents tied up the taxi drivers from the village of *Shalazhi* whose taxis they stole, but left them in sleeping bags so that they did not freeze to death. Nor did they harm the school's female janitor, even though she apparently informed the law enforcement agencies of their presence (RBC daily, 8.12.2014).

<sup>7</sup> Vesti.ru, 5.12.2014

<sup>8</sup> Although this and other information from the security agencies may be unreliable, our own assessment indicates an even larger drop in insurgent activity, by a factor of 3.5 rather than 2.5.

law-enforcement agencies had prevented 30 terrorist crimes, detained over 770 alleged insurgents and their supporters and withdrawn significant quantities of arms and ammunition from illegal circulation in 2015. Counter-terrorist operations had resulted in the deaths of 156 insurgents (by way of comparison, the figure was 243 in **2014**, 260 in **2013**, 391 in **2012** and 345 in **2011** according to previous data), including 36 group and unit commanders.<sup>9</sup>

The evident collapse in terrorist insurgent activities over recent years is also clear from the fact that the Winter Olympics passed off without event in *Sochi* in **February 2014**, despite the bloody terrorist acts in late **2013** in *Volgograd*.

### ***An end to the 'Caucasus Emirate'?***

A further conclusion which can be drawn from the events of **2014-2015** is the defeat or potentially even the effective discontinuation of operations by the 'Caucasus Emirate',<sup>10</sup> established on **7 October 2007** by **Doku Umarov**, who became the first 'amir of the Emirate'. This was brought about not only by the activities of the Russian security forces in eradicating each successive 'amir' who headed up the organisation, but also by the departure of a significant number of sympathisers of the insurgency from the North Caucasus to the Middle East, and the fact that the insurgent units remaining in the North Caucasus swore allegiance in **2014-2015** to another terrorist organisation, the Islamic State (IS).<sup>11</sup>

The death of the 'amir of the Emirate', **Doku Umarov**, was reported on the Internet by fundamentalist insurgents from the North Caucasus only on **18 March 2014**, even though his actual date of death was **7 September 2013**. It is likely that the six months between his death and the announcement of the same were taken up by discussions between leaders of insurgent groups and the election of his successor, who on the same day, **18 March**, was named as **Aliaskhab Kebekov**. Kebekov was killed one year, one month and one day later, on **19 April 2015**, during a special forces operation. His successor, **Magomed Suleimanov**, was also killed by security officials on **11 August 2015**, having been the 'amir of the Emirate' for 40 days since **2 July**.

Although the leaders of the armed insurgents (based firstly on a secular and then on an Islamic fundamentalist platform) had previously been Chechens, the following two 'amirs' were born in *Dagestan*, which is a natural result of the fact that the Dagestani insurgents had been most active since **2010**. Both were militant theologians, and had served as qadi (in Sharia courts). At the same time, Kebekov showed himself to be more moderate than his predecessor in sermons posted on the Internet, calling on insurgents to avoid attacking the civilian population and its property if possible (apart from those who persistently violated Sharia laws), advising fighters (in particular women) against committing acts of shahidism (suicide and terrorist attacks) and telling them to hand themselves over to the Russian security forces if they are surrounded.<sup>12</sup> Magomed Suleimanov, who replaced Kebekov, trod in his predecessor's footsteps

<sup>9</sup> NAC website, 15.12.2015 <http://nac.gov.ru/nak-prinimaet-resheniya/v-moskve-proshlo-sovmestnoe-zasedanie-nacionalnogo-0.html>

<sup>10</sup> A terrorist organisation which is banned in Russia.

<sup>11</sup> An international terrorist organisation which is banned in Russia.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/245134>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/267398>

in this respect, and citizens of *Dagestan* noted a significant drop in the level of violence and extortion perpetrated against the civilian population of the Republic in **2014-2015** compared to previous years. It should also be noted that the placing of restrictions on the use of violence by no means signified a rejection of its use in general. According to reports by the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, Suleimanov, while acting as qadi, had meted out a death sentence to the prominent Dagestani religious activist sheikh **Said-afandi Chirkeysky**<sup>13</sup>, whose murder by a suicide bomber on **28 August 2012** put an end to dialogue between followers of the different branches of Islam in Dagestan and led to a marked deterioration in relations between them.<sup>14</sup>

Following Suleimanov's death, one of his close companions, **Magomed (Khadzhi** according to other sources) **Abdulayev (Abu-Dudzhan)**, the leader of the 'Mountain Sector of the Wilayat of Dagestan'<sup>15</sup> and an experienced militant who had received religious training in *Syria* and had fought there since **2013** against the government forces, was named as a contender for the title of 'amir of the Emirate'. Six days later, however, on **17 August 2015**, Abdulayev was killed in a ravine close to *Gimry* in *Dagestan* during the special forces operation which had continued after Suleimanov's death, without having been officially named 'amir'. Ever since there has been no indication of who is head of the 'Emirate', or whether the structure continues to exist at all.

In **autumn 2015**, the Caucasus Emirate was dealt a further blow by the crushing defeat of the Gimry-based group of insurgents, to which Suleimanov had belonged. This unit formed the heart of the entire organisation and, unlike its other units, refused to swear allegiance to the Islamic State.<sup>16</sup>

In **early 2016**, a statement was issued by **Zalim Shebzukhov**, the 'amir' of the insurgents active within the territory of the *Kabardino-Balkaria Republic* and the *Karachay-Cherkess Republic*, condemning the decampment of insurgents to IS and calling for insurgent cells to return to the Caucasus Emirate.<sup>17</sup> The insurgent fighters operating under the aegis of the 'Emirate' in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic and the Karachay-Cherkess Republic make up a single formation known as the 'Wilayat of Kabarda, Balkaria and Karachay of the Caucasus Emirate'. According to experts, the fact that this group of insurgents is still extremely well organised means that the full potential of the Caucasus Emirate may not yet have been exhausted.

## ***The shadow cast by the Islamic State over the Caucasus***

In **June 2015**, the Islamic State (IS), having one year earlier declared the establishment of a global caliphate, announced that it would 'create a province (wilayat)' within the territory of

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2134422>

<sup>14</sup> According to information from the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAC), Suleimanov apparently also organised the murder of prominent Dagestani religious activist **Muhammad-Khadzhi Abdulgafurov**, in **2012**.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/266321>

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/271320>

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/275548/>

North Caucasus. The first IS representative in North Caucasus was the Dagestani **Rusman Aselderov** (*Abu Mukhammad Al Kadari*), who was appointed 'amir' of the newly formed 'Caucasus wilayat of the Islamic State'.<sup>18</sup> As various groups of North Caucasus insurgents started to announce their allegiance to the Islamic State from *late 2014* onwards, Aselderov was one of the first to do so in *December*. As a result, he was deposed (formally) from his role by Kebekov, the then 'amir of the Emirate'. In *2015*, one after another of the surviving leaders of the fundamentalist insurgents swore allegiance to IS: **Gasam Abdullayev**, **Aslan Byutukayev**, **Mugutdin Mazanov** etc.<sup>19</sup> Whereas the 'amirs' of the Caucasus Emirate had previously opposed the decampment of Caucasus insurgents to the formal command of IS, no one now resisted this trend.

Could the swearing of oaths of loyalty to IS by local insurgent leaders have significant consequences for the North Caucasus? It is unfortunately and very probably the case that this move may turn out to be more than merely a meaningless rebranding exercise, leading instead to a shift in tactics and the use of even greater cruelty and a strategy of total terror against all those who are not prepared to submit to IS.

It should not be forgotten that the refusal by the Russian authorities to adopt 'soft power' tactics and their use of State terror in the fight against the armed insurgents has contributed to the emergence of significant numbers of disaffected individuals who feel aggrieved at the authorities. The more proactive among them may join the jihadists outside Russia's borders, but the absolute majority will stay at home. Some of them may form reserves which experienced fighters returning from the Middle East may be able to mobilise in order to build a genuine Islamic army. If this scenario did come to pass, the Russian security forces would face a very difficult task in combatting such a structure.

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The main take-away from the events of *2014-2015* is the marked upswing in the influence of individuals from the North Caucasus within the fundamentalist armed structures fighting in the Middle East.

We have become accustomed to investigating the balance of power and terrorist potential of the extremist insurgents in the North Caucasus in a linear fashion and as a function of a single parameter (confrontations with Russian law-enforcement agencies). In recent years, however, a secondary factor has emerged and gained in importance, namely the large number of radicalised young people from the North Caucasus who are involved in the jihadist movement abroad, and the establishment of links between the North Caucasus insurgents and the 'Jihadist International' in Syria and Iraq.

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<sup>18</sup> [http://spbvedomosti.ru/news/politika/podsadili\\_na\\_iglu/](http://spbvedomosti.ru/news/politika/podsadili_na_iglu/)

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/274345/>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/264409/>; <http://pravda.info/news/144694.html>; <http://oko-planet.su/politik/politiklist/285449-boeviki-severnogo-kavkaza-prisyagnuli-igil.html>; [http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/06/25\\_a\\_6854273.shtml](http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2015/06/25_a_6854273.shtml)

As is usually the case, the Russian security agencies cannot agree on the exact number of Russian insurgents fighting in Syria and Iraq, with figures ranging from 1800 to 5000.<sup>20</sup>

The refusal to engage in any dialogue with the representatives of the Salafi branch has resulted in followers of this strain of Islam being pushed outside the borders of the Russian Federation.

The issue of young people leaving the Caucasus for Syria is an extremely sensitive one for the leaders of the Caucasus Emirate, and they have been openly ambivalent – to the point of expressing grievances – about the participation of Caucasus-born Muslims in the Syrian conflict. In **May 2014**, the ‘amir’ A. Kebekov issued a video statement proclaiming that the jihad in Syria is of course a ‘holy’ struggle, but that the people of the Caucasus had their own struggles at home. Being unable to halt the exodus of radicalised young people from the country, the proponents of a jihad on home soil (in the interest of saving face), have achieved a certain ideological compromise by allowing the younger generation to join the jihad in Syria ‘*for the purpose of acquiring military experience*’, on the condition that they later return to their home country to continue fighting (this theory is set out in the fatwa of the influential sheikh **Abu Abdurrahman al-Magribi**<sup>21</sup>).

The departure of radicalised individuals has had obvious advantages for the Russian authorities, in the first place because it reduces the potential support base available to the insurgents.

Secondly, in the event that any of the jihadists become disillusioned and attempt to return to their home country, they will immediately be detained. Both of these scenarios mean that the individual in question poses no danger to the Russian security forces for a period of time. There are also currently no signs of an organised expansion and re-emigration of radicalised Muslims from the Middle East to North Caucasus; although the Russian Caucasus has formally become a ‘wilayat’ of IS, it is perhaps the remotest of its ‘provinces’ and remains outside the sphere of influence of the ‘metropolis’, which is busy fighting a brutal war on several fronts.

Some people believe that, before Russia’s military intervention in Syria, mechanisms existed for the removal from the North Caucasus of people suspected by the authorities of holding radicalised views but who had not directly taken part in the operations of illegal armed groups. These individuals were assisted – either by various types of negotiators (local leaders or heads of municipalities) or by agencies – to achieve their goal of joining the jihad in the Middle East. According to media reports, this assistance took the form of foreign passports and a safe corridor over the border.<sup>22</sup>

It is impossible to either prove or refute these claims definitively, but in the course of our investigations into the situation in the North Caucasus we have heard of several instances of the

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<sup>20</sup> RBC, 17.9.2015 <http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/55fadb5a9a79472a85d8487e>; RBC, 18.9.2015 <http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/55fbd8c99a7947d6af7de034>; NAC website, 27.10.2015 <http://nac.gov.ru/publikacii/vystupleniya-i-intervyu/vystuplenie-pervogo-zamestitelya.html>; <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2748467>

<sup>21</sup> News agency REGNUM, 3.2.2014.

<sup>22</sup> Novaya gazeta, 29.7.2015 <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/69364.html>; <http://inosmi.ru/russia/20150826/229870624.html>.



authorities (both the security forces and employees of local administrations) deliberately making life difficult for followers of the Salafi branch of Islam through the use of threats, constant searches, unjustified arrests and abuse. If anyone complains about these practices, the representatives of the authorities – in informal talks – tend to respond as follows: *'We'll never let you live in peace here, so you may as well go somewhere else...like Syria'*. Even the relatives of insurgents who have left for Syria are not left in peace, although they are not subjected to such severe 'pressure' as the families of insurgents who are active in the North Caucasus. In any case, even if this policy was indeed followed at one point, it had been abandoned by **mid-2015**, by which point the pre-trial detention centre in Grozny held around two dozen people who had planned to travel to Syria.

Overall, the small stream of 'returnees' is still reasonably well monitored by the Russian security services. The number of Russian nationals who have been subject to criminal proceedings as a result of travelling to fight alongside radicalised Muslims is subject to a great deal of uncertainty, ranging from 477 to 800 depending on the officials cited.<sup>23</sup> According to the Interfax agency, over 150 Russian citizens returning from Syria were convicted for their participation in illegal armed groups outside Russia in **December 2015**.<sup>24</sup>

## Increasing challenges faced by human rights activists

Against the backdrop of the systematic suppression of autonomous civic action throughout all of Russia which began in **2012**, there was a marked deterioration in the situation of human rights defender and lawyers working together with these activists in the North Caucasus between **2014** and **2016**. As was the case throughout Russia, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation added a number of human rights organisations working in the region to its 'list of NGOs acting as foreign agents', including the Public Human Rights Centre of Kabardino-Balkaria (on **17 August 2015**), the Human Rights Centre of the Chechen Republic (on **21 August 2015**) and the Autonomous Non-Profit and Human Rights Organisation MASHR (on **8 December 2015**). A fabricated criminal case was also opened against a human rights activist accused of inciting terrorism. Human rights activists and the journalists and lawyers working together with them have been attacked by 'unknown persons' on more than one occasion, with some sustaining serious injuries as a result, and the offices of human rights organisations have been broken into and vandalised. There are substantial grounds for believing that a person carrying out human rights work may have been murdered in **2014**.

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<sup>23</sup> RBC, 17.9.2015 <http://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/55fadb5a9a79472a85d8487e>; Kavkazsky uzel, 10.11.2015 <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/272230>.

<sup>24</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/482746>.

## ***Dagestan: the case of Zarema Bagavutdinova***

In **2014 Zarema Bagavutdinova**, a staff member of the public organisation Human Rights Defence was sentenced to five years' imprisonment in *Dagestan*<sup>25</sup> on fabricated grounds as a result of her human rights work.

According to the prosecution, Bagavutdinova had persuaded her acquaintance **M. Dolgatov** to join an illegal armed group and promised to marry him afterwards. Dolgatov was killed during a counter-terrorist operation in *late September 2013*.

The prosecution's case fell to pieces in court, with information about proceedings leaking out despite the fact that all the hearings were held in camera (for which there were no legal grounds whatsoever).

The prosecution built its case around testimonies from four secret witnesses, one of whom retracted the testimonies he had given during the preliminary investigation and announced that he had been coerced into giving them. The second witness called to the stand could not remember exactly what he was supposed to give evidence about, and asked whether he could read out the testimony he had given during the preliminary investigation. The third witness, who appeared under a false name and gave his testimony from behind a screen, could only state that 'from what he had been told, the accused had recruited someone from Dagestan to join an illegal armed group', but could not remember the new recruit's name or describe either his appearance or that of Bagavutdinova herself.

Dolgatov's relatives and acquaintances who were interrogated in court stated that he had held radical views and sympathised with illegal armed groups for a considerable time before he had allegedly talked with the accused, which meant that there would have been no need to recruit him as a militant. Other witnesses for the defence said that the local law-enforcement agencies bore a grudge against Bagavutdinova as a result of her work.

Having realised that the prosecution's 'evidence' was entirely unconvincing, the public prosecutor's office asked for a police officer to be interrogated, who initially stated that, according to his criminal record, Dolgatov had been a follower of the Salafi branch of Islam since *summer 2011*, but had only 'started to show signs of extremism' after he came into contact with Bagavutdinova.

The lawyer lodged a motion for discovery in respect of Dolgatov's criminal record, which would have provided valuable additional information indicating exactly when he had in fact joined forces with the illegal armed group and hence supplied either the prosecution or the defence with weighty new arguments. However, for some reason the public prosecutor's office objected, and Judge Vagidov, after refusing the lawyer's motion, indicated that he was not interested in elucidating all the circumstances of the case.

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<sup>25</sup> <http://memohrc.org/special-projects/delo-bagavutdinovoy>; <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-prigovor-politicheskoy-zaklyuchennoy-zareme-bagavutdinovoy-ostavlen-bez-izmeneniy>; <http://memohrc.org/news/zhestokiy-prigovor-pravozashchitnice>; <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-politicheskuyu-zaklyuchennuyu-bagavutdinovu-prigovorili-k-pyati-godam-kolonii>; <http://rusplt.ru/society/bagavutdinova-sud-10018.html>.



The accused has denied all of the accusations against her, both during the preliminary investigation and during the trial itself.

The Memorial Human Rights Centre has recognised Zarema Bagavutdinova as a political prisoner.

According to **Oleg Orlov**, a member of the board of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, Bagavutdinova's conviction represents a risk for the social and political situation in Dagestan: *'Bagavutdinova, who is a Salafi herself ... attempted to defend the rights of her fellow believers on the basis of the Russian Constitution and Russian legislation. This way of defending rights and values is fundamentally different to that adopted by the terrorist insurgents. And now our State has clearly demonstrated to the entire Salafi community in Dagestan – a community which is by no means small – that any attempt to defend their rights and values within the framework of the law, by peaceful means, is doomed to failure. It's hard to think of a better way to play right into the terrorists' hands.'*

The Dagestani organisation Human Rights Defence was forced to shut down due to constant pressure from the authorities.

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On **4 February 2015**, the lawyer **Murad Magomedov**, who had worked together with the Memorial Human Rights Centre, was brutally beaten by an unknown assailant in *Makhachkala*, next to the building of the Supreme Court of the Republic of Dagestan.<sup>26</sup>

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In *Chechnya* in **2014**, the prominent public figure **Ruslan Kutayev** was sentenced to four years in prison on a trumped-up charge (see below for further details).<sup>27</sup>

### ***Chechnya: pressure on the Joint Mobile Group of human rights activists***

On **13 December 2014**, following an unprecedented campaign of harassment masterminded by the Republic's authorities, unknown arsonists set fire to the *Grozny* office of the Joint Mobile Group of human rights activists in the Chechen Republic.<sup>28</sup>

Following the **2009** murder of **Natalya Estemirova**, a staff member of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, the interregional organisation Committee against Torture had taken on the difficult and dangerous task of organising a Joint Mobile Group which would work in Chechnya and be staffed on a rotating monthly basis by human rights activists from various regions of

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<sup>26</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/v-dagestane-izbit-sotrudnik-memoriala-advokat-murad-magomedov>; <http://www.kp.ru/daily/26338.4/3221060>; <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/421994>; [http://dagestan.rusplt.ru/index/izbit\\_advokat\\_pravozashitnogo\\_tsentra\\_Memorial-15478.html](http://dagestan.rusplt.ru/index/izbit_advokat_pravozashitnogo_tsentra_Memorial-15478.html).

<sup>27</sup> <http://memohrc.org/special-projects/delo-kutaeva>; <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/news/1688929.html>; <http://www.pytkam.net/press-centr.novosti/4095/analitika.iz-ofitcial-nih-istochnikov-rf>.

<sup>28</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/222058.html>; <http://www.mk.ru/incident/2014/12/14/v-groznom-sozhgli-ofis-pravozashitnikov-iz-komiteta-protiv-pytok.html>; <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pc-memorial-o-situacii-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-zima-2014-2015-g>.

Russia. The group's work was targeted primarily at providing citizens with the legal assistance they needed to appeal against unlawful actions by employees of the security forces. Their stubborn and systematic efforts have long since aroused the displeasure of the authorities of the Chechen Republic, and the head of the Committee Against Torture, **Igor Kalyapin**, has been one of the main targets of their attacks. Kalyapin's statement to the General Public Prosecutor's Office of the Russian Federation and the Chair of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, in which he asked for a legal review of **Ramzan Kadyrov's** statements on repressions against the relatives of militants (see below), served as further encouragement for the campaign of harassment, and Kadyrov made a public announcement in response that an 'individual named Kalyapin' had been linked to the militants and Western intelligence services. He issued threats to the staff of the Committee Against Torture and called for the members of the Joint Mobile Group to be expelled from Chechnya.<sup>29</sup> Local civil servants and public figures, the region's newspapers, Internet media and television channels then joined in the witch hunt against human rights activists,<sup>30</sup> and on 13 December a rally in the centre of Grozny was attended by many thousands of people. Its official purpose was the public condemnation of terrorism, but the speakers made clear reference to the real villains of the show – Kalyapin and the Joint Mobile Group – and it was manifestly obvious that the atmosphere was too highly charged for the audience's response to be expressed in words alone. Soon after the end of the rally, unknown arsonists set on fire the Grozny-based office of the Joint Mobile Group, which was located in an apartment block. The fire destroyed much of the documentation which the Group had gathered on the subject of abductions and other human rights violations in Chechnya. Immediately before the fire broke out, CCTV cameras showed the apartment being entered by three unknown persons, at least one of whom was armed. The arsonists have not yet been identified, and investigations into the cause of the fire have been half-hearted.

Six months later, on **3 June 2015**, the Joint Mobile Group's renovated office was ransacked.<sup>31</sup> Despite being located in the city centre, only 600 metres away from the building housing the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Chechen Republic, the culprits waged their attack boldly and with full impunity. After breaking down the wall with sledgehammers (having failed to break open the door), the masked intruders burst into the Joint Mobile Group's office and turned it upside down, destroying furniture, computers, office equipment and documents, stealing certain documents and smashing up the car used by the Committee Against Torture. The attackers then broke down the door of the neighbouring apartment, occupied by human rights activists, and the staff members of the Committee Against Torture present there at the time were forced to escape through a window. Despite repeated phone calls to the police, law-enforcement officers took over an hour to arrive at the scene of the crime and left soon afterwards, having done nothing to stop the ransacking. Before leaving, the culprits used truncheons and crowbars to smash up the car used by the Committee Against Torture, which was parked in the courtyard.

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<sup>29</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-kadyrov-obvinil-organizaciyu-kalyapina-v-finansirovanii-terrorizma>; <http://president-sovet.ru/members/blogs/post/994>.

<sup>30</sup> News agency Grozny-Inform, 10.12.2014; 11.12.2014.

<sup>31</sup> <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pc-memorial-o-cituacii-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-leto-2015-goda>; [http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/06/150603\\_grozny\\_torture\\_committee\\_attack](http://www.bbc.com/russian/russia/2015/06/150603_grozny_torture_committee_attack); <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2015/06/03/6744098.shtml>

R. Kadyrov accused the human rights activists themselves of having deliberately provoked the crime, posting the following to his Instagram feed: *'After analysing the events, it is reasonable to conclude that they were deliberately provoked by the Committee's staff with the aim of attracting yet more notoriety in the international press and pocketing more grants from the USA.'*<sup>32</sup> The investigation into the crime has been to all intents and purposes sabotaged.

The Joint Mobile Group continued its work in Chechnya in an office provided by **Lana Estemirova**, the émigré daughter of the murdered Natalya Estemirova.

On the evening of **9 March 2016** in *Ingushetia*, on the border with Chechnya, between 15 and 20 young people attacked a minibus carrying staff members of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture<sup>33</sup> and Russian and foreign journalists. The assailants smashed the vehicle's windows with sticks and attacked its passengers with cries of *'Terrorists! Defenders of terrorism! You have no business in Grozny!'*, after which they set the minibus on fire. All of the victims of the attack required medical assistance, and four were hospitalised. On the same day in Karabulak, around 10 unknown armed assailants in camouflage and masks broke into and ransacked the headquarters of the Committee Against Torture.<sup>34</sup>

On **16 March**, at the entrance to the Grozny City Hotel in *Grozny*, Igor Kalyapin, the head of the Committee Against Torture, was attacked by unknown persons. The hotel director had asked Kalyapin that evening to vacate his room on the grounds that he had criticised Chechnya's leader, and he was attacked at the hotel entrance by unknown youngsters in civilian clothing, who beat him up and threw eggs at him.<sup>35</sup>

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On **14 January 2015**, the branch of the Memorial Human Rights Centre in *Gudermes* was attacked,<sup>36</sup> with unknown masked assailants breaking into the office where two female staff members were working, shouting threats and insults and throwing eggs at them. The scared landlord subsequently refused to let the premises again to the Memorial Human Rights Centre.

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On **31 July 2014**, the civic activist **Tamur Kuashev** disappeared in Kabardino-Balkaria. Kuashev had worked together with human rights organisations and with media publications which cover human rights issues such as *Kavkazsky uzel*, *Dosh* and *Kavkazskaya politika*. His body was discovered by the side of the road in the suburb of *Nalchik* on the day after his disappearance, with no wounds except a bruise around the left eye. The forensic pathologist discovered traces of an injection under his arm, together with a blackening of the fingers which might point to poisoning. Timur Kuashev's death is currently being investigated as a criminal

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<sup>32</sup> NEWSru.com, 3.6.2015 <http://www.newsru.com/russia/03jun2015/kadyrov.html>

<sup>33</sup> The organisation which took up the mantle from the Committee Against Torture after the latter chose to discontinue its operations following its inclusion by the Ministry of Justice on the list of "foreign agents".

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/278876/>, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/278881>, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/278881>

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.pytkam.net/press-centr.novosti/4337/pg6;>  
<http://www.newsru.com/russia/16mar2016/kalyapin.html>.

<sup>36</sup> [http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/255563;](http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/255563) <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/255642>.

case on the basis of an offence under Article 1(105) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation (murder).<sup>37</sup>

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In **2014-2015**, lawyers working together with the Memorial Human Rights Centre in Kabardino-Balkaria were threatened and subjected to pressure, and attempts were made to deprive **Eva Chaniyeva** in particular of the status of lawyer on the grounds of her appearance at a round-table discussion hosted by human rights activists (see below).

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On **17 August 2015**, based on the outcome of an unscheduled inspection, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation added the Public Human Rights Centre of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (regional division of the movement For Human Rights) to its list of 'NGOs acting as foreign agents'. Prior to this, on **7 July**, the members of the organisation had adopted a resolution to discontinue its operations at a general meeting, having realised that it would be impossible to avoid inclusion on the list. A new human rights organisation, the Kabardino-Balkaria Regional Human Rights Centre, was established with the express purpose of dispensing with foreign funding. **Valery Khatazhukov**, the head of both the old NGO which was shut down and the new one which was set up, admitted that the new organisation's activities would in all likelihood have less impact due to the funding gap, but indicated that he was counting on the citizens of the Republic to volunteer their support to fill this gap.

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In **September 2015**, based on the outcome of a scheduled inspection of the activities of the Autonomous Non-Profit Organisation MASHR, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation issued a warning that its constitution contravened legislation, and issued a report on an administrative offence allegedly committed by MASHR in failing to submit an application for inclusion on the list of NGOs acting as foreign agents, even though the organisation receives foreign funding and, in the opinion of the Ministry of Justice, engages in 'political activities'. MASHR lodged an appeal against the results of the inspection in **October**. The court allowed the appeal on formal grounds, but handed down a special ruling stating that the Autonomous Non-Profit Organisation MASHR '*may meet the definition of a non-profit organisation acting as a foreign agent*', and obliging the Ministry of Justice to remedy the breach of law committed by MASHR in its activities.<sup>38</sup>

Between 7 a.m. and 1.30 p.m. on **6 November 2015**, employees of the Central Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation for the North Caucasus Federal District carried out searches of the office of MASHR and the home of its director, **Magomed Mutsolgov**, during which they confiscated all computers and papers including the organisation's constitution and its bookkeeping documents, items belonging to its staff, reports

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/246809>; <http://echo.msk.ru/blog/shevchenkomax/1371558-echo>; <http://newsru.com/crime/04aug2014/timurkuashevsmurd.html>; <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavka-2>.

<sup>38</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushskih-pravozashchitnikov-nazyvayut-agentami-za-kritiku-vlastey>.

by human rights organisations, copies of *Dosh* magazine, greetings cards and business cards. According to the grounds stated in the search warrant, there were indications for believing that MASHR was engaged in extremist anti-Russian operations in the interests and on the instructions of NGOs from *Georgia*, the *USA* and countries in *Europe*, and that Mutsolgov 'was engaged in measures aimed at inciting interfaith tensions within the territory of the North Caucasus Federal District.'<sup>39</sup> On **8 December 2015**, the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation added MASHR to its 'list of NGOs acting as foreign agents.'<sup>40</sup>

## Chechnya: a totalitarian 'State within a State'

The system of governance in the Chechen Republic had acquired all the basic features of a totalitarian state long before **2014**, a development inescapably linked with the name of **Ramzan Kadyrov**. As head of Chechnya, Kadyrov also claims the role of amir (ruler of a Muslim country), thus conflating both spiritual and secular power. He no longer positions himself merely as the administrative and political leader of a subject of the Russian Federation, but as its indisputable religious and secular leader, responsible for showing his nation the one true path.

This bodes ill for anyone who attempts to disobey his instructions, and the damning phrase 'enemy of the people' and its derivatives – 'enemy of Islam', 'enemy of society' and 'enemy of the State' – fall from his lips all too easily and frequently when he talks about human rights activists, independent journalists, federal media outlets which publish reports on everyday life in the Republic, Russian oppositionists (Chechnya has lacked any opposition of its own for many years), and practically anyone whose opinion differs from his own. In Kadyrov's eyes, dissidents are worse than openly aggressive militant 'shaitans': they 'are more dangerous than beasts in the forest, since they may betray you at any time... They are not men. They are not even shaitans, they are worse than shaitans, they are contagious.'<sup>41</sup>

His opinion of the Internet publication *Kavkazsky uzel*, which is painstakingly accurate in its research, serves as a prime example of this attitude and is cited below:

*'The website Kavkazsky uzel that has appeared is an enemy of the people, an enemy of Russia, an enemy of the Chechen people and an enemy of Islam. It is devoid of any ideas, and they will write anything for the sake of money.'*<sup>42</sup>

Kadyrov is also fond of throwing around the word 'Wahhabi', which for him means the same as 'apostate', when talking about religious matters.

Kadyrov's interference in the spiritual aspects of Chechen society is crass and all-embracing. He constantly pays attention to religious matters (primarily in the sphere of rituals)

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<sup>39</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-magomeda-mucolgova-obvinyayut-v-antirossiyskoy-deyatelnosti>, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/272042/>.

<sup>40</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-mashr-vklyuchena-v-spisok-inostrannyh-agentov-ee-rukovoditel-zayavil-o>.

<sup>41</sup> From an appearance by R. Kadyrov on the Grozny television channel on 11.1.2014, Vesti, 22:00.

<sup>42</sup> From an appearance by R. Kadyrov on the Grozny television channel on 18.2.2014, Vesti, 22:00.



with the aim of achieving absolute unanimity of views, and takes it upon himself to determine the standards to be followed and what constitutes inadmissible deviations:<sup>43</sup>

*'They pray differently with all kinds of new movements, and all this is foreign to the sharia. Everything they do contradicts our faith. They are enemies of our religion. There is no place for them among us. [...] If a person practices only one aspect of Wahhabism, he too is our enemy. Many scholars from other countries who have come to us to be healed say that our way is iman<sup>44</sup> and belief, so why would anyone need to go elsewhere? Some people, like Shoip-Mulla, who asked forgiveness from me first,<sup>45</sup> start by saying one thing and then go away and say something very different. Anyone who follows people like him is no better than he is. The Prophet said that people like him should be annihilated, that they should not exist. There should be no other branches of Islam!'<sup>46</sup>*

*'We have always tried to keep our blood pure, but now there are people giving their children up to these new and unknown branches of Islam. They should understand that these new trends have no solid foundation – they are preached by apostates who do not observe their own religion.*

*Wallahi Billahi Tallahi, I swear to you by these three names of God that there will be no one on our territory who resembles a Wahhabi in any aspect of their behaviour whatsoever<sup>47</sup>... there can be no question of this ... no one observes the Sunna<sup>48</sup> as faithfully as we do.<sup>49</sup>*

This is how the secular head of one of the subjects of the Russian Federation talks about the murder of those who have defected from the true faith:

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<sup>43</sup> Cf. <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-izvilistyy-put-borby-za-istinnuyu-religioznost;>  
<http://memohrc.org/news/ramzan-kadyrov-rassuzhdaet-ob-ubiystve-otstupnikov-ot-istinnoy-very;>  
[http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavka-3.](http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavka-3)

<sup>44</sup> Arabic for a belief in the truth of Islam.

<sup>45</sup> In **February 2011**, the famous preacher **Shoip-Mulla Tutayev** from *Germenchuk* in the *Shalinsky district* was brought before Kadyrov for a “discussion,” after which he appeared on Chechen television admitting that some of his previous sermons had been incorrect.

<sup>46</sup> From an appearance by R. Kadyrov on the Grozny television channel on 11.1.2014, Vesti, 22:00.

<sup>47</sup> Ahbasmism is a recently developed branch of Islam which in many respects runs counter to the beliefs espoused by the fundamentalist Salafis (Wahhabis). After emerging in Lebanon in the 1980s, it later spread to Jordan and to European and American countries, with many viewing it as a “Europeanised version” of Islam, and it entered the former Soviet Union through Ukraine. Sheikh **Akhmed Tamim**, a former Lebanese scholar of Ahbasmism, is the head of the Spiritual Administration of Ukrainian Muslims. Like the majority of Muslims in Chechnya, Dagestan and Ingushetia, the followers of Ahbasmism are Sunnis of the Sufi branch of Islam, and their Sufi rites are similar to those which have traditionally been practised in Chechnya, having their basis in the Qadiriyya tariqa which holds sway in the Republic. At the same time, however, the followers of Ahbasmism are radical reformers when it comes to a number of points of doctrinal theology.

<sup>48</sup> The Sunna are holy Muslim legends handed down as tales (hadith) about the acts and sayings of the Prophet Mohammed. The tales were passed down through Mohammed’s companions and their students and act as a supplement to and interpretation of the Koran. The Sunna is the second source of sharia, after the Koran.

<sup>49</sup> From an appearance by R. Kadyrov on the Grozny television channel on 31.1.2014, Vesti, 22:00.

*'The Prophet showed us the true path clearly and distinctly. It is thanks to our faith in this path that we have waged war. Not because we were enforcing the law or what have you... I waged war on the Wahhabis for the sake of Allah. I wasn't even in power at the time – you are all aware of how and where I killed them. There are dozens of similar examples, since this battle has gone on since the days of Ichkeria, and people like them have no business here. The Prophet told us to kill them!'*<sup>50</sup>

The entourage of the head of the Chechen Republic regards his words as a licence to act, and passes them on down the chain of command. The Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs for the Chechen Republic, **Apti Alaudinov**, had the following to say about Kadyrov in an appearance on **3 February 2014** in the town of *Urus-Martan*:

*'The whole world calls him the Keeper of the Koran – we have a document signed by 34 of the most learned people who have the right to issue fatwas which says that the head of our Republic is following the right path, the path of jihad, and that he is adhering to the true religion of Islam. [...]*

*All these Wahhabis should be damned and damned again, and those who dare to turn to the right or left of the path shown by our leader should also be damned.'*<sup>51</sup>

**Oleg Orlov**, a member of the board of the Memorial Human Rights Centre, was told by the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Chechen Republic that its 'renowned specialists and experts' prepare a synopsis each week for the forthcoming Friday sermon as guidance for all the imams of mosques,<sup>52</sup> and these latter are obliged to write their sermons on the basis of these synopses. R. Kadyrov has indicated on more than one occasion in his public speeches that he regards all the imams of Chechnya's mosques as civil servants funded and controlled by the Republic's government.

Chechnya's political, public, economic and religious life has long been subject to absolute control, and this control has already extended to the personal day-to-day life of its citizens. Kadyrov frequently issues instructions on appropriate clothing and facial hair during his television appearances:

*'[...] I tell you that a woman who goes out in black clothes, with a covered chin... her husband should know that we will take this woman away and look her over – we will force her to take off her clothes and trousers.'*<sup>53</sup>

As is often the case in totalitarian societies, a campaign is generally launched on the back of Kadyrov's public appearances in order to combat the external trappings of religious dissidence, for example in the form of particular styles of men's beards or women's hijabs. Elements of the campaign are raids by the security forces, 'representatives of the community'

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<sup>50</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>51</sup> Grozny television channel, 3 February 2014

<sup>52</sup> The imam of a mosque is a cleric who manages the mosque and leads the collective prayers.

<sup>53</sup> From an appearance by R. Kadyrov on the Grozny television channel on 15.9.2014, Vesti, 22:00; <http://memohrc.org/news/ramzan-kadyrov-podborodok-chechenskoy-zhenshchiny-prinadlezhit-mne>; <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikt-na-severnem-kavka-3>

and clerics. In *early 2014*, the Director of the Department for Communications with Religious and Public Organisations of the Administration of the Head and Government of the Chechen Republic, reporting to the head of the Republic on his progress in opposing pseudo-Islamic movements, preventing extremism and implementing the 'Single Concept for the Spiritual and Moral Education of the Younger Generation', stated that 4,961 measures had been carried out, involving 151,881 people.<sup>54</sup>

Campaigns of this kind are held on a regular basis.

In the last few months of *2015*, raids were carried out by employees of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Chechen Republic in all of Chechnya's major towns and cities, not only in streets and markets but also involving stopping buses and cars. Young men whose appearance was deemed 'suspicious', for example because their moustache was too short, were detained and taken away to an unknown destination. In the majority of cases, the detainees were forced to take part in 'guidance discussions' and were then released, but these 'discussions' could last one, two or more days, and the detainees' relatives were not told where they were or what was happening to them. We estimate that several hundred people were detained in this way during the last three months of 2015, but their relatives refused to lodge any kind of complaints in order to avoid incurring the wrath of the authorities, and as a rule the detainees were also reluctant to report their experiences once they had been released. Some of the people detained during this period had still not been traced by *2016*.<sup>55</sup>

On *18 February 2016*, a statement was published on the website of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic advising that, further to a decision by Ramzan Kadyrov, each Chechen citizen aged between 14 and 35 should undergo 'spiritual and moral passportisation', following which they would receive a document from their district police department and local branch of the muftiyat indicating their passport number, registered address and place of residence, religious denomination, nationality, teip and wurd membership and details of their place of study or work.

This scheme attracted a lot of media attention, and a rebuttal was published one day later by the head of Chechnya. Citizens of the Republic have however noticed that the authorities have not abandoned the idea of 'spiritual and moral passportisation' for young people, but are instead carrying it out using a questionnaire administered by teachers and local police officers.

According to *Novaya gazeta*, the questionnaire asks not only for personal details, but also for the contact details of older relatives of the 'candidate for passportisation', the local police officer and the imam, who are then asked to confirm the identity of the candidate and assume full responsibility for his or her future actions, effectively casting them in the role of guarantor<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Chechen Republic today, 20.2.2014 (<http://chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=14728>)

<sup>55</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/v-konce-proshlogo-goda-v-chechne-zafiksirovany-mnogochislennye-pohishcheniya>.

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2919256>, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/278238/>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/279215/>, <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/72013.html>.



## ***A new vision of history***

Totalitarian leaders typically impose their own vision of the history of their nation with scant regard for historical truth, and this is also the case for the Chechen Republic. A significant event in the public arena has been the *de facto* abolition of the Day of Remembrance and Grief, which in Chechnya (and neighbouring Ingushetia) was always celebrated on **23 February**, the day on which the Chechen and Ingush peoples were deported to Central Asia on Stalin's orders in **1944**. In **2011**, however, a Day of Remembrance and Grief for the Peoples of the Chechen Republic was instituted on Kadyrov's instructions and commemorated on **10 May**, the day on which Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov was buried following his assassination on **9 May 2004**. This day now symbolises 'every dramatic event in the history of the Chechen people.'<sup>57</sup> A. Kh. Kadyrov's death is equated with the tragic fate of an entire people, and in some sense even overshadows it: *'The attempt on the life of the President of the Republic was an attempt on the life of the entire nation.'* *'The date of 10 May – the day when our First President was laid to rest – was chosen by general consensus'*.<sup>58</sup>

Until **2013** both dates were celebrated in Chechnya, but as of that year **23 February** was celebrated solely as Defenders of the Motherland Day, together with the rest of Russia, and the Day of Grief was held on **10 May**. Although Kadyrov published a message on his *Instagram* feed on **23 February 2016** dedicated to the memory of the victims of the deportation, heaping obloquy on the heads of those who had organised it (I. V. Stalin and L. P. Beria) and proclaiming that the authorities of the Chechen Republic would not allow the tragedy to be repeated, no large-scale public events were held on that day, whereas commemorations were held on **10 May 2016** to mark the Day of Remembrance and Grief for the Peoples of the Chechen Republic. Representatives of the Chechen leadership, members of the State Duma of the Russian Federation, theologians, heads of the municipalities and other civil servants visited Akhmad Kadyrov's grave in the village of *Tsentora* in *Kurchalovsk district* and laid wreathes on his obelisk at the War Memorial in Grozny. Commemorations devoted to the Day of Remembrance and Grief for the Peoples of the Chechen Republic were held in towns and villages throughout the Chechen Republic.<sup>59</sup>

In **2014**, the remarkable memorial complex dedicated to the memory of those who had been deported, which had stood in the centre of Grozny, was 'relocated' or more accurately destroyed, possibly because it had been opened in **1994** by **Dzhokhar Dudayev**, the first president of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria whose memory Kadyrov is attempting to eradicate entirely. Part of the complex – the 'churts' or gravestones from graveyards which were demolished during the deportation of Chechens – were transferred to the

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<sup>57</sup> News agency Grozny-Inform, 19.2.2014.

<sup>58</sup> Website of the Parliament of the Chechen Republic, 9.5.2013. It is worth noting in passing that the cult of memory associated with A. Kadyrov has taken on quasi-religious fervour in Chechnya. Civil servants commonly refer to "following the path of Akhmad-Khadzhi", or in other words adhering to certain spiritual practices believed to have been instigated by A. Kadyrov: *"Forty leading scholars have attested and confirmed in writing that the path of Akhmad-Khadzhi is the truest path"* (TK Grozny, Vesti, 15.1.2014).

<sup>59</sup> <http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=17616>, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282217/>; <http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=18010>.

site where the 'Reskoma' or Presidential Palace building had stood before prior to **1996**. It was there that a memorial to Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov was erected in the mid-2000s but later removed from its plinth, and the site was transformed into a memorial to the employees of law-enforcement agencies of the Chechen Republic who have fallen in service, and the churts now stand there next to steles bearing the names of fallen Chechen police officers. The intention of the authorities, which has been expounded on more than one occasion by R. Kadyrov, is for the complex to symbolise both the heroism and the tragedy of the Chechen people. However, a crucial element of the memorial to the victims of the deportation was lost during relocation, namely the raised fist holding a dagger towering above the centre of the monument, which symbolised the resilient spirit of the Chechen people, and the plaque with the inscription '*Dukhur dats! Doelkhur dats! Dits diir dats!*' ('*We will not break! We will not cry! We will not forget!*'). There is nothing about the memorial that any longer reminds the observer of the tragic deportations.

### ***The case of Ruslan Kutayev***

An unenviable fate is in store for anyone who disputes this manufacturing of historical memory.

On **18 February 2014**, in the run-up to another anniversary of the deportation a conference entitled 'Deportation of the Chechen People. What Really Happened, and Can We Forget It?' was organised and hosted by the prominent civic activist **Ruslan Kutayev** in Grozny's National Library without the consent of the authorities. Those attending included historians, anthropologists and journalists, and in one of his contributions Kutayev criticised the Republic's authorities for their *de facto* abolition of the Day of Remembrance and Grief.

The head of the Republic was annoyed in the extreme by this unauthorised conference, and on the following day all those who participated were summoned before **Magomed Daudov**, Chief of the Administration of the Head and Government of the Chechen Republic. They were lectured to by Kadyrov himself on historical issues, but then allowed to go home. Ruslan Kutayev was the only person who refused to comply with Daudov's request.

On **20 February**, Ruslan Kutayev was arrested in the village of *Gekhi* in the *Urus-Martanovsky district* 'on suspicion of possessing heroin'. He was tortured in the first few days after his arrest and gave a confession which formed the basis for a drugs possession charge. However, the sheer flimsiness of the investigators' case became clear during the trial, and it was obvious that the charge was fabricated. Yet although the case essentially fell apart in court, R. Kutayev was found guilty and sentenced to four years in a standard regime prison colony and a further year's ban on attending public events or engaging in public activities. A court of second instance commuted the sentence to three years and ten months in prison.<sup>60</sup>

The Memorial Human Rights Centre has recognised R. Kutayev as a political prisoner.

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<sup>60</sup> For more details concerning the Kutayev case, cf.: <http://memohrc.org/special-projects/delo-kutayeva>.

## ***Judicial independence***

Even considering the altogether deplorable state of the justice system in Russia, the courts in the Chechen Republic are remarkable for their level of ‘independence’. Like the Republic’s other institutions, courts are subject to direct and immediate interference from the representatives of the executive branch and from Kadyrov himself. It can be said without any hint of exaggeration that a sentence which does not suit the head of the Republic will not be considered final, and that even an acquittal by a court – let alone genuine innocence – in no way guarantees protection against retaliatory measures. As well as the aforesaid case of Ruslan Kutayev, the cases of **Alvi Abdurakhmanov**<sup>61</sup> and **Suleiman Edigov**<sup>62</sup> can be cited as examples in this regard.

As the omnipotent master of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov can publicly chastise the courts for sentences which he finds objectionable<sup>63</sup> or call for the resignation of the Chair of the Supreme Court of the Chechen Republic, as was the case on **5 May 2016**.<sup>64</sup>

The latter of these actions blatantly exceeds the bounds of the authority of the head of a subject of the Russian Federation, and directly contravenes the Constitution of the Russian Federation. **Magomed Karatayev**, Chair of the Supreme Court of the Chechen Republic, initially announced that Kadyrov had been mistakenly informed, which under the current circumstances can only be regarded as an attempt to defy the will of the head of the Republic. On **15 May**, however, M. Karatayev announced on television (on the Chechen State Television and Radio Broadcasting Company Grozny channel) that the criticism had been entirely justified, after which he apologised to Kadyrov and confirmed his resignation.<sup>65</sup>

Kadyrov may be aware of principles such as the separation of powers, judicial independence and the irremovability of judges, but he certainly has no intention of abiding by them.

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<sup>61</sup> Further details of the case can be found in documents published by the Memorial Human Rights Centre: <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-kadyrov-obrushilsya-na-sud-prisyazhnyh-opravdavshiy-lyudey>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-ischez-chelovek-opravdanie-kotorogo-prisyazhnyimi-vyzvalo-yarost-ramzana-kadyrova>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-policeyskie-bolee-dvuh-mesyacev-nezakonno-uderzhivayut-opravdannogo-cheloveka>; <http://memohrc.org/news/groznyy-moskva-verhovnyy-sud-rf-ostavil-v-sile-opravdatelnyy-prigovor-vyzvavshiy-vozmushchenie>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-tochka-v-dele-o-nezakonnom-lishenii-svobody-cheloveka-opravdannogo-sudom>.

<sup>62</sup> Further details of the case can be found in documents published by the Memorial Human Rights Centre: <http://memohrc.org/news/v-sizo-groznogo-trinadcatyy-den-golodaet-obvinyaemyy-edigov>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-golodayushchiy-edigov-byl-dostavlenn-v-sud-no-zasedanie-ne-sostoyalos>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-sud-poluchit-polnyy-otchet-o-sostoyanii-zdorovya-golodayushchego-podsudimogo>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-verhovnyy-sud-rf-otklonil-apellyacionnyu-zhalobu-na-prigovor-suleymanu-edigovu>.

<sup>63</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-kadyrov-obrushilsya-na-sud-prisyazhnyh-opravdavshiy-lyudey>.

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/73046.html>.

<sup>65</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282534>.

## Collective responsibility

As was the case in previous years, the authorities of the Chechen Republic have upheld the principle of collective responsibility in punishing the relatives of alleged members of illegal armed groups.

On **5 December 2014**, the day following an insurgent attack on Grozny, Ramzan Kadyrov posted the following to his *Instagram* feed: *'It shall no longer be said that parents are not responsible for the deeds of their sons and daughters. They will be responsible in Chechnya!'* He followed this up with the promise that: *'If an insurgent murders a police officer or anyone else in Chechnya, his family will be immediately thrown out of Chechnya and banned from returning, and their home will be destroyed down to its very foundations.'*<sup>66</sup> That evening this announcement was reproduced word-for-word on the official portal of the Head and Government of the Chechen Republic and referred to as a speech Kadyrov had made at an extended meeting of the members of the government, representatives of the security forces and the clergy.<sup>67</sup> Kadyrov was stretching the truth by saying that the relatives of Chechen insurgents had not previously been held responsible for the actions of their family members, since the Chechen authorities had issued threats to the families of alleged insurgents on many occasions before, and their homes had been set on fire by 'unknown armed persons' with the connivance of the authorities.<sup>68</sup> This time the homes of 15 families of alleged insurgents and all their belongings were destroyed over the course of two weeks in various regions of Chechnya,<sup>69</sup> and family members were forced to leave the Republic under threat of harsh reprisals.

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On **9 May 2016**, a check point<sup>70</sup> at the village of *Alkhan-Kal* in *Grozny (rural) district* was attacked by **Shamil Dzhannaraliyev** and **Akhmed Inalov**, both of whom were carrying arms. Dzhannaraliyev blew himself up, injuring six police officers, while Inalov was killed in his attempt to seize a police officer's service weapon. On **11 May**, a female relative of Dzhannaraliyev told the web portal *Life.ru* that the homes of Dzhannaraliyev and Inalov, in the *Zavodsky district* of Grozny, had been set on fire. **Ilya Azar**, a journalist for *Meduza* who photographed the burnt-out remains of Dzhannaraliyev's house in the settlement of *Kirov*, was arrested by local security officials, allegedly on suspicion of collusion with Islamic State, an

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<sup>66</sup> <https://www.instagram.com/p/wO08kRiRv4/?modal=true>.

<sup>67</sup> <http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=15985>.

<sup>68</sup> [http://www.memo.ru/2011/03/02/02031111.html#\\_RefHeading\\_238\\_1216636074](http://www.memo.ru/2011/03/02/02031111.html#_RefHeading_238_1216636074);  
<http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2009/03/m162902.htm>;  
<http://www.memo.ru/2009/06/26/2606091.html>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/162082/#7>;  
<http://85.236.9.116/d/2401.html>.

<sup>69</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-podtverdilas-informacii-ob-unichtozhenii-eshche-shesti-domov-rodstvennikov-boevikov>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-rasprava-nad-rodstvennikami-boevikov-prodolzhaetsya>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-siloviki-sozhgli-dom-rodstvennikov-eshche-odnogo-boevika>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-siloviki-sozhgli-doma-rodstvennikov-boevikov>.

<sup>70</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282172/>.

organisation which is prohibited in Russia.<sup>71</sup> According to reports by *Kavkazsky uzel*<sup>72</sup>, Inalov's home in the settlement of *Andreyevskaya dolina* was also burnt down.

## ***Arrests, abductions and disappearances***

Abductions, unlawful detentions and enforced disappearances continue to be widespread and systematic occurrences in the Chechen Republic, and it is not only those suspected of being linked in some way (as a friend or relation, for example) with insurgents who are removed to unknown locations by security officers, but also those who dress 'incorrectly' (see above) or pray 'incorrectly'. The atmosphere of terror and generalised suspicion which prevails in the Republic means that Chechen citizens are extremely unwilling to talk to human rights activists, and do not report breaches of the law by members of the security forces, even when they, their relatives or their acquaintances, have suffered as a result. People are afraid of notifying abductions, even to the State authorities, which means that the majority of crimes committed by security officials are not recorded by the law-enforcement agencies, the media or human rights NGOs. The incidents reported to the Memorial Human Rights Centre, and in particular those which we have permission to talk about openly, are only the tip of the iceberg.<sup>73</sup> There are many cases we are unable to discuss because the relatives of the individual abducted shun publicity for fear that the torture will continue and other family members may suffer. Most importantly of all, they do not believe that anyone can help them.

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By way of example, we can cite the events which occurred in the *Nadterechny district* in **winter 2015**. On **23 February** an explosion took place on a dam at a water reservoir in this suburb of *Grozny*, with three bodies found at the scene of the crime. According to the official reports, three residents of two villages in the *Nadterechny district* (*Gvardeyskoye* and *Nadterechnoye*), had blown themselves up during an attempt to plant an explosive device. Staff members of the Memorial Human Rights Centre were told by people living in these villages that security officials visited the relatives of the deceased within hours of the explosion and took the male family members to the district police headquarters, where they were held for three days and then released on condition that they left the Republic together with their families. At the same time, security officials throughout the entire district started to arrest young people who had been acquainted with the deceased, and at least 100 people were detained over the next 11 days. Some

<sup>71</sup> <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/05/12/kak-v-moskve-no-s-popravkoy-na-mentalitet>.

<sup>72</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282412>.

<sup>73</sup> Cf.: <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-net-svedeniy-o-sudbe-pohishchennyh-zhiteley-groznogo>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-zhitelya-gudermesa-pohishchennogo-ranee-otpustili>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-chetvertyy-den-neizvestna-sudba-pohishchennoy-molodoy-zhenshchiny>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-v-gudermese-pohishchen-molodoy-muzhchina>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/v-konce-proshlogo-goda-v-chechne-zafiksirovany-mnogochislennye-pohishcheniya>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-v-nachale-dekabrya-ischezli-ili-byli-pohishcheny-devyat-zhiteley-respubliki>; <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-lyudi-ischezayut-posle-zaderzhaniy>



of the detainees were held for several days in the district police headquarters without access to a lawyer, and were then released. Some were taken away to Grozny, with their relatives knowing nothing about their whereabouts or their fate for a whole four months, but refusing point blank to lodge any complaints or talk to human rights activists.<sup>74</sup> Seven of the disappeared from the villages of Gvardeyskoye and Nadterechnoye were then 'legalised' by formalising their detention between *May* and *early June 2014* and charged with colluding with an illegal armed group before they were convicted and sentenced to prison terms of between two and five years

The bodies of two residents of Nadterechnoye detained during the period in question were handed over to their relatives by security officials.

The 23-year-old **Kana Afanasev** was arrested by security officials on **26 February 2015** in the village of *Gekhi* in the *Urus-Martanovsky district* of Chechnya at the construction site where he worked. The security officials said that they were taking him to the Department of Internal Affairs for the Shalinsky District, but that department and all others subsequently contacted by his relatives denied any knowledge of his whereabouts. That evening, security officials and representatives of the local authorities visited the home of Kana Afanasev in the village of *Gvardeyskoye* and handed over his body to his relatives, bearing no obvious injuries apart from traces of handcuffs and marks on the hands similar to burns from an electric current. The deceased's relatives were forbidden from lodging any kind of complaint, and were ordered to bury the dead according to Muslim customs without holding the prescribed memorial service. Kana Afanasev can be presumed to have died from electric shock torture during interrogations.

According to residents of Gvardeyskoye, the father of the deceased and his wife and two small children hastily left the village after the funeral, and their fellow villagers believe that they have fled Chechnya on the instructions of the authorities.

Other people living in the same village have stated that Kana Afanasev was married and had two children. In **2013** he had travelled to *Sweden* and sought asylum there, but was refused by the local migration services. Three months earlier he had been deported to Russia and returned to Chechnya.<sup>75</sup>

On **5 March** 29-year-old **Suleiman Tsakayev**, who also came from the village of *Gvardeyskoye*, reported to the District Department of Internal Affairs of his own accord (according to fellow villagers), after having lived in *Moscow* for a period of time. When the police officers asked his relatives living in Chechnya to ensure that he presented himself, Suleiman came home and handed himself over to the police. That evening security officials took him somewhere in Grozny, and on the night of **6 March** his body was taken to the Department of Internal Affairs of the Nadterechny district before being handed over to his relatives. He is survived by a wife and three small children.

The relatives did not wish to lodge complaints in connection with either of these murder cases.

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<sup>74</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-massovye-zaderzhaniya-v-nadterechnom-rayone>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-telo-zaderzhannogo-silovikami-muzhchiny-vydano-rodstvennikam>

<sup>75</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-massovye-zaderzhaniya-v-nadterechnom-rayone>

**Late 2015** saw the death of yet another person who had been detained by members of the security forces. On **1 January 2016**, the body of **Khizir Yezhiyev**, who was born in 1979 and was a teacher of economics at Grozny State Oil Technical University, was found in the woods near the village of *Roshni-Chu* in *Urus-Martanovsky district*. According to the medical report, Yezhiyev died from internal bleeding, with six broken ribs, a pierced lung and many injuries visible on his body. The official reports state that the cause of death was a fall from a cliff. On **19 December 2015**, witnesses saw security officials arrest Yezhiyev at a garage in Grozny and take him to an unknown location, possibly as a result of his social media posts critical of the authorities in the Chechen Republic. According to a number of witnesses, the detainee was taken to one of Grozny's district police headquarters (Zavodsky, by all accounts).

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On the evening of **31 March 2016**, two people in black uniform took **Khusein Betelgeriyev**, a poet and singer-songwriter well-known in Chechnya, from his home to an unknown location. He only returned home on the evening of **11 April**, with representatives of the International Crisis Group reporting that he had been brutally beaten. His relatives and acquaintances believe that he was abducted as a result of comments he posted on social networks and the fact that he had ignored an invitation to attend a rally on 23 March marking the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of the Chechen Republic.<sup>76</sup>

On **1 April 2016**, **Rizvan Ibragimov** and **Abubakar Didiyev** – journalists and authors of extravagant 'historical' and 'linguistic' theories affirming the exceptional nature of the Chechen ethnicity and the Chechen language, the antiquity of the Chechens and the fact that they are God's chosen people – were taken from their homes by security officials. On **5 April**, Ibragimov posted to his Facebook page that no one had abducted him, and that he was spending four days in the Oktyabrskoye District Department of Internal Affairs in Grozny, where he was being detained in order to stop him disappearing; this post was later removed. On **6 April**, Ramzan Kadyrov posted to his *Instagram* feed that Ibragimov and Didiyev had '*apologised to the academic community and the clergy of Chechnya*' for their writings.<sup>77</sup>

### ***'The weak point of each and every person'***

Mass showcase events at which the population lends its approval to the regime's repressive measures are a typical feature of totalitarian regimes and can also be seen in Chechnya. At rallies in the centre of Grozny, many thousands of people, gathered on the orders of top regional officials, listen to speakers calling for greater repressive measures against the relatives of insurgents and the adoption of corresponding laws, and execrating human rights activists, journalists and Russian oppositionists (Chechnya no longer has any of its own), as well as – naturally – reiterating their warm approval for Ramzan Kadyrov's 'one true path'. The organisers generally supply those attending the rally with the appropriate banners and placards, prepared using templates and standard designs.

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<sup>76</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/280752/>

<sup>77</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-sedmye-sutki-neizvestna-sudba-pohishchennogo-barda>

The human rights organisations based in the Republic that continued their work during the worst times of the Second Chechen War and demonstrated their bravery, even in the face of mass disappearances and the ‘mopping up’ of settlements by the federal authorities, have now been frightened into submission, and do not dare to utter even the slightest criticism of the authorities of the Chechen Republic. What is more, their representatives regularly appear on Chechen television uttering crude attacks against the Committee Against Torture, the Joint Mobile Group and Memorial.

This is hardly surprising; the Chechen authorities can find the weak point of each and every person as and when the need arises.

This was eloquently demonstrated by a seemingly insignificant and curious episode. On **16 August 2014**, during a festival in the *Shalinsky district* of *Chechnya*, the head of the Republic lost his mobile phone. Security officials questioned those who had been present, but without success. Then, having asked the leaders of the various districts for lists of attendees at the festival, the security officials questioned over one thousand people on the night of **16 to 17 August**, including minors.<sup>78</sup>

Even innocent criticism of authority figures in Chechnya is regarded as unacceptable, and independent thinkers have been hounded out of the Republic’s universities in recent years. Members of the creative community are at serious risk if the authorities take a dislike to a particular aspect of their writings or work.

The authorities in Chechnya persecute anyone who helps to spread negative reports about what is happening in the Republic to the outside world, and people suspected of doing so are unlawfully detained and subject to harsh beatings. According to a number of victims, the people delivering the beatings include members of Kadyrov’s entourage who hold high-ranking government positions.

Dissidents in the Republic are subject to pressure of different kinds, sometimes in the form of demonstrative public humiliation of individuals who have dared to voice criticism on social networks.

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In **December 2015**, for example, a user with the screen name **adam\_chechenskiy** posted an ironic comment to his *Instagram* feed about a video clip which had been posted earlier<sup>79</sup> and which showed the head of the Republic working out to the tune of the Timati song ‘My Best Friend is President Putin’. Shortly afterwards, a video clip was shared on the mobile app *Whatsapp* showing **Adam Dikayev**, a young resident of the village of *Avtura*, running on a treadmill dressed only in a sweater and swimming trunks, and saying: *‘I am Adam Dikayev from the village of Avtura. I set up an account on Instagram using the nickname adam\_chechenskiy and, thinking they wouldn’t find me, I wrote something that didn’t need to be written. They found me, and they took my trousers. I understand now that I’m a goose.’*<sup>80</sup> *From now on, Putin is my*

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<sup>78</sup> Further details of this incident can be found in documents published on the website of the Memorial Human Rights Centre <http://memohrc.org/news/kak-v-chechne-iskali-telefon-kadyrova>.

<sup>79</sup> [https://www.instagram.com/p/-w\\_tXaiRmS](https://www.instagram.com/p/-w_tXaiRmS)

<sup>80</sup> In Chechen society, the word “goose” is an insult equivalent to the Russian “goat”.



*father, my grandfather and my tsar. This video can be found on my Instagram feed under the profile adam\_chechenskiy.* Then, singing along to the song 'My Best Friend is President Putin', he quickens his pace. The custom in Chechnya used to be (and in some places still is) that men who had committed a crime regarded as shameful – for example an attack against a woman or someone's honour – would have their trousers taken away in order to emphasise the unworthiness of the crime. The young man appears on his own in the video clip, but there can be little doubt that he is not saying or doing any of the above of his own accord.

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In *mid-December 2015*, the mobile app Whatsapp was used to share an audio clip (in Chechen) of a Chechen woman addressing Ramzan Kadyrov and complaining that employees of government bodies responsible for housing and communal services, together with local administrative officials and members of the security forces, had started paying visits to people (sometimes recorded on film) in order to demand 'upfront payments' for housing and communal services. The recipients of these visits, including those who were up-to-date with their payments, were so scared that they were willing to pay between 300 and 3000 rubles without even knowing who was charging these 'tariffs' and why. In the recording, the woman says:

*'Ramzan Akhmatovich, do you<sup>81</sup> really not know what is going on? Or is this happening on your say-so? We've only just paid off our electricity and gas bills and settled our debts in full, and now they want another three thousand from us. What's going on? They're asking for three thousand rubles as an upfront payment, and if we don't hand it over, they're threatening to get us sacked from our jobs! What do you gain from getting us sacked, Ramzan? [...] Apparently this crisis only affects us – our leaders are not affected and never have been. [...] Are you the only ones that are allowed to live in peace? Why are you tormenting us? The prefect is squeezing us dry, and telling us that it's on your instructions. [...] Are you not in the slightest bit bothered that we're going to die of hunger? All that matters is that things are going well for you, that your construction sites flourish so that your entertainers get flats and cars. You give them hand-outs of 100,000 or 50,000 rubles, and you give them to sportsmen too. Why don't you give these hand-outs to simple people? You should settle their debts for them before wasting your money outside the Republic.'*

The identity of the woman was soon revealed as **Aishat Inayeva**, a resident of the village of *Gvardeyskoye* in the *Nadterechny district* of *Chechnya*. On **19 December**, she and her husband were shown on local television<sup>82</sup> as the head of the Republic lectured both of them on their ingratitude in the face of his single-handed hard work for the good of his nation: *'I ask you, as a Chechen and a Muslim, to tell me and the whole nation where I have been showing off, where I have stolen the nation's money, where I have given orders for the people's pay to be withheld,'* says Kadyrov, adding that over one billion rubles are paid out to beneficiaries every year in Chechnya. He then turns his attention to the apartments, kindergartens, hospitals and so

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<sup>81</sup> In Chechen (unlike in Russian) there is no formal second-person pronoun.

<sup>82</sup> A recording of the segment is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yoK8v66VB-0> (in Chechen); a transcription is available here <http://memohrc.org/specials/ramzan-kadyrov-protiv-inaevoy> (in Russian, translation by the Memorial Human Rights Centre).

on which have been built in the Republic: *'In just one year, I have provided several thousand people with apartments and built hundreds and thousands of homes,'* he continues, without specifying the source of his funding. He failed entirely to mention one point, namely the grounds for the 'upfront payment' levied from Chechen citizens for housing and communal services and the number of payments which had been levied.

Inayeva gave monosyllabic answers to Kadyrov's questions, stating in particular that *'nobody had asked her'* for money, and finally retracting everything she had said on the audio clip: *'I have no idea how I could have said such things – I think I must have lost my mind. I am guilty towards my family and the head of our Republic, and I would like to ask forgiveness from everyone.'*

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Over the past eight years, staff at the Memorial Human Rights Centre and other human rights organisations have heard many reports about systematic extortion from citizens of the Chechen Republic working in various budgetary departments. They say that part of their wages are held back and passed on to their immediate superior, but they do not generally wish to lodge any complaints out of fear of losing their job or suffering other reprisals.

The following incident serves as a prime example of these cases. On **14 April 2016**, during the televised 'Direct Line to Vladimir Putin', a video message was shown to Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation, from **Ramazan Dzhahalaldinov**, a resident of the mountainous Avar village *Kenkhi* in the *Sharoyksy district of Chechnya*. Dzhahalaldinov said that local civil servants were commandeering a large part of the compensation for housing destroyed during the war and the floods, as well as withholding teachers' pay and ignoring villagers' requests for help.<sup>83</sup>

Following the broadcasting of this clip, Dzhahalaldinov received threats and was forced to move to Dagestan. A cavalcade of several dozen cars led by **Islam Kadyrov**, a nephew of Ramzan Kadyrov and Chief of the Administration of the Head and Government of the Republic, arrived in Kenkhi shortly afterwards and Islam Kadyrov held a meeting which lasted until 3 o'clock in the morning, during the course of which local citizens voiced public condemnations of Dzhahalaldinov in front of camera crews from Chechen television stations.<sup>84</sup>

On **6 May 2016**, R. Kadyrov arrived in the Sharoyksy district and met with Kenkhi residents. During the meeting, he heard complaints that Dzhahalaldinov had allegedly dealt in alcohol and arms in the village and that he was an accomplice of insurgents, in response to which Kadyrov replied: *'Are you really unable to stop a single person?'*<sup>85</sup>

In the night of **12 May**, armed security officials arrived at Dzhahalaldinov's house, broke down the door, took away his wife and children and set the house on fire. The wife and older daughter were beaten, and then taken together with the other children to the border with Dagestan and left there without documents.<sup>86</sup> The village of Kenkhi was sealed off by security

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<sup>83</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/280969>.

<sup>84</sup> <http://chernovik.net/content/novosti/ne-ver-no-boysya-i-prosi>.

<sup>85</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282101>.

<sup>86</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2986787>.

officials and its residents were questioned in turn in an attempt to trace Dzhalsalidinov's location.<sup>87</sup> On **15 May**, unknown persons attempted to abduct Ramazan Dzhalsalidinov at the exit from the mosque in the *Tsumadinsky district* of *Dagestan*, but the congregation at the mosque were able to prevent the abduction.<sup>88</sup>

On **30 May**, Dzhalsalidinov then appeared on the Grozny television channel with the following statement: *'I am very ashamed of myself, and I apologise to Ramzan Kadyrov for the unfounded accusations, and to the entire Chechen nation, and I call on the agitators to stop aggravating the situation and sowing discord between two brother nations. Many people will now say that I was frightened into writing this speech, but that is not true. I decided to do it of my own accord.'* He also thanked Kadyrov for the reconstruction of the Sharoysky district: *'I always knew that Kadyrov would not fail to solve the problems faced by the residents of the Sharoysky district as soon as he found out about them. This is just what happened, and now our district is being completely rebuilt.'*

### ***'On a Russia-wide scale': threats and murder***

There are increasing indications that Ramzan Kadyrov is already finding the Chechen Republic a rather 'small stage' for himself. Although he is (for now) 'Putin's infantryman', he sees himself not only as the amir of Chechnya, but as the leader of the North Caucasus and a politician on the national Russian stage, even though his rhetoric and methods have not changed.

On **12 January 2016**, at a meeting with journalists in Grozny, R. Kadyrov said with reference to the Russian opposition that is outside parliamentary institutions: *'These people must be treated as though they were enemies of the people and traitors. There is nothing sacred about them. I believe that they should be judged very harshly for their seditious activities.'*<sup>89</sup>

These statements aroused the indignation of members of the opposition, human rights activists and the Russian ombudsman. **Konstantin Senchenko**, a member of the city council of *Krasnoyarsk*, posted a sharp retort to R. Kadyrov on his Facebook page, saying that he had brought 'shame on Russia'. Following a discussion with an unnamed 'VIP', however, Senchenko repudiated his statement and apologised to the head of Chechnya.

On **22 January**, a rally was held in Grozny in support of the head of Chechnya. According to the Chechen Ministry of Internal Affairs, it was attended by 800,000 people (57% of the entire Chechen population). Those present denounced the anti-State and anti-government activities of the extra-parliamentary opposition and called for a closing of ranks around Kadyrov as a defender of Russia's integrity and interests.<sup>90</sup>

On **1 February 2016**, the head of Chechnya posted to his *Instagram* feed a video clip in which **Mikhail Kasyanov**, leader of the PARNAS party, appears in a sniper's crosshairs, along

<sup>87</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2988471>.

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/282719/>.

<sup>89</sup> <http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=17475>.

<sup>90</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-v-groznom-proshel-miting-v-podderzhku-ramzana-kadyrova;>  
<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/276395>.

with the following comment: *'Kasyanov has come to Strasbourg for money for the Russian opposition. Whoever didn't understand will get it!'*<sup>91</sup> The video was later removed by the administrators of the social network. This could have been regarded as nothing but a brutal prank if it were not for the fact that another prominent member of the opposition had been murdered one year earlier.

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Boris Nemtsov, an acknowledged leader of the Russian opposition, was murdered on **27 February 2015** in the centre of Moscow, demonstrating the risk posed to Russia's future by the creation of a regime of absolute personal power on part of its territory. Evidently, there are influential forces at work that would like the country as a whole to move in this direction.

A group of investigators led by General-Major **Igor Krasnov**<sup>92</sup> quickly narrowed down the field of suspects to a list of seven, all of whom either lived in or originated from Chechnya. Four of the seven were active or former members of the security forces stationed in the Chechen Republic. **Zaur Dadayev**, the former deputy commander of the North Battalion<sup>93</sup> who investigators believe was responsible for shooting the politician, was on active service at the time of the crime. **Beslan Shavanov**, Dadayev's comrade-in-arms, had resigned 'for health reasons' not long before Nemtsov's murder. Media reports citing sources within the law-enforcement agencies state that he had flown from Grozny to Moscow two days before the murder using a ticket from the quota reserved for the Chechen Republic's government.<sup>94</sup> **Ruslan Mukhudinov** was an officer in the North Battalion, while **Tamerlan Eskerkhanov** was a former employee of

<sup>91</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/276846>.

<sup>92</sup> Krasnov had previously led successful investigations into cases involving neo-Nazi terrorist underground groups, the murder of Stanislav Markelov, the Militant Organisation of Russian Nationalists, and others.

<sup>93</sup> The North Battalion was formed (at the same time as the South Battalion) under the patronage of Ramzan Kadyrov in *spring 2006*, with its core made up of former members of the Security Service of the President of the Chechen Republic and the Anti-Terrorist Centre (two Chechen security forces for which there is no provision under law), whose members were former insurgents who had given themselves up under the personal guarantee of R. Kadyrov and had been "amnestied" by him. **Alimbek Delimkhanov**, the brother of **Adam Delimkhanov** (then commander of Neftepolka and currently member of the State Duma of the Russian Federation) was appointed its commander, while **Muslim Ilyasov** was appointed commander of the South Battalion. Both are former insurgents. At the official ceremony during which the battalions swore allegiance, Ramzan Kadyrov was presented with the "banner of the Anti-Terrorist Centre" for perpetual safekeeping, and the fighters "solemnly swore to uphold the traditions of the Security Service and the Anti-Terrorist Centre" (cf. <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/msg/2006/07/m56564.htm>; <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/doc11/index.htm>). Officially, these separate special motorised and operational battalions form part of the 46<sup>th</sup> Separate Operational Brigade of the Internal Troops of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation. In reality, the North and South Battalions make up an integral part of R. Kadyrov's "private army", and the soldiers still proudly refer to themselves as "Kadyrovtsy". In *spring 2008*, during Kadyrov's conflict with the Yamadeyev brothers, the North and South battalions surrounded the location of the Yamadeyev divisions in *Gudermes*. The battalion is currently operating as the Akhmad-Khadzhi Kadyrov 141<sup>st</sup> Special Motorised Regiment, and still goes by the name of North.

<sup>94</sup> [https://www.znak.com/2015-07-09/smi\\_odin\\_iz\\_podozrevaemyh\\_v\\_ubiyстве\\_nemcova\\_priletel\\_v\\_moskvu\\_po\\_pravitelstvennoy\\_broni](https://www.znak.com/2015-07-09/smi_odin_iz_podozrevaemyh_v_ubiyстве_nemcova_priletel_v_moskvu_po_pravitelstvennoy_broni); <http://polit.ru/news/2015/07/09/nemtsov>.

the Patrol and Checkpoint Service of the Department of Internal Affairs for the Shelkovsky district of the Chechen Republic. **Anzor** and **Shadid Gubashev**, relatives of Z. Dadaeyev, and **Khamzat Bakhayev** have also been charged as accessories to the murder. Five of the suspects – Dadayev, Eskerkhanov, the Gubashev brothers and Bakhayev – were detained outside the borders of Chechnya and then charged. Attempts to arrest the remaining suspects within the Chechen Republic ended in a fiasco since B. Shavanov (according to official reports) blew himself up with a grenade during his attempted arrest in *Grozny*, while R. Mukhudinov disappeared, was charged *in absentia* and is on the federal wanted list.

A curious ambiguity surrounds **Ruslan Geremeyev**, initially a key witness and later a suspect in the Nemtsov murder case. Geremeyev, who was an officer in the North Battalion and commanding officer of one of the accused (R. Mukhudinov, his chauffeur), belongs to an influential clan. His relatives include **Adam Delimkhanov**, a billionaire and member of the State Duma referred to by R. Kadyrov as his ‘right-hand man’, **Suleiman Geremeyev**, a member of the Council of the Federation and **Vakha Geremeyev**, head of the Department of Internal Affairs for the Shelkovsky district. Soon after the first suspects were arrested, the investigators decided that Ruslan Geremeyev should be called in for questioning, but the latter chose to disappear. In *March 2015*, the Investigative Committee instructed law enforcement agencies to conduct a search for R. Geremeyev, and the Special Forces of the Federal Security Service attempted to detain him, but without success. ‘Sources within the law enforcement agencies’ then told the media that R. Geremeyev was apparently in the village of *Dzalka*, but it was impossible for these agencies to question him, and eyewitnesses who were in Dzalka during this period have reported that all the roads into the village were under watchful armed guard. Adam Delimkhanov and his brother **Alimbek Delimkhanov**, commander of the North Battalion, were born in Dzalka.<sup>95</sup>

The Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation sent repeated instructions to the Chechen Republic asking for R. Geremeyev to be questioned, but they were not executed. Only those unfamiliar with developments in the Chechen Republic over the past decade can be surprised by this impotence on the part of the federal investigative bodies.

Back in *2010*, the Memorial Human Rights Centre wrote the following:<sup>96</sup> *‘Employees of the Investigative Department for the Chechen Republic are placed in a situation where they are unable to investigate such crimes properly – the Chechen branches of the Ministry of Internal Affairs pay absolutely no regard to them, and intentionally ‘forget’ to comply with their requests. Sometimes the investigators speak directly to the victims, but would never attempt to question anyone who had allegedly participated in an abduction for fear of severe reprisals, right the way up to death threats.’* A press conference held by human rights NGOs in *Moscow* in *2011* saw the disclosure of official documents from the Investigative Committee and the Public Prosecutor’s Office stating that the Ministry of Internal Affairs for the Chechen Republic had openly

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<sup>95</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/259145>; <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/69418.html>; [https://zona.media/news/geremeev\\_dzalka](https://zona.media/news/geremeev_dzalka); <http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2015/03/25/1381130.html>.

<sup>96</sup> Report by the Memorial Human Rights Centre: “The System of Impunity in North Caucasus (2009-2010) – How Does It Function?” (<http://memohrc.org/reports/mehanizmy-beznakazannosti-na-severnom-kavkaze-2009-2010-gody-kak-oni-rabotayut>).



sabotaged the investigation of crimes suspected to have been committed by members of the Chechen security forces.<sup>97</sup>

Media outlets have reported different versions of the investigation into Nemtsov's murder: that Geremeyev left the Russian Federation on a counterfeit passport as part of a Chechen delegation,<sup>98</sup> or that recently *'his appearances in the Republic have been ever more frequent as he ventures further from his previous retreat in a mountain village.'*<sup>99</sup> Geremeyev gave comments to reporters on the investigation into the political murder, and yet the investigators appear unable to interrogate him.

At the same time, Geremeyev's *de facto* commanding officer – R. Kadyrov, Major-General of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation – has justified the flight of his subordinate: *'Yes, I've heard the reports that he has left the country. What do you think he should have done instead? Sit next to Dadayev in the pre-trial detention centre, in spite of his innocence? I doubt he'd find that an attractive prospect. When everything has been cleared up, Geremeyev will be able to confirm his innocence and file suits against those who have slandered him. Naturally I have no knowledge whatsoever of any of the details of his alleged departure from the country.'*<sup>100</sup> After hearing a speech like that, it is highly unlikely that any employees of the Ministry for Internal Affairs of the Chechen Republic would have any desire to locate the fugitive Geremeyev for the purpose of interrogating him. Ramzan Kadyrov too has escaped questioning, despite the pleas lodged by lawyers on behalf of the Nemtsov family.

Eventually, without having questioned Geremeyev, the investigators 'nominated' as instigator and mastermind of the high-profile political murder his chauffeur, Ruslan Mukhudinov, whose fate remains unknown. **A. Bastrykin**, head of the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation, announced in *January 2016* that he believed the crime had been solved:<sup>101</sup> the five individuals who had been arrested were charged with carrying out a contract killing and with the illegal acquisition, possession, transport and storage of firearms.

The accused have retracted admissions of guilt made following their arrest, claiming that employees of the law enforcement agencies used unlawful violence and threats in order to force them to confess. The Investigative Committee found no evidence of this, and refused to initiate proceedings regarding the detainees' allegations. The Basmany Court of Moscow later ruled that this decision by the Investigative Committee had been lawful.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-sledstvennyy-komit-et-i-prokuratura-raspisalis-v-sobstvennom-bessilii>; <http://www.memo.ru/2011/04/20/pc/led.pdf>; <http://www.memo.ru/2011/04/20/pc/pr.pdf>.

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/69418.html>.

<sup>99</sup> <http://www.rosbalt.ru/moscow/2016/02/14/1489520.html>.

<sup>100</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/448043>.

<sup>101</sup> <http://www.interfax.ru/russia/490653>.

<sup>102</sup> The Committee for the Prevention of Torture (set up after the Committee Against Torture discontinued its operations; its leader is I. Kalyapin) lodged an appeal with the ECtHR on behalf of Zaur Dadayev on the grounds that, as proven by human rights activists, "almost no investigations [had been carried out during the enquiry] apart from the interrogation of police officers and members of the Investigative Committee." What is more, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture has shown that Dadayev's right to qualified legal assistance was violated during the investigation, since the lawyer Yevgeny Gubin was not allowed to meet him in order to clarify details of the case. Cf. <http://www.pytkam.net/press->

The extent to which the charges are justified will become clear during the forthcoming trial, but preliminary information points to the existence of weighty evidence confirming the guilt of the five prisoners, notwithstanding their initial confessions.

Who was really behind the murder of Boris Nemtsov, leader of the opposition and former Deputy Prime Minister, in what was essentially an act of terrorism? If it can be proven that the late B. Shavanov and the other defendants in the case are guilty of the crime as charged, it seems unlikely to say the least that these 'Kadyrovtsy' would have embarked on such an action without direct or indirect instructions from the leadership of the Chechen Republic. Any officer or soldier in the North Battalion (even those who have recently left) would have had to be crazy to embark on such a major crime without approval from the top. In modern-day Chechnya, an entire family may pay for the disobedience of one of its members. Yet R. Kadyrov has spoken warmly about the suspects, and Chechen television has broadcast footage of Shavanov's family at his wake. This contrasts sharply with the fate of the family members of those suspected of carrying out terrorist crimes in Chechnya.

## **Dagestan: a step back in time to State terror**

The social and political situation in the Republic of Dagestan differs from that of its nearest neighbours in the North Caucasus. The population of Dagestan consists of many different ethnic groups (unlike Chechnya and Ingushetia, which are essentially mono-ethnic). Conflict over the allocation of limited resources (whether land or money from the federal budget) often manifests itself as conflict among ethnic clans. This multiplicity of forces active in the republic means that the resolution of conflicts which arise requires the accommodation of their interests, which, in turn, prevents the definitive centralisation of power and the creation of an authoritarian regime. On the other hand, the 'accommodation of interests' and 'resolution of conflicts' often take place outside the law, which also affects the situation in the republic. This archaic aspect of Dagestani political life facilitates rampant corruption, cronyism and nepotism, but at the same time it allows the republic to maintain some democratic elements, such as a level of freedom of speech which is already impossible in other regions of Russia. In addition, there are several cases where Dagestani society has actively, energetically and courageously asserted its own interests, including in conflicts with the republic's authorities and power structures. At any rate, in the context of its ethnic, community, religious and, in particular, family groups, Dagestani society is characterised by close solidarity and is able to mobilise quickly for protests.

The standard of living in the republic, however, is one of the very lowest in the Russian Federation.

As was traditionally the case, there is a high level of Islamic observance among the population of Dagestan that survived the militant atheism of the Soviet period.

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[centr.novosti/4330](http://centr.novosti/4330); <https://meduza.io/news/2016/02/25/advokaty-obvinyaemogo-po-delu-ob-ubiystve-nemtsova-pozhalovalis-v-espch>.

In **2010-2012** a new model of collaboration between the authorities and society was introduced, in the context of the fight against the armed insurgency. It followed the fairly successful example of this approach by the President of the *Republic of Ingushetia*, **Yunos-Bek Yevkurov**. Attempts were made to carry out counter-terrorist operations in accordance with the law. A 'new deal' was designed to facilitate dialogue between the authorities and various sections of society and encourage the authorities to work together with human rights activists. An important component of this approach was the start of talks between the spiritual leader of the Sufi Muslims in Dagestan and representatives of the republic's Salafi communities.<sup>103</sup> The head of Dagestan, **Magomedsalam Magomedov**, created a Commission for Adaptation to Civilian Life for Those who Decide to Cease Terrorist or Extremist Activity (the Commission for Adaptation).<sup>104</sup> That was when the trend changed from a growth in activity of the insurgency (judged by the number of deaths of soldiers and law enforcement agencies' staff), to a decline. But this tendency developed significantly more slowly than in Ingushetia. The 'new deal' encountered opposition from members of the security services who did not want to abandon the methods of State terror, and the insurgency carried out terrorist acts whenever there was a prospect of success in the dialogue between representatives of the Sufi and Salafi Muslim communities.<sup>105</sup>

With the arrival in **January 2013** of the new head of Dagestan, **Ramazan Abdulatipov**, this policy was firmly rejected and there was a return to an exclusive reliance on brute force, often by illegal means. The Dagestan Republic's Commission for Adaptation was closed down or, to be more precise, transformed into a new structure designed to solve a very wide range of conflicts. Essentially, however, nothing remained of the previous mechanism which had functioned effectively.

### ***'Mopping-up operations' in villages and towns***

In Dagestan, beginning in **2013** and continuing in **2014**, 'mopping-up operations' took place in villages and towns, reminiscent of similar special operations during the Second Chechen War, involving gross violations of the law and of the rights of local inhabitants.

One example is the series of operations carried out in the settlement of *Maidanskoe* and in the village of *Vremennyi* in the *Untsukul'skii district* of *Dagestan*. In both cases, according to official sources, small groups of insurgents were hiding in villages and resisted, using armed force, when they were discovered. Interviews with witnesses and visits to the places where the events occurred<sup>106</sup> allowed us to reach the conclusion that these statements were correct. In some cases, members of the illegal armed groups found shelter in population centres where some local inhabitants helped the insurgents, whether voluntarily or under duress. Memorial Human Rights Centre does not doubt in the slightest the necessity of combatting terrorists and illegal armed

<sup>103</sup> In the Republic of Dagestan, a regional law formally bans "Wahhabism", which is also called Salafism (for the text of the law, see: <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/9315>). The law does not refer explicitly to so-called "Wahhabism". A very large number of members of Dagestan's Salafi communities would be unlikely to agree that they are "Wahhabis".

<sup>104</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/176479>.

<sup>105</sup> <http://memohrc.org/reports/novyy-kurs-magomedova-situaciya-s-pravami-cheloveka-i-popytki-konsolidacii-obshchestva-v>.

<sup>106</sup> Memorial Human Rights Centre staff visited the village of *Vremennyi* several times.



groups. We consider that the State is obliged to use force to fight such evil. However, even the most noble purpose cannot justify illegal and cruel actions by members of the security services.

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A 'mopping-up operation' took place *from 1 to 9 July 2014* in the mountain village of Maidanskoe (which has about 2,000 inhabitants). The village was completely cordoned-off and security forces repeatedly carried out house-to-house checks.<sup>107</sup> The reason for such thorough identity checks, according to the security forces, was that they had received operational information that insurgents from the Balakhaninsky group had recently held a gathering, a *shura*, in the village.<sup>108</sup>

A clash took place during the operation. According to official data, insurgents who were in a house at the edge of the village suddenly opened fire on the security services on *6 July* in the afternoon. One police officer, **Aleksandr Gladchenko** from *Khabarovsk*, who had been deployed to Dagestan, died, and four police officers were injured. Three militants, members of the Balakhaninsky group,<sup>109</sup> were killed and were identified as residents of *Balakhan* who had taken 'to the forest' [become insurgents] a long time previously. Local residents who were questioned by Memorial Human Rights Centre staff confirmed that this clash had taken place.

Similarly, according to official accounts, during an attempt to escape from the cordoned-off zone *during the night of 7-8 July*, another four insurgents, who all lived in the village of Maidanskoe, were killed. However, numerous eye-witnesses denied this. They said that four village residents - **Gadzhimurad Magomedov**, **Ahmed Gitinov**, **Magomedrasul** and **Magomed Paizullaev** - were detained by security forces in front of witnesses, but were later declared to have 'died during an armed attempt to escape'. Unable to deny the obvious, police then gave the following version of events to a correspondent from the *Caucasian Knot* news website: '*Once police officers had established the identity of all those detained and taken to our headquarters, which are situated in a school, everyone was released and allowed home. There was operational information that they might be involved with aiding and abetting members of the 'Balakhaninsky' group, but this was not proved. It turned out that after they had been released to go home, they joined up with members of the illegal armed groups and were killed during a special operation.*'<sup>110</sup> The absurdity of this version was obvious - why would someone who had been checked and released by security forces choose not to go home but instead fetch a weapon from some secret hiding place in the village - which was full of police officers - and fight to break out of the blockaded village?

The special operation in Maidanskoe was accompanied by the blowing up of homes, just as had happened previously during 'mopping-up operations' in the *village of Gimry* and then in the town of *Buinaksk*, where houses were blown up on the pretext that explosive devices had

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<sup>107</sup>For further details about the 'mopping-up operation' in Maidanskoe, see Memorial Human Rights Centre's newsletter: <http://memohrc.org/uploads/files/1385.pdf>.

<sup>108</sup> *Novoye Delo*, 14.7.2014.

<sup>109</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2521070>

<sup>110</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/245699>.

been found in them.<sup>111</sup> By the evening of **8 July** police officers had blown up seven houses in Maidanskoe. The eighth building to be blown up was the madrassa, a prefabricated house next door to the village's Juma mosque. It was destroyed with a grenade launcher.

One day during the 'mopping-up operation', police officers brutally beat up the head of the village administration, **Abu-Hasan Nurmagomedov**.

During the special operation there were mass detentions of men living in Maidanskoe. Some of those detained were beaten up. Most of the detainees were released quickly, but four, including the imam of a local mosque, were subsequently arrested. The investigation and trial were carried out in an unprecedentedly short period, less than two months. They were found guilty of aiding and abetting the insurgents, but the sentence passed was surprisingly lenient: between 18 months and 2 years' imprisonment in a prison colony. Courts usually pass sentences like this when there is no evidence at all of the guilt of those accused.

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The 'mopping-up operation' in the village of *Vremennyi* in *Untsukul'skii district* lasted more than two months (!). On **24 September 2014**, during a visit to the capital of the *Republic of Dagestan*, the representative of the President of the Russian Federation in the *North Caucasus Federal District*, **Sergei Melikov**, said: *'We have moved away from large-scale use of armed forces and military units. Today, precise blows can be applied to armed, insurgent underground groups, and the battle can be fought by law enforcement officers. In the same way, we try not to affect peaceful civilians or infringe their rights, and we especially strive to protect the civilian population from suffering casualties.'*<sup>112</sup> Meanwhile, the methods used during the large-scale special operation in the village of *Vremennyi* were in flagrant contradiction with the principles declared by President's representative.

On **18 September 2014**, soldiers and police encircled the village<sup>113</sup> and dozens of armoured vehicles took up position. The following day, security forces entered the village and a

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<sup>111</sup><http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnem-kavka-5>. Under President Abdulatipov, police officers in Dagestan adopted an illegal practice used by their colleagues in Chechnya: destroying the homes of families of people suspected of being involved with the illegal armed groups. They first tried out this 'method of combating terrorism' in **2013** during a 'mopping-up operation' in the mountain village of *Gimry*, and subsequently in the town of *Biunaksk*. On **6 May 2013** in *Biunaksk*, police officers blew up three houses belonging to families of people alleged to be involved with the illegal armed groups. They said that the houses were destroyed by hand-made explosive devices which bomb disposal teams found in the houses but considered too dangerous to remove and transport. However, the facts of the matter indicate that this was an exemplary campaign of revenge and intimidation. As local residents told Memorial Human Rights Centre staff, security forces entered buildings that morning and immediately began driving inhabitants out onto the street, without any explanation, saying: "Take your passports and money with you!" The owners of the houses were not let back into their houses, but virtually no searches took place. Bomb disposal teams entered a house, did something there before leaving, and then there was an explosion. Then the same thing happened again in another house. At the gate of one of the houses which was blown up, police officers stuck a photograph of the owners' son who was apparently 'in the forest.'

<sup>112</sup>[http://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/politics/s\\_melikov\\_v\\_dagestane\\_planomerno\\_osushchestvlyayet\\_sya\\_kompleksnyy\\_plan\\_protivodeystviya\\_ideologii\\_terrorizma/](http://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/politics/s_melikov_v_dagestane_planomerno_osushchestvlyayet_sya_kompleksnyy_plan_protivodeystviya_ideologii_terrorizma/).

<sup>113</sup><http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-posle-zachistki-v-poselke-vremenny-ostalis-tolko-zhenshchiny-i-deti>.

full-scale ‘mopping-up operation’ began. In the first few days, all residents were forced to undergo identity checks: their documents were reviewed in the fire station, and many people had their fingerprints, DNA samples and photographs taken. Women were generally allowed to return home afterwards, but the security forces told most men to leave the village, sometimes not letting them go home first to pick up essentials, or even clothes.

The only men left in Vremennyi were men who worked nearby at either Gimrinskii tunnel or Irganaiskii hydroelectric power station. The remaining residents were forbidden to move around the village. Security forces even stopped them from going to the chemist’s or to the shop. Homes began to be searched. Security officers behaved rudely and provocatively. They insulted residents and broke expensive appliances such as fridges and washing machines in a defiant, mocking way, rendering them unusable. Around **6 October**, all remaining residents of the village were forced to leave their homes.<sup>114</sup>

No temporary accommodation was provided for any of the residents of the village of Vremennyi who were driven out of their homes during September-October, as required by the Russian Federation law ‘On combating terrorism’. Later, responses from the public prosecutor’s office and the Investigative Committee claimed that village residents had been offered accommodation by the district administration in tents at a health complex or at a base for young naturalists. However, neither the head of the village administration, nor expelled residents, ever heard any such proposals.

Mass media, quoting sources in the law enforcement agencies, reported that two hidden bunkers with armed men inside were found in the village.

On **2 October** a group of people who were blockaded in one of the bunkers resisted. One riot police officer was wounded during the fight. According to official figures, seven alleged militants were killed. An inspection by Memorial Human Rights Centre staff at the location where these events took place, and accounts which staff collected from eye witnesses, suggest that an armed clash did indeed occur. A local woman resident whom we interviewed saw three charred bodies, apparently those of dead insurgents.

On **15 October** another blockaded group of three people surrendered to the security forces. They were detained and driven away in an unknown direction.<sup>115</sup>

On **26 November 2015** the counter-terrorist state of emergency on the territory of Untsukul’skii district was lifted and the inhabitants of the village of Vremennyi gradually began to return home. They could hardly believe what they saw there.

Many houses had been razed to the ground during the special operation. Domestic appliances and electronics, furniture and homemade foodstuffs had been taken away. Many premises had been destroyed and often crudely vandalised. It goes without saying that there was no justification for this behaviour. Not only private homes and flats had been wrecked and looted, but also public buildings such as a school, a rural medical centre and a hospital. Security forces had dug up the whole village using excavators while searching for bunkers and militants. Why was it necessary to level orchards with bulldozers and why had local residents’ possessions

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<sup>114</sup>Ibid.

<sup>115</sup><http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/250957>.

been taken from the deserted houses, thrown into specially dug holes and mixed up with earth?<sup>116</sup>

One of the detainees disappeared without trace.

A special commission was appointed after numerous appeals and complaints by local residents about the security forces' actions and after a meeting between Vremennyi village residents and the head of the Republic of Dagestan to assess the damage caused by the special operation. Residents were promised 50,000 roubles in compensation for damage to their property and 100,000 roubles if their house was completely destroyed. This level of compensation was obviously nowhere near enough to cover the damage.

Despite rulings by the public prosecutor's office, the Investigative Committee of the Russian Federation has so far repeatedly, unlawfully, refused to open a criminal case into members of the security forces for exceeding their official powers and has ignored the looting. *By the end of spring 2016*, no one had received any compensation.

The victims' representative - a lawyer who works with Memorial Human Rights Centre - filed a complaint about the Investigative Committee's inaction.

Furthermore, on *20 October 2014*, Memorial Human Rights Centre sent an open letter to the head of the Republic of Dagestan, **R.G.Abdulatipov**, drawing his attention to the mass and gross violation of human rights during the 'mopping-up operation' in villages and towns in *Untsukul'skii district*.<sup>117</sup> We have not received any substantive reply.

However, *in 2015 and the first half of 2016*, no more large-scale 'mopping-up operations' have taken place. Perhaps this was due to the attention paid to the events in Vremennyi by human rights defenders, as well as numerous publications in the Dagestani and federal mass media.

### ***The 'Gimry agreement': an attempt by the authorities to conduct a dialogue with rural communities in Dagestan***

The leadership of Dagestan apparently believed it was necessary to supplement the 'hard line' towards 'problematic' villages with a system of agreements between authorities at different levels and the rural communities that involved the parties in taking on certain commitments.

On *6 February 2014* the first such agreement was signed, a quadripartite agreement between the Dagestani authorities, the Untsukul'skii district administration, the administration of *Gimry* and the community of that village.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-itogi-specoperacii-v-poselke-vremennyy-foto;>  
<http://www.novayagazeta.ru/society/68040.html>.

<sup>117</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/obrashchenie-k-rg-abdulatipovu>.

<sup>118</sup> For further details, see: <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/byulleten-pravozashchitnogo-centra-memorial-situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavka-1>.

Gimry was purposely chosen as the test bed for a new type of agreement. The powerful Gimry insurgent group was based in and around the village. In **April 2013**, police officers carried out a 'mopping-up operation' in Gimry which lasted several days. All villagers without exception were pushed out of the village during the operation, dozens of homes were intentionally destroyed or badly damaged, and property was looted. At the end of the operation, security forces remained in the village on a permanent basis, taking over premises at the local hospital and school.

The February agreement spelled out the obligations of the population of Gimry. The main obligations were as follows: to take all legal measures to return those people from the village who were involved with the illegal armed groups to peaceful civilian life; to work together with law enforcement agencies to prevent people linked to insurgents or their accomplices from entering the village; and to assist law enforcement agencies during counter-terrorist operations in the village. In addition, Gimry residents undertook to create an armed militia in the village, carry out propaganda work to turn young people against the illegal armed groups, and send young people to the law enforcement bodies to take part in maintaining public order. (Not a single Gimry resident has served with the police so far, however.)

In turn, the head of Dagestan undertook to solve the village's acute social problems, which the authorities had neglected for decades. The government of the Republic of Dagestan undertook to include construction of a hospital, polyclinic and kindergarten, as well as riverbank reinforcement works, in the Russian Federation and Republic of Dagestan investment programmes for **2014-2016**. The government of the Republic promised to allocate funds for repairs to be carried out in **2014** to the House of Culture community centre and to the mains water pipe, and to provide a bus for the local school. The authorities promised to help in the organisation of small industries for processing agricultural products, stone production, and recreational camps for children.

The signing of a special agreement between the authorities of the Republic and an individual village was something new in Dagestan. The head of Dagestan, R. Abdulatipov, said that this model of interaction between the authorities and rural communities could be adopted as a basis for relations with other municipal bodies. He instructed the government to work out similar agreements with *Tsuntinskii*, *Tsumadinskii* and *Tabasaranskii* districts, and then with other districts.<sup>119</sup>

But this initiative was never followed up properly by the Republic's authorities and there have been no other agreements with individual settlements. This is possibly because the government of the republic somehow failed to live up to its promises to residents of one village, Gimry.

To date, the hospital is still housed in the same old, inadequate building with a leaky roof where staff heat up water with kettles. Above it, on a precipice, like a symbol, like a fortress, stands a splendid, well-equipped hospital building made of brick, occupied by the security forces in **2013**.

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<sup>119</sup> [http://kavpolit.com/articles/podpisano\\_soglashenie\\_po\\_voprosam\\_vzaimodejstviya-261](http://kavpolit.com/articles/podpisano_soglashenie_po_voprosam_vzaimodejstviya-261).



No polyclinic has been built either. Work began on renovating the House of Culture community centre, but stopped due to lack of funding. There are no investment programmes to organise small industries for processing agricultural products or stone, and no recreational camps for children from Gimry. Conservation work has not taken place along the river banks, nor did any money come through to repair or construct irrigation channels for local agriculture.

However, some things did get done: the village was presented with a school bus and the kindergarten is currently still being built (more than two years after the agreement was signed!) .

### ***The 'watch list'***

The practice of exerting 'preventative' pressure on members of the Salafi community has gained momentum over the past three years. With no legitimate reason, law enforcement officers have repeatedly detained worshippers on their way out of Salafi mosques, as well as people in cafés where Salafis met up (often with their families). The detainees were taken to police stations where they had to show their ID and were forced to have their photographs and fingerprints taken; sometimes DNA samples were taken too. Information about the detainees was put into a database. Detentions like this were not usually documented: security officials called them an 'invitation to have a chat', as if attendance was voluntary. Usually the detainee was released after no more than three hours, but the consequences of such 'preventative measures' were usually long-lasting and highly unpleasant.

There is a widespread practice of putting adherents of 'Wahhabism' onto a so-called 'watch list' by adding their details to a special database.<sup>120</sup> All it takes to be put on this watch list is to be detained once during a police raid on Salafi mosques, or having a beard, or being a victim of a denunciation. People on the watch list have not been accused of any crime by law enforcement authorities. No criminal cases have been initiated against them. However, people who are on the watch list are frequently detained when passing through police checkpoints and are often taken to the nearest police station. They are then asked to explain where they are going and why, who are the members of their family, which mosque they go to and what they think of 'Wahhabism'. In addition, they have their photographs and fingerprints taken again, as well as DNA samples. These procedures are carried out whenever there are new detentions, sometimes several times a day. People have sometimes been summoned to the police station many times for 'a chat' or for new DNA samples and fingerprinting. Sometimes they have been prevented from leaving Dagestan and have been put under surveillance, and so on. Preventative measures against extremism and terrorism have therefore been transformed into a set of pointless actions which show a contemptuous attitude to citizens.<sup>121</sup>

Many thousands of people are already on the watch list. Police officers who are seconded to Dagestan from other regions of Russia are surprised to find that such a large number of the

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<sup>120</sup> Memorial Human Rights Centre received the following response from the Interior Ministry of the Republic of Dagestan: such citizens are "justifiably put on the centralised watch list under the category of 'Wahhabis'."

<sup>121</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-antikonstitucionnaya-praktika-profilakticheskogo-ucheta-grazhdan-prodolzhaetsya>; <http://memohrc.org/special-projects/dagestan-postanovka-na-profuchet-delo-alhasova>; <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-izdevatelskaya-praktika-profilakticheskogo-ucheta>.

Republic's residents are on the watch list. They say there are neither enough police officers nor enough time to carry out all the procedures required according to instructions.

In reporting on their work to prevent terrorism and extremism, the Dagestani authorities state that in Dagestan in **2015** more than 2,500 targeted 'preventative chats' took place, together with over 1,700 public events focussed on anti-terrorism, including forums, community gatherings and round-table discussions, involving more than 370,000 participants.<sup>122</sup> It is important to realise that most of these activities are either purely formal and bureaucratic in nature or of the type of security-related event described above, which actually only contribute to the radicalisation of sectors of Dagestan's population.

### ***Pressure on Salafi mosques***

It would seem that 'preventative action' of this type, along with a campaign to close Salafi mosques or 'wean' people in Dagestan away from them, began in **November 2015**. Thirteen 'preventative actions' took place over the following five months. The authorities may have hoped to defeat the Salafi communities easily, but they are hampered by typical aspects of community life in Dagestan, which are unique in today's conditions of authoritarian power: a long tradition of community-based decision-making and direct democracy has been preserved, as well as a relatively free press.

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To start with, an attempt was made to replace the imam of the Makhachkala mosque on *Kotrova Street (the An-Nadyriia mosque)*, which is popular with Dagestani Salafis. The authorities subsequently closed it down completely.

On Friday **20 November 2015** a few hundred armed security personnel turned up at the mosque. Some of them were wearing masks and some were in camouflage uniform, while others were in plain clothes. When prayers ended, the security forces began to detain young men as they left the mosque. They were taken to the police station where they were held for several hours. Besides these 'typical' aspects of a raid, there was something new: when the mosque was nearly empty, up to 200 adherents of the Sufi branches of Islam approached the mosque. Some of them went into the mosque building while others remained in the courtyard outside. Again police forces were brought up and deployed.

The people who entered the mosque claimed to act on behalf of the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Dagestan (DUMD in Russian). They said that the Mufti of Dagestan (who is in fact the chair of the DUMD) had offered to replace the imam of the mosque and that they nominated him for the post. According to witnesses, DUMD supporters beat up

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<sup>122</sup> [http://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/politics/s\\_uchastiem\\_sergeya\\_melikova\\_obsuzhdeny\\_itogi\\_deyatelnosti\\_antiterroristicheskoy\\_komissii\\_v\\_respublike\\_dagestan](http://www.riadagestan.ru/mobile/news/politics/s_uchastiem_sergeya_melikova_obsuzhdeny_itogi_deyatelnosti_antiterroristicheskoy_komissii_v_respublike_dagestan).



people who tried to get back into the mosque.<sup>123</sup> The new arrivals said: 'The authorities have set a condition: either close the mosque or the Spiritual Administration will appoint the imam.'<sup>124</sup>

A fight started in the immediate area around the mosque. Police fired shots in the air to stop it.

The mosque has been virtually seized. A watch post was organised nearby, manned by strong young men from among the DUMD supporters; police were constantly present too.

However, with the 'election' (or rather, the appointment) of the new imam, strange things began to happen. **Davud-Khadzhi Tumalaev**, Vice-Rector for public relations of the Dagestan Humanitarian Institute, who was appointed as imam on 20 November, was unexpectedly replaced after only a few days by decision of the Council of Muftis (muftiate). His replacement was **Mukhammadrasul Saaduev**, imam of the Central Juma Mosque in Makhachkala.<sup>125</sup> It remained unclear how he would be able to lead prayers simultaneously in two mosques. Three days later the DUMD's website reported that the Council of Muftis had released Saaduev from his post as imam of the An-Nadyriia mosque '*with the aim of allowing the congregation [jamat] of the mosque a completely free choice in selecting a new imam.*'<sup>126</sup>

It seemed that reason had prevailed, and the congregation were to be allowed to elect the imam themselves<sup>127</sup>. But on **30 November** the mosque was cordoned off again by the security forces, allegedly because of a bomb scare. There turned out not to be a bomb, but as of the release of this report the mosque remains closed and is constantly guarded by police.

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Who initiated the capture and later the closure of the mosque?

Saaduev, on the eve of his short-lived appointment as imam of the Kotrova Street mosque, held a press conference in Makhachkala at which he tried to explain the Council of Muftis' position. He said that the security forces and Dagestani authorities had given an ultimatum to the Council of Muftis: either replace the imam immediately or the mosque will be closed. The muftis were therefore forced to replace the imam to avoid the mosque being

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<sup>123</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-zaderzhany-prihozhane-dvuh-mechetey-mahachkaly>; <http://ndelo.ru/news/politika/1075>.

<sup>124</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-zaderzhany-prihozhane-dvuh-mechetey-mahachkaly>.

<sup>125</sup> <http://muftiyatrd.ru/content/muhammadrasul-hadzhi-saaduev-naznachen-imamom-v-mecheti-nadyriyya>; <http://chernovik.net/content/politika/operaciya-kotrovanash>.

<sup>126</sup> <http://muftiyatrd.ru/content/reshenie-muftiyata-rd>.

<sup>127</sup> According to Sharia law, the imam of a mosque is chosen by the congregation or by their authorised representative or by the mosque council (the shura). The Council of Muftis can only nominate candidates for approval by the community and, in practice, this decision is often a formality. But in conflict situations, as in this case, it is of fundamental importance. The people who seized the mosque on Kotrova Street on the evening of 20 November evening merely imitated the voting procedure. In any case, an imam appointed by force would not have any authority and would not command the congregation's respect, and so would be unable to have a positive influence on the congregation.

closed.<sup>128</sup> According to Saaduev, the Council of Muftis had no plans to take control of any other mosques.

The Dagestani authorities strongly refuted Saduev's version of events<sup>129</sup>, but subsequent events suggest that it was correct. The hand of the security forces could be clearly seen during new attempts at closing mosques, each time using the Council of Muftis as a cover. For now, the Council of Muftis is unwilling to take responsibility for these outrageous actions which undermine the situation in Dagestan. They have not supported the local administrations in the villages and towns where such events have occurred.

We shall take a closer look at two typical examples of partially successful mosque closures<sup>130</sup>: in the village of *Shamkhal* and the town of *Khasavyurt*.

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In the village of *Shamkhal* (located 8 km from Makhachkala, but administratively belonging to the city's *Kirov district*) there are four mosques: three Sufi mosques and one Salafi mosque, next to the train station. On a regular basis 350-400 people attend the Station Mosque. The imam, **Valya Mukhammad**, has not had any conflict with the authorities or with representatives of the DUMD. Nonetheless, at *the end of January 2016*, Shamkhal police station warned worshippers that in the near future they intended to close the mosque down. No real explanation was given. Next, the imam of Shamkhal's Central Mosque, a Sufi mosque, came to the meeting between police and worshippers, and essentially acted as a mediator, carrying out the security forces' instructions. He said that he could help keep the Salafi mosque open on condition that 'his' candidate was nominated as the new imam. The mosque congregation (*jamat*) suggested a compromise: the community would continue to have the right to choose the new candidate for imam themselves, with subsequent discussion and approval of the candidate by the mufti of Dagestan. This did not seem to satisfy the security officials present.

In Friday *29 January* armoured personnel carriers and Ural military trucks drove up to the village, transporting soldiers and police officers. Security forces cordoned off the mosque and refused entry to worshippers. This caused outrage among the congregation. After lengthy negotiations, the situation ended with a compromise: the mosque was not closed, but was left as a prayer house, without an imam.<sup>131</sup> Any Muslim can pray there except for Friday collective prayers. The situation in Shamkhal has thus become somewhat less tense.

The mayor of Shamkhal, **Magomed Tagirov**, described the congregation of Station Mosque only in positive terms when he talked to a member of Memorial Human Rights Centre. He said that there had never been a problem with this mosque: the congregation was actively involved in the life of the village, they took part in voluntary work to keep the village tidy and helped other residents. The worshippers at Station Mosque, for their part, said that they intended

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<sup>128</sup> Chernovik, 27.11.2015 <http://chernovik.net/content/politika/operaciya-kotrovanash>; *Kommersant*, 24.11.2015 <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2861649>.

<sup>129</sup> Chernovik, 27.11.2015 <http://chernovik.net/content/politika/operaciya-kotrovanash>.

<sup>130</sup> For further details, see: <http://memohrc.org/bulletins/situaciya-v-zone-konflikta-na-severnom-kavkaze-ocenka-pravozashchitnikov-zima-2015-2016-gg>.

<sup>131</sup> This was still the case when this report was written.

to preserve their mosque by legal means and were ready to offer the post of imam to one of the congregation, *‘and let the Mufti check whether he has the necessary knowledge.’*<sup>132</sup>

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Similarly, an attempt to close the mosque in *Khasavyurt*, in the *Severnyi (Northern) micro-district*, which authorities also consider to be Salafi, was ended thanks to negotiations. In the evening of **31 January**, police put a lock on the mosque door<sup>133</sup> and said that the mosque’s activities were suspended, since the plot of land where the mosque stood had supposedly been allocated for the construction of residential housing rather than a mosque.

On **1 February**, after an appeal on social networks, the congregation of the ‘Severnyi’ mosque, together with representatives of Salafi communities in other town and villages in Dagestan, gathered in the second Salafi mosque in Khasavyurt, in the *Vostochnyi (Eastern) micro-district*. After the evening prayers (*namaz*), a crowd of up to 10,000 people<sup>134</sup>, crying ‘*Allah akbar!*’ and other Islamic slogans, made their way to the offices of the municipal administration. The protest was led by **Magomednabi Magomedov**<sup>135</sup>, the recently elected imam of the Vostochnyi mosque and chair of Khasavyurt’s Council of Imams. *‘It is worth noting that the participants did not heckle, make demands, chant slogans or do anything else to call for disobedience’*, the town administration’s website reported with relief, meaning that the protest had not become political. But many thousands of people crying ‘*Allah akbar!*’ did make a strong impression in Dagestan, among both supporters and opponents of Salafism.

On the same day, a delegation of believers began negotiations with the town administration. The report about this on the administration’s website ends aphoristically: *‘Khasavyurt would not be Khasavyurt if we couldn’t resolve such issues through dialogue, leading to compromise.’*<sup>136</sup> It was reported that both sides admitted errors, such as the closure of the mosque and the retaliatory rally, respectively. At the talks, members of the delegation from the congregation of the closed mosque conducted themselves in a demonstratively polite manner, so as not to provoke acts of force against those they were representing. The town administration stressed firmly that it had not been involved in the incident. The DUMD behaved in the same way, stating that the closure of the Severnyi mosque in Khasavyurt had taken place without the spiritual leadership’s intervention, and saying that the Council of Muftis had only found out about it the following morning.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-popytka-zakrytiya-privokzalnoy-mecheti-v-poselke-shamhal>.

<sup>133</sup> *Novoye delo*, 6.2.2016 <http://ndelo.ru/news/obshchestvo/1516/>.

<sup>134</sup> Khasavyurt’s town administration said there had been “over a thousand” people. The press gave a considerably higher estimate of the number of participants: 5,000 to 10,000 people (*Kavpolit*, 1.2.2016 [http://kavpolit.com/articles/zhiteli\\_hasavjurma\\_trebujut\\_u\\_administratsii\\_gorod-23132/](http://kavpolit.com/articles/zhiteli_hasavjurma_trebujut_u_administratsii_gorod-23132/); *Chernovik*, 5.2.2016 <http://chernovik.net/content/respublika/klyuch-ot-problemy>; *Dagestan sevodnya*, 1.2.2016 <http://dagestan-today.com/socium/7735-vlasti-hasavyurta-otkryli-zakrytuyu-nakanune-mechet.html>). A video of the event is available at the following link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayHhXJoEGKQ>.

<sup>135</sup> *Chernovik*, 5.2.2016 <http://chernovik.net/content/respublika/klyuch-ot-problemy>.

<sup>136</sup> Website of the town of Khasavyurt: 1.2.2016 <https://xacavurt.ru/news/1376-hasavyurt-cherez-dialog-k-kompromissu.html>.

<sup>137</sup> *Novoye delo*, 6.2.2016 <http://ndelo.ru/news/obshchestvo/1516/http://ndelo.ru/news/obshchestvo/1516/>.

So far as we know, the congregation of Severnyi mosque agreed with the administration that the mosque will operate as a prayer house until the necessary authorisation documents have been prepared.<sup>138</sup> On **3 February 2016** the congregation of Severnyi mosque elected a new imam, **Arsen Shushaev**.<sup>139</sup>

It may be considered that once again reason prevailed, and that a compromise had been successfully achieved.

Note that Salafis now consider 'their' mosque a 'buffer' between 'official' Islam under the auspices of the DUMD, on the one hand, and the fundamentalist underground movement, on the other. Thanks to this, as the Dagestani weekly newspaper *Chernovik* notes, '*Young Salafi Muslims have managed to create a new path for themselves - living harmoniously in the surrounding society whilst adhering to the principles of their beliefs and religious practice*'.<sup>140</sup>

The leader of Khasavyurt's Salafi community, **Magomednabi Magomedov**<sup>141</sup> has publicly and consistently spoken out to oppose violence and against Muslim young men going 'to the forest' or leaving for the Middle East. Similarly, in **December 2015**, the community council of Makhachkala's Tangim Salafi mosque, situated on Vengerskii Boitsov Street,<sup>142</sup> published on their Facebook page a selection of sayings by well-known contemporary Islamic scholars from a number of Muslim countries condemning the so-called Islamic State, Taliban, Al-Qaida<sup>143</sup> and other terrorist organisations.

However, it appears that Dagestan's progress in calming tensions has not satisfied powerful forces for whom the very idea of constructive dialogue between government and society is unacceptable.

### ***The arrest of imam Magomednabi Magomedov***

On Friday **8 April 2016** Magomednabi Magomedov was detained. The next day, following a court ruling, he was arrested. He was charged under Article 205.2, Section 1 (public calls to carry out terrorist activities or public justification of terrorism) and Article 282, Section 1 (incitement to hatred or hostility, as well as debasing human dignity) of the Russian Federation Criminal Code.

The very way in which the security forces behaved shows the deliberately provocative nature of their action.

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<sup>138</sup> *Chernovik*, 5.2.2016 <http://chernovik.net/content/respublika/klyuch-ot-problemy>; it was still functioning as a prayer house at the time when this report was written.

<sup>139</sup> *Kavkazsky uzel*, 3.2.2016 <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/276968/>.

<sup>140</sup> *Chernovik*, 5.2.2016 <http://chernovik.net/content/respublika/klyuch-ot-problemy>.

<sup>141</sup> For an interview with Magomednabi Magomedov about this and other events in Khasavyurt, see: <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-imam-vostochnoy-mecheti-hasavyurta-magomednabi-magomedov-rasskazal-sotrudniku>.

<sup>142</sup> In fact, since 2005 the street has officially been named after M. Omarov, a police general killed by militants that year, but the old name for the road continues to be more widely used.

<sup>143</sup> These organisations are banned in Russia.

On that day (8 April), on Magomednabi Magomedov's initiative, a regular meeting was held of the imams of Khasavyurt's mosques with representatives of the authorities. It was attended by the mayor, **Zainudin Okmazov**, his deputy, the town's prosecutor and the chair of the city court. No official from the town's police force was present. When the meeting ended, the building where it was held was unexpectedly cordoned off by armed, masked men. Their commander said that they had come to detain Magomednabi Magomedov. The head of the town administration went out to them and explained that there was no need to detain Magomednabi in that manner as he could go to the police station by himself. The masked men left, and Magomednabi and his lawyer went to Khasavyurt police station, where he was told that he was wanted for questioning over events at Khasavyurt town hospital in February.<sup>144</sup> An investigator began questioning Magomednabi, but after a short while some masked men came to the police station, overpowered Magomednabi and took him away. The interrogator contacted the prosecutor's office to find out who had taken away the man he was questioning and why. It soon transpired that the imam had been taken to *Makhachkala* to the Crime Investigations Department of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Federation Investigative Committee, where he was accused of offences under Article 205.1, Section 1, and Article 282, Section 1, of the Russian Federation Criminal Code. According to the prosecution, the imam gave a sermon on **5 February 2016** in which '*there were words and statements justifying terrorism and also intended to arouse hatred, debasing the dignity of an individual or a group of people in relation to their religious or belonging to a social group (representatives of the authorities and law enforcement agencies or Communists).*' It is true that during his Friday sermon that day (published online<sup>145</sup>) the imam had sharply criticised the authorities and the police for their attempts to close mosques, but he did not justify terrorism.

The next day, the court of *Makhachkala's Sovetskii district* remanded Magomednabi Magomedov in custody for two months, although his lawyer asked the court not to do so, saying that Magomedov was not going to go into hiding, was of good character and had young children to look after.

On **10 April** Magomedov was severely beaten by representatives of the authorities, including remand centre staff, in the remand centre (SIZO no.1) where he was being held. M. Magomedov was then transferred to the temporary detention facility (IVS) in the town of Kaspiisk, where his lawyer was not able to meet him until the evening of **13 April**. At his request a medical examination was conducted, and the doctor recorded the fact that there were bruises on Magomedov's body consistent with his having been beaten. The question of whether to initiate criminal proceedings is being considered.

## ***Continuing provocations***

Security officials continue to exert pressure on the Salafi community of Dagestan.

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<sup>144</sup> Regarding these events, see the following interview: <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-imam-vostochnoy-mecheti-hasavyurta-magomednabi-magomedov-rasskazal-sotrudniku>

<sup>145</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sP8EtGrl08>; <http://www.tube5.ga/video/-05022016/TqsXAz-QA0k>



On **8 April 2016** after Friday prayers in one of the smaller mosques in Khasavyurt, officers of the Dagestani police force began to detain worshippers once again, without any lawful reason. The police behaved rudely, which angered those present who then tried to stop police officers putting detainees into a police car. The police started shooting and, according to witnesses, they did not only shoot above people's heads, but even beside people's feet. A passerby was injured - a 47-year-old taxi driver named **Sirazhudin Biyarslanov**, who was taken to hospital in a critical condition.<sup>146</sup>

On **10 April, early in the morning**, drunken police officers entered the 'Tangim' Salafi mosque on *Vengerskikh Boitsov Street (Omarova Street) in Makhachkala*, without removing their dirty shoes. The police asked the whole congregation of the mosque to follow them immediately. When people protested, the police responded with abusive language, saying that they were carrying out their superiors' orders and were accountable to no one. A statement about this incident was posted on the mosque's official Facebook page.<sup>147</sup>

A member of the Public Chamber of Dagestan, founder of the *Novoye delo* newspaper, **Ahmed Chililov**, witnessed this event. It seems to have been his intervention which eventually persuaded the police to withdraw.

The mosque's leadership sent a statement to the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the police), the public prosecutor of Dagestan and the Investigative Committee. As of **mid-May 2016**, the leadership had received no response. When they telephoned the Department for Internal Security of the Dagestan Interior Ministry, a staff member replied that checks were continuing and that no decision had yet been taken.

On **15 April 2016**, five days after the first incident, there were more mass arrests of worshippers at the mosque on Vengerskikh Boitsov Street. In total, 200 people were detained.

On **11 May 2016**, **Magomed Magomedov**, an activist who was the spokesman for the mosque on Vengerskikh Boitsov Street, was detained while in the street in *Makhachkala*. He was taken to Sovetskii district police station. For two days the lawyer hired by his relatives was not allowed to meet him and, once he was able to meet with his client, it transpired that the detention order had been issued on **13 May**. His lawyer insisted that the detention date should be corrected. According to Magomedov, the detention was more like an abduction: security officers threw him into a GAZelle light truck, put a plastic bag over his head and drove him off in an unknown direction. They assaulted Magomedov in the truck, blaming him for contacting journalists and for his public appearances, including an interview given to *Dozhd* television station, where he talked about people being put on the 'watch list'. The security officers took Magomedov to an unknown place and began to question him, asking him to tell them the pin code of his mobile phone. When he refused they began to beat him. Back in the truck, they hung a heavy bag around his neck, put some sort of objects into the pockets of his trousers and told him to confess that he had had these things on him when he was searched, or else they would drive him out of town and kill him. At first Magomedov refused, but then he became scared that those who carried out the

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<sup>146</sup>See the following video clips: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Wlp-DSQkYw> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zgHB8wx3txc>.

<sup>147</sup>[https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story\\_fbid=567064786795331&id=304761999692279&pnref=story](https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=567064786795331&id=304761999692279&pnref=story).

abduction would implement their threat and so he agreed. Magomedov was then taken to Sovetskii district police station. However, he did not admit his guilt despite the pressure, and said that the items supposedly found in the body search did not belong to him. Nevertheless, Magomedov was charged under Articles 222 (illegal arms trafficking) and 228 (illegal possession of drugs) of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation.

On Friday **13 May 2016** more members of the congregation of the mosque on Vengerskikh Boitsov Street were detained. Around twenty people were taken to the police station but released after their documents had been checked.

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According to many experts, attempts to close Salafi mosques, a *de facto* ban on them holding collective prayers, arbitrary detention of worshippers and other crazy 'preventative' measures only provoke the radicalisation of Salafi young people who have lately demonstrated cohesion and the ability to mobilise on several occasions. The initiators of such provocative actions are likely to be found among the senior officers of the Interior Ministry of Dagestan, and they probably have a degree of support in Moscow.

However, in Dagestan, there is another opinion: that the initiator of these provocations is actually in Grozny. This is suggested by a number of facts to which we shall turn below.

## ***Abductions and enforced disappearances***

Over **2014-2016** abductions and enforced disappearances of residents of Dagestan continued. According to locals, members of the security forces were involved in most such cases.<sup>148</sup> Temporary disappearances became a regular occurrence, and those who disappeared were then accused of having committed a crime, to which they often 'confessed'. People disappeared without trace in far fewer cases; security forces sometimes claim to have found, during a clash with insurgents, the body of someone who had previously disappeared. Memorial Human Rights Centre has repeatedly drawn such cases to public attention.<sup>149</sup>

According to the National Anti-Terrorist Committee, two special operations took place on **26 April 2014** to 'neutralise' two closely-linked groups of insurgents. The special operations occurred in the *city of Derbent* at the intersection of *General Saidov Street* and *Narimanov Street*, as well as on *Kollektivnaya Street*. The people killed when resisting in a blockaded apartment on *Kollektivnaya Street* were formally identified. One of them was **Arif Mamaliev** who was declared in the official report to be an '*accomplice to militants*'.<sup>150</sup>

But Mamaliev, his relatives said in a statement to Memorial Human Rights Centre, was abducted from his home that day by representatives of unknown security forces before the eyes of numerous witnesses. The abduction happened around **10.30 p.m.**, and at **11:40 p.m.** he was

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<sup>148</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/212055.html>.

<sup>149</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/197596.html>, <http://www.memo.ru/d/219867.html>,  
<http://www.memo.ru/d/218995.html>, <http://www.memo.ru/d/197596.html>,  
<http://www.memo.ru/d/219233.html>.

<sup>150</sup> *Rossiiskaya gazeta*, 28.04.2014.



officially declared to have been killed in the special operation on Kollektivnaya Street. Official reports, however, indicated that the special operation on Kollektivnaya Street started at **4 p.m.** This begs the question: how could Mamaliev turn up in the blockaded apartment late at night, when he had been at his workplace, the Derbent locomotive depot, until **8 p.m.**? (He was an engineer in the occupational health and safety department there.)

The next day, **27 April**, Mamaliev's relatives were shown a photograph of his dead body. According to their statement, the photograph showed that the body had been burned, part of the head was missing and the remaining part of his head had clear signs of having been shot. But there was a wide swathe of intact skin on his chest, indicating that he had been tied up.

Mamaliev's friend **Zakir Magomedov** had been abducted together with him, but soon released. He did not want to talk to human rights activists about the incident.

Arif Mamaliev's relatives convincingly refute the security officials' version of events with regard to his death during the special operation, claiming that Mamaliev had been abducted and then brutally murdered.<sup>151</sup>

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On the evening of **2 March 2015**, local resident **Artyom Alkhasov** was abducted from the Dynamo Stadium in the centre of *Makhachkala*. Alkhasov was born in 1988 and was the son of **Gadzhikurban Alkhasov**, an editor for the Dagestan State television and radio company. According to witnesses, a car drove up from which unknown men jumped out; they pushed Alkhasov into the car and drove off in an unknown direction. On **4 March** it transpired that Artyom had been detained by police in the *Sovietskii district* of Makhachkala and charged with illegal possession of ammunition.<sup>152</sup>

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On **17 March 2015** in *Buinaksk*, local resident **Shamil' Magomedov** was abducted.<sup>153</sup> Eyewitnesses reported that unidentified people stopped his car that morning on *Kutuzov Street*, smashed the glass, pulled Shamil' out of the car and took him away to an unknown location. When his relatives reported the incident to Buinaksk police station, officers responded that they had not detained him. Only on **20 March** was **Selim Magomedov**, the lawyer hired by Shamil's relatives, able to establish that his client was in Buinaksk temporary detention facility (IVS) and meet with him. There were bruises on Magomedov's body and signs of electrocution. On **21 March**, Buinaksk District Court remanded Shamil Magomedov in custody on charges of possessing weapons. The case documents state that Magomedov was not detained in Buinaksk itself, as numerous witnesses have reported, but in Buinaksk district, where weapons were allegedly found on searching his car.

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<sup>151</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/197596.html>.

<sup>152</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/258279>; [http://flnka.ru/glav\\_lenta/8784-kto-pohischaet-lyudey-v-dagestane.html](http://flnka.ru/glav_lenta/8784-kto-pohischaet-lyudey-v-dagestane.html).

<sup>153</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/259085>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/259219>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/259271>.

On **18 and 19 May 2015**, three Derbent residents - **Zamir Pashaev**, born in 1984, **Magomedzhavad Khizriev**, born in 1968, and **Davud Sarukhanov**, born in 1995 - went missing under mysterious circumstances. The three knew each other, all attended a Salafi mosque, and were on the law enforcement agencies' watch list. Pashaev's relatives reported his disappearance to the police department in Derbent on **18 May**, and the relatives of Khizriev and Sarukhanov reported their respective disappearances on **21 May**.

According to the Crime Investigations Department of the Dagestan branch of the Russian Federation Investigative Committee, a clash took place with insurgents on the night of **27 May** in a wooded area near the village of *Akhnig* in *Kurakh district*, during which three alleged insurgents were killed. Relatives immediately identified one of the dead men as Zamir Pashaev, who had previously gone missing. They stated that there were marks on the body showing that he had been beaten.<sup>154</sup> The two other bodies were badly burned, but relatives were later able to identify them as Khizriev and Sarukhanov.

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On **2 August 2015**, 33-year-old **Magomed Gaikuev**, who lived in the village of *Andi* in *Botlikhsk district*, went missing. He looked after sheep in sheepfolds up in the mountains. His relatives reported his disappearance to the police department for Botlikhsk district. As Gaikuev later described himself, on that day he was waiting on the road for a passing car to give him a lift home. Two cars drew up next to him, going towards Chechnya. Three masked men got out of one of the cars, put a bag over his head, pushed him into the car and drove him away to an unknown place. There they showed him photographs and asked if he knew the people on the photos, while giving him electric shocks. Late at night on **8 August**, more masked men entered the room where Magomed Gaikuev was being held, put a bag over his head, put him into a car and took him back to his family's sheepfold early in the morning on **9 August**. They apologised to him and told him he was free.<sup>155</sup>

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On **20 October 2015**, police officers detained **Magomed Abdurakhmanov**, born in 1972. They took him to his home in the village of *Gotsatl'*, where they searched the premises, taking away a hunting rifle and bullets for it, which lawfully belonged to Magomed's grandfather. In addition, according to Magomed, they planted a package of marijuana on him. After the search, Abdurakhmanov was taken away, and his relatives were unable to find out what had happened to him for two days. They only found out on **22 October** that he was being held at the police department for *Khunzakhsk district*. On **23 October**, there was a hearing at Khunzakhsk district court to consider remanding Abdurakhmanov in custody with respect to the charges of drug possession. Magomed's relatives and acquaintances noticed that Magomed had to be carried into the courtroom — he was unable to walk independently. The court decided to release Abdurakhmanov on condition that he signed a document agreeing not to abscond, and he was thereupon released in the courtroom. Staff of Khunzakhsk police department asked Abdurakhmanov to go to the police station to collect his personal belongings. There, according

<sup>154</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-odin-iz-troih-ischeznuvshih-zhiteley-derbenta-nayden-ubitym>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/263012>.

<sup>155</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/266853>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/266910>.

to police, Magomed spoke to them abusively, and so they jailed him for an administrative offence. On **25 October**, as the jail term for the administrative offence was due to expire, Magomed's relatives went to Khunzakhsk police station, where they were told that Magomed had already been released. But he never came home. His relatives searched for him everywhere, but to no avail. Meanwhile, on **29 October**, Dagestan's Supreme Court quashed the district court's ruling, granted an appeal by the Prosecutor of Khunzakhsk district and ruled that Abdurakhmanov be remanded in custody for two months as a 'preventative measure'. Only then, on **2 November**, did Abdurakhmanov's relatives find out that he was again being held at the police department for Khunzakhsk district. He told the lawyer hired by his relatives that on 25 October he had been taken away with a bag over his head to an unknown location where he was subjected to electric shocks, while people told him to confess to aiding insurgents.<sup>156</sup>

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On **29 December 2015**, Makhachkala resident **Gadzhimurad Gazichilov** disappeared. He was a second cousin of **Shamil' Nurmagomedov**, leader of the Sogratlinskii insurgency group, killed during an exchange of fire with security forces on **27 December**. His relatives only found out on **6 January 2016** that he had been detained and was at the police station. He was charged with possessing weapons, a crime to which he had already confessed. On **8 January 2016**, Buinaksk municipal court remanded Gazichilov in custody for one month.<sup>157</sup>

### ***The fight against clans in Dagestan***

Another significant tendency in Dagestan in recent years has been the numerous resignations of high-ranking officials and heads of administrations of towns and districts, often accompanied by the filing of criminal cases against them, including on terrorism charges. The authorities have been forced to acknowledge that in Dagestan the insurgency underground is now firmly embedded in local corruption. As the Deputy Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation, **A. Buksman**, stated in **April 2014**, a proportion of the tens of billions of roubles withdrawn in cash from banks in Dagestan goes to finance insurgent operations.<sup>158</sup> A partial blending of ordinary criminality, the authorities and the terrorist underground has taken place. A 'mopping-up operation' targetting influential clans in Dagestan began in the **spring of 2013** with the deliberate rotation of mayors of districts and towns, but later the full scale of the operation became clear, as well as the fact that Moscow was directly involved.

In **June 2013**, **Said Amirov**, mayor of Makhachkala, was arrested. He was a very powerful, senior political heavyweight and head of a powerful mafia clan. He was captured and taken from his home by helicopter by a group of commandos sent from Moscow on **27 August 2015**. The North Caucasus Regional Military Court sentenced him to life imprisonment, declaring him guilty of terrorism. The court found that Amirov had organised the murder of a

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<sup>156</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-zhitel-hunzahskogo-rayona-ischez-posle-osvobozhdeniya-v-zale-suda>; <http://memohrc.org/news/dagestan-zhitel-hunzahskogo-rayona-obnaruzhen-v-otdele-policii-cherez-8-dney-posle>.

<sup>157</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/275528>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/275677>.

<sup>158</sup> <http://mahachkala.bezformata.ru/listnews/finansirovanie-bandpodpolya/19624250>.

member of Dagestan's Investigative Committee in **2011**, and also the shelling of the Moskva shopping and entertainment complex in the town of *Kaspiisk* the same year. Two accomplices of Amirov were given long prison sentences. Previously, Amirov had been found guilty of preparing a terrorist act<sup>159</sup> and illicit arms trafficking, and sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Subsequently, in **2015**, more arrests followed. The following people were dismissed from their posts and detained: **Marina Abramkina**, head of *Tarumovsk district*, and five of her subordinates (suspected of fraud and abuse of office); **Bagautdin Adzhamatov**, head of *Kizilyurt district* (forgery, bribes, abuse of official powers), and **Daniyal Shikhsaidov**, head of Buinaksk district (fraud on a large scale with the use of budgetary funds allocated to kindergartens). A search was also carried out at the house of D. Shikhsaidov's father, chair of Dagestan's National Assembly and Secretary-General of the regional office of the United Russia party **Khizri Shikhsaidov**. Faced with the threat of a criminal case being initiated against him, **Imam Yaraliev**, mayor of Derbent, was forced to resign. As the online publication *Kavkazskaya politika* noted, 'with the resignation of the mayor of Derbent, the era of municipal heavyweights in Dagestan has really come to an end'.<sup>160</sup> In most cases, district heads are under investigation for belonging to a criminal group in which officials of lower rank are usually involved too.

The most serious charges - of murder and of financing terrorism - have been brought against **Sagid Murtazaliev**, head of the Pension Fund of Dagestan, member of the Dagestan National Assembly and candidate for mayor of Makhachkala in Dagestan's forthcoming elections, and also against **Andrei Vinogradov**, head of administration in *Kizlyar district*. The investigators consider that over the two years **2009-2010**, Murtazaliev, while head of administration in Kizlyar district, settled his own personal scores with other district officials and members of the security forces with the help of hired insurgents, and that his subordinates Vinogradov and **Omar Asadulaev** acted as intermediaries in the transfer of payments for at least two contract killings.<sup>161</sup> Murtazaliev went into hiding abroad. On **27 July 2015**, Vinogradov was detained in Kizlyar, taken to Moscow and remanded in custody.

Dagestani officials talk proudly of the success of the major new anti-corruption campaign. The head of Dagestan, R. Abdulatipov, in his address to the National Assembly in **January 2015**, coined the expression 'cleansing and renewal'<sup>162</sup>, vowing that 'it will hurt' local leaders.<sup>163</sup>

However, not all political 'heavyweights' of previous decades are subject to such brutal treatment. For example, in **November 2015**, **Saigidpasha Umakhanov**, a thoroughly

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<sup>159</sup> He had made preparations for using a portable anti-aircraft missile to destroy a passenger plane in which Sagid Murtazaliev, head of the Pension Fund of Dagestan, was due to fly. Amirov and Murtazaliev were long-standing enemies.

<sup>160</sup> [http://kavpolit.ru/articles/vymuchennaja\\_derbentskaja\\_otstavka-19040/](http://kavpolit.ru/articles/vymuchennaja_derbentskaja_otstavka-19040/).

<sup>161</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2785624>.

<sup>162</sup> <http://president.e-dag.ru/novosti/v-centre-vnimanija/poslanie-glavy-dagestana-r-abdulatipova-narodnomu-sobraniyu-rd>.

<sup>163</sup> [http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/president/ramazan\\_abdulatipov\\_prinyal\\_uchastie\\_v\\_zasedanii\\_pravitelstva\\_respubliki\\_dagestan/?print=Y](http://www.riadagestan.ru/news/president/ramazan_abdulatipov_prinyal_uchastie_v_zasedanii_pravitelstva_respubliki_dagestan/?print=Y). Since then, Abdulatipov often has used the expression "cleansing and renewal" in his speeches and interviews. See, for example: <http://lenta.ru/articles/2015/08/20/dagestan/>; <http://president.e-dag.ru/novosti/v-centre-vnimanija/ramazan-abdulatipov-prinyal-uchastie-v-52-j-sessii-narodnogo-sobraniya-rd>.

‘authoritative’ figure in Dagestan, who was head of the town of *Khasavyurt* for nearly twenty years, was offered the post of Minister for Transport, Energy and Communications in Dagestan. Of course, this post is much less influential than the position of head of Khasavyurt, which has a population of 150,000 and has an extensive commercial centre and marketplaces.

**Zainudin Okmazov**, the new head of Khasavyurt, elected by deputies of the City Council, came from the same village as Umakhanov (and was apparently his protégé).

According to some reports, Umakhanov’s new appointment was the result of lengthy negotiations in which the head of Dagestan and federal structures participated.<sup>164</sup> It is possible that the long-standing animosity between Umakhanov and Kadyrov also contributed (more on this below).

What is the role of the head of Dagestan, Ramazan Abdulatipov, and his team, in all these goings-on? On the one hand, Abdulatipov certainly benefits from the ongoing ‘cleansing of the ranks’, thanks to which people leave the political scene after having played major roles in Dagestan politics for decades. But it would seem that not even he is always aware of what is happening and this makes him uneasy. For example, the detention of A. Vinogradov, head of Kizlyar district, and the attempt to detain S. Murtazaliev, head of the Pension Fund of Dagestan, were organised as a special operation by federal security forces, with the involvement of FSB special forces and a team from the Investigative Committee in *Mozdok (North Ossetia-Alania)*. Federal security forces facilitated loans of special equipment, including Tiger armoured cars brought through the territory of Chechnya into Dagestan, and helped with the dawn blockades of houses and subsequent attacks from several directions at once. Local law enforcement agencies did not participate in these activities.<sup>165</sup> The operation to detain D. Shikhsaidov, head of Buinaksk district, and his alleged accomplices, was carried out in a similar way: they were detained by FSB special forces and taken to Pyatigorsk.<sup>166</sup> The usual way of detaining officials would probably have been considerably more difficult, given that the officials live in reinforced, fenced premises with small armies of armed guards. It gives the impression that the head of Dagestan has to keep his distance from these events and avoid meddling with the federal centre (Moscow). He is slow to comment and often says that he personally has no grievances against the people detained, and that the crimes they are alleged to have committed took place before he came to work in Dagestan. Of course, the declared goal of fighting against corruption and ‘cleansing’ the ranks is just one side of the coin. The elimination of mafia clans would be good for the Republic of Dagestan. However, few people in Dagestan believe that a fight against crimes committed by the authorities has really been launched, a fight which would treat everyone equally. Instead, this campaign is considered to be an instrument to allow the federal centre to eliminate any clans which might become discontented and defiant in the face of the deepening economic crisis in Russia and the reduced flow of budgetary funds trickling down to them.

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<sup>164</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/273431>.

<sup>165</sup> <http://chernovik.net/content/politika/vozvrashchenie-vertolyota>.

<sup>166</sup> <http://chernovik.net/content/politika/izyuminka-vyborov>



## Ingushetia: an example of a successful policy of calming tensions?

Given the afore-mentioned trend towards the increasing use of force in the fight against the armed insurgency, an alternative approach by the authorities - less focused on armed clashes with terrorists and the illegal armed groups - is especially interesting. This approach is based primarily on genuine crime prevention and on finding a possible compromise, not with terrorists but with various law-abiding groups of society. We can point to the *Republic of Ingushetia* as the region where these measures have been applied most thoroughly.

It cannot be said, of course, that the use of force is absent from Ingushetia nor that the law is respected by all, at all times. During the **2014-2016** period, residents of Ingushetia repeatedly appealed to Memorial Human Rights Centre, complaining about the fabrication of criminal cases against their relatives.<sup>167</sup> There were also complaints about the use of torture against detainees by the security forces<sup>168</sup>, illegal searches and detentions.<sup>169</sup>

*On 22 March 2014*, in the rural settlement of *Plievo* in *Nazranovsk district* of the *Republic of Ingushetia*, two local residents - **Bashir Dyshnoev** and **Muslim Kuriev** - were killed during a special operation by Republic of Ingushetia FSB officers and the Russian Federation Interior Ministry. According to the official version, they were killed while an attempt was being made to detain them. Dyshnoev, according to security officials, was killed when an IED exploded, and Kuriev was killed while putting up armed resistance. The staff of Memorial Human Rights Centre investigated the circumstances of the special operation and concluded that Muslim Kuriev definitely did not participate in a shootout with security forces. The official version of the death of Bashir Dyshnoev is also in doubt.<sup>170</sup> The main role in this special operation appears to have been played by federal power structures not under the control of the government of Ingushetia.

The MASHR human rights organisation and its director **Magomed Mutsol'gov** have been blatantly harassed (see section on 'Increasing challenges faced by human rights activists' in this report).

In the fight against the armed insurgency, the head and government of Ingushetia continue to use a combination of law enforcement operations against insurgents and 'soft power'

<sup>167</sup> See, for example: <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-mat-prosit-zashchitit-syna>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-opravdannogo-po-delu-o-banditizme-obvinili-v-moshennichestve>

<sup>168</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-k-arestovannomu-poluchivshemu-travmy-ot-pytok-ne-dopuskayut-chlenov-onk-i>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-vozbuzhdeno-ugolovnoe-delo-po-faktu-nasiliya-so-storony-policeyskih>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-magomed-aushev-osvobozhden-pod-podpisku-o-nevyezde>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-rodstvenniki-magomeda-ausheva-obvinyaemogo-v-strelbe-na-svadbe-zhaluyutsya-na>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-zaderzhany-syn-ingushskogo-oppozicionera-i-troe-ego-znakomyh>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-zaderzhannaya-l-chemurzieva-zhaluetsya-na-nasilie-so-storony-silovikov>

<sup>169</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-nezakonno-zaderzhannogo-doprashivali-neskolko-chasov>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-zaderzhany-bratya-ubitogo-boevika>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/263946/>

<sup>170</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-specoperaciya-v-plieve-boestolknovenie-ili-karatelnaya-operaciya>.

methods. This policy on the part of the head and government of Ingushetia is bearing fruit. There were no cases of abductions or enforced disappearances in which there was reason to suspect the involvement of security forces during the 2014-2016 period, whereas there had been dozens previously.<sup>171</sup> As a result, Ingushetia has become a relatively calm region in recent years. Ingushetia was the 'hot spot' of the North Caucasus in the period **2008-2009** (see the section on 'The condition and activities of the armed insurgents' in this report), but by **2015** loss of life among the security forces due to the armed insurgency in the Republic fell by 118 (!) times (compared to the peak in **2009**). Such a reduction in insurgent activity has not been seen in any other republic of the North Caucasus. An important element in this policy has been played by the Commission for Adaptation to Civilian Life for Those who Decide to Cease Terrorist or Extremist Activity (the Commission for Adaptation), established in **2011** on the personal initiative of the head of Ingushetia, **Yunus-Bek Evkurov**. Commissions for Adaptation have been functioning in Ingushetia at the district level since **2012**.

Unlike similar commissions, the creation of which were announced in Dagestan and Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia's Commission for Adaptation still exists and meets regularly. The Commission met at three sessions in **2014: 26 February, 26 June and 15 December**.<sup>172</sup> Following the death in **August 2013**<sup>173</sup> of the head of Ingushetia's Security Council, **Akhmed Kotiev**, who had, in effect, directed the Commission's work for two years, in **February 2014** the first deputy-chair of the government of Ingushetia, **Khavazh-Bagaudin Darsigov**, was appointed as the new chair of the Commission for Adaptation.

The work of the Commission continued in **2015**<sup>174</sup>, and four meetings had been held by July.<sup>175</sup>

On **5 February 2015**, the cases of two men from Ingushetia who went to fight in Syria were referred to the Commission. The cases had previously been considered by the Commission for Adaptation of Malgobek district, which decided to apply to the Republican Commission for Adaptation for the two young men to be pardoned. The Republican Commission for Adaptation decided to apply to the Investigative Committee or, if the case by then had been taken to court, to the court for leniency to be shown to the two young men in sentencing them.

On **26 February 2015** there was only one issue on the Commission's agenda: a statement by a resident of the village of *Nesterovskaya* who was accused of aiding and abetting members of the illegal armed groups. Taking into account the fact that the man's case had already been

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<sup>171</sup> Memorial Human Rights Centre data: <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/66667.html>.

<sup>172</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/189782.html>; <http://www.memo.ru/d/202061.html>;  
<http://www.memo.ru/d/219261.html>.

<sup>173</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/170872.html>.

<sup>174</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/224862.html>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-zhene-boevika-otkazali-v-adaptacii-k-mirnoy-zhizni>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-komissiya-po-adaptacii-okazhet-pomoshch-vernuvshemusya-iz-sirii-mestnomu-zhitelyu>.

<sup>175</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/224862.html>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-zhene-boevika-otkazali-v-adaptacii-k-mirnoy-zhizni>; <http://memohrc.org/news/ingushetiya-komissiya-po-adaptacii-okazhet-pomoshch-vernuvshemusya-iz-sirii-mestnomu-zhitelyu>.



handed over to the court, members of the Commission unanimously agreed to apply to the court for leniency in sentencing him. He was subsequently sentenced to a short term of imprisonment.

On **31 March 2015**, the Commission refused **Khadishat Albakova** as a candidate for adaptation. As the wife of an insurgent, she had taken part in operations by illegal armed groups.

On **5 August 2015**, the Commission considered a request from a man from Ingushetia who had served a short prison sentence for taking part in hostilities in Syria as a member of illegal armed groups. He had applied to the Commission for assistance in finding a job and adjusting to civilian life. This young man, once in Syria, quickly realised that the situation there was not at all what he had expected, and he returned to Russia voluntarily. The Commission decided to approve the applicant's request.

In total, the Commission for Adaptation examined 67 applications. Only one man who had been seen by the Commission was subsequently detained again and convicted in the *Chechen Republic* (he did not hide from the authorities and was detained on the grounds of new evidence.<sup>176</sup>)

However, after **Akhmet Dzeitov**, former head of the Interior Ministry in Sunzhensk district, was appointed chair of the Commission for Adaptation in the *summer of 2015*, the work of the Commission has, in effect, come to a halt. There has not been a single meeting between then and *June 2016*.

### ***Conflict around Nasyr-Kort mosque***

Events around the mosque in the *district of Nasyr-Kort* in *Nazran* show the contrast between the Ingush authorities' policies towards different sectors of society (including religious dissidents) and the policies pursued by the current authorities of Dagestan and Chechnya.

With regard to the background to the conflict, which has definitely had a negative impact on the situation in Ingushetia, we note that for a long time proponents of Salafism in Ingushetia were persecuted by the authorities and the security forces, who saw them as the support base for the armed insurgency, treating the whole Salafi community as equivalent to extremists and accomplices to terrorists. However, in *May 2009*, the head of the Republic of Ingushetia, **Yunus-Bek Yevkurov**, met with representatives of all religious movements in Ingushetia. An open dialogue took place on sensitive religious issues which cause tensions and conflicts. Since then, the Republic has virtually ceased prosecuting people on religious grounds.

Most of the worshippers at the new mosque in Nasyr-Kort are adherents of Ahl al-Sunnah wal Jamaah, i.e. Sunni Muslims (Salafis generally refer to this denomination by its full name). **Khamzat Chumakov** has been imam at the mosque since *2008*. He is a well-known Ingush public figure and Islamic preacher who received his religious education in *Egypt*. It is difficult to identify Chumakov's religious and political position unambiguously, since he himself resists doing so. His sermons<sup>177</sup> are very popular. He has often spoken out emotionally and

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<sup>176</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/v-chechne-osudili-boevika-reabilitirovannogo-v-ingushetii>

<sup>177</sup> For several of Chumakov's sermons in Russian translation, see: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gDJ1VMg5n7o&spfreload=10>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwaVwgK6bkY>; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EVDiEB->

convincingly on political and social issues, and has been sharply critical of the authorities. Yet there are many officials and members of the security forces in his congregation. Chumakov has often appealed to higher authorities, including **President Putin**, when he has been in conflict with the Council of Muftis (muftiate), thereby demonstrating his political loyalty to Russia as a whole.

It is even harder to define the religious position of Chumakov and his many followers (it should be noted that thousands of people attended his Friday prayers in Nasyr-Kort). He is often referred to as a 'Salafi', but he rejects labels being applied to him. He has said that he does not deny the teachings of Sheikh **Kunt-Hadzhi**, a Sufi scholar who is highly revered by the Ingush and Chechens, and says that he is a disciple (*murid*) of Kunt-Hadzhi. He also reads the teachings of the Sufi saints. Islam is a very pluralistic religion, and within Sunni ideology there is an endless array of variations. It is therefore quite possible for Chumakov to describe his beliefs in this way. However, Chumakov's opponents obviously want to be able to label him as, for them, a notorious 'Wahhabi'. Traditionalists had accumulated a number of grievances against him, and he was in constant conflict with Mufti **Isa Khamkhoev**.

In late **May 2015**, Chumakov made a number of statements which led to an escalation of the conflict. The statements concerned a purely ceremonial issue: the number of collective Friday prayers which he was allowed to conduct in Nasir-Kort mosque. He later softened his stance, but the Sufis, unhappy with the imam's remarks, decided to come to the mosque on a Friday, say an additional prayer there and expel Chumakov from the mosque.

On Wednesday **3 June** in Nasyr-Kort mosque, a meeting was held between imams who supported Chumakov and representatives of the authorities, in particular **Albert Barakhaev**, Acting Secretary-General of the Security Council of the Republic of Ingushetia; **Magomed Shavkhalov**, a member of the staff of the head of Ingushetia; and **Alikhan Tumgoev**, the mayor of Nazran. They talked about ways to reduce tensions. It was announced that the authorities would convene a theological conference at which controversial issues could be discussed peacefully.

But the situation became tense. On Thursday **4 June** various social networks began to spread the news that unknown persons were planning to carry out a provocation in Nasyr-Kort mosque in order to discredit Imam Chumakov.

Head of Ingushetia Yunus-Bek Yevkurov used his official Instagram account to call on the congregation of Nasyr-Kort mosque not to succumb to any provocation.

Nonetheless, there were clashes on Friday **5 June 2015**. Security forces cordoned off the perimeter of the mosque in the Nasyr-Kort even before the start of Friday prayers. People were only allowed to enter after walking through a metal detector. When Imam Chumakov delivered his sermon, a group of people came into the mosque, led by the Mufti of Dagestan. At the end of prayers, Mufti Khamkhoev got up and headed towards Chumakov. People standing near the imam tried to obstruct him, and scuffles broke out involving both the mosque's congregation and

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[jTA&spfreload=10; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QSbJD2VUJeE;](#)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-lXJYcBgDYA&spfreload=10;](#)  
[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EVDiEB-jTA.](#)

those who came in with the Mufti, ending in a fistfight. Clashes continued outside the mosque. Security forces intervened in the conflict, firing in the air to prevent a mass brawl. The confrontation was eventually calmed with the congregation's help.

A 'war of words' followed the phase of active clashes between the two sides. On the same day, **5 June**, Chumakov wrote a letter to the President of the Russian Federation, the director of the FSB and heads of other security agencies. The contents of the letter immediately fell into the hands of the press. Chumakov blamed, in particular, 'the official spiritual leaders [of the Republic of Ingushetia] and some individuals' for trying, in his opinion, 'to destabilise the social and political situation in the region, and unleashing a conflict during the Friday sermon in order to achieve this goal,' but he did not explain their motives for such behaviour.<sup>178</sup>

On the same day, Mufti Khamkhoev recorded a message to the residents of the Ingush Republic in which he accused Chumakov of seizing control of Nasyr-Kort mosque. According to Khamkhoev, Chumakov was never elected imam, neither by the villagers nor by the Council of Muftis. Khamkhoev said that on **31 May** villagers who were unhappy with the way Chumakov gives sermons appealed to the mufti to send back to the mosque another imam, **Ruslan Chakhkiev**, whom they had elected several years before. That, he said, was why he had come to the mosque for Friday prayers. He was shocked by the fact that Chumakov had not greeted him, and that when he wanted to speak to the worshippers, he was pounced on as if he were an enemy and pushed away.<sup>179</sup>

More statements were subsequently made by both sides.

On **8 June**, for instance, Mufti Khamkhoev recorded a video message in which he said that Ingushetia did not need any new currents of Islam and that people should stick to the existing schools [*tariqat*] of Sufism.

On the same day, the head of Ingushetia, Y.-B. Yevkurov, spoke about the incident at the mosque at a meeting of the Ingush Republic's Anti-Terrorist Commission and Operational Headquarters. He mentioned that he had spoken to both parties of the dispute and urged them to forgive each other.

At the same time Yevkurov defined himself as a member of Qadiri tariqa, i.e., a follower of a particular Sufi school of Islam.

On **10 June** a round-table discussion was held in *Magas* to discuss the current situation, ways to prevent other such conflicts and measures which could be taken to unify Ingush society. **Isa Tsechoev**, a prominent Ingush theologian, spoke at the round table as an expert witness. His view was that rather than talking about the conflict, the first step should be to understand what a mufti is and what an imam is. A mufti, Tsechoev said, is chosen by scholars and theologians from their own midst, as someone highly knowledgeable about matters of Islam. A mufti has to explain theological questions, but cannot appoint nominees or give commands, and must act in the interest of all the Muslims of the community in which he was elected. The imam of a mosque, in contrast, is elected by the majority of the congregation of a particular mosque. If an imam had been elected in this way in Nasyr-Kort mosque, the problem could be solved. But an

<sup>178</sup> <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/263530/>

<sup>179</sup> <http://www.islaming.ru/index.php/home/1695-2015-06-05-17-29-13.html>.

imam can only be dismissed for incompetence in matters of religion by those who elected him. Tsechoev stressed that the Council of Muftis should have settled the question in accordance with Islam and issue a fatwa, but nothing of the sort had happened. All contentious issues needed to be resolved through discussion, rather than people trying to impose their views by force.

After the round table, the participants prepared a message to the nation, the spiritual leaders and authorities in Ingushetia, which said, above all: *'We consider that it is no longer acceptable to use force to resolve differences of opinion, including theological disputes, all the more so when the issues involved are of secondary importance, and we call on all parties in the conflict to forgive each other and engage in dialogue in a spirit of conscientiousness, restraint and mutual respect ...'*

On **12 June** in Nasyr-Kort mosque the Friday prayers took place and were attended by the head of Ingushetia, several imams and prominent religious leaders in the Republic of Ingushetia. Addressing the congregation, Yevkurov said that he considered both sides responsible for the conflict, and added: *'We will not look for those guilty of causing this problem, and we will not name names. Today we must make sure that everything gets sorted out. We have to forgive each other and go to our homes.'* Mufti Khamkhoev was absent from the meeting, as he was on a working visit to Qatar. He later supported the resolution of the conflict through a peaceful settlement and endorsed the words of everyone who spoke on 12 June in Nasir-Kort mosque.

However, the conflict was essentially left unresolved. The Mufti of Ingushetia described Yevkurov's position as supporting the Salafis, and on **27 December 2015** he expressed his disagreement with the head of Ingushetia on the website of the Ingush Republic Muslim Spiritual Centre (DTsM in Russian). The Salafi problem, according to Mufti Khamkhoev, has become pronounced: over the last decade, 'about ten mosques' have appeared which are not part of the DTsM. In Ingushetia, according to Khamkhoev, there have been *'many cases where a certain group of people accuse the village community of unbelief and of inventing new forms of spiritual practice, and claim that their prayers will not be accepted, etc. Then they build themselves separate mosques and keep themselves separate from the main congregation [jamat]. People with such beliefs should in no way receive any support from our citizens, and especially not from the authorities.'*<sup>180</sup> According to the Mufti, *'These mosques have recently become political platforms.'*

Yevkurov took a different view of the problem, and was unhappy that the Mufti, instead of calming the situation, was escalating the conflict: *'We must communicate and work with all believers - this is the only way to achieve harmony in the whole community of Muslims [ummah] and the stability of Ingush society. [...] No one should put labels on others unfairly just because they don't share their point of view or their approach to religious rites.'*<sup>181</sup>

These differences of opinion led to Yevkurov publicly expressing his wish for Mufti Khamkhoev to resign on several occasions at the end of December, including at a meeting with the imams of towns and villages across Ingushetia, at the Council of Muftis.

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<sup>180</sup> <http://www.islaming.ru/index.php/home/1994-2015-12-27-13-09-15.html>

<sup>181</sup> <http://www.ekhokavkaza.com/content/article/27479203.html>

However, Ingushetia is not totalitarian Chechnya. In **July 2014** Khamkhoev was re-elected as the Mufti of the Council of *ulama* and imams of the Ingush Republic. The secular head of the Republic is unable to replace a person in a religious position at will.

The majority of the Ingush public took a neutral, wait-and-see attitude to the argument, since most inhabitants of the Ingush Republic do not wish the religious conflict to escalate.

Mufti Khamkhoev found support for his position from the authorities in neighbouring Chechnya. In Grozny on **28-30 December 2015** there was a meeting between representatives of the muftiates of Chechnya and Ingushetia at which they talked about countering the 'dissemination of the ideology of Wahhabism.' On **2 February 2016**, the Mufti of Ingushetia actively participated in the North Caucasus Forum of Sufi Spiritual Leaders [*madzhlis*] organised by **Kadyrov**. The overriding issue was how to oppose the 'Wahhabis' and Salafis, and they repeatedly referred to **Khamzat Chumakov** as one of the 'enemies' to be fought (see next section in this report for further details).

Consequently, the conflict in Ingushetia worsened. The Council of Clans [*teip*] of Ingushetia called for Khamkhoev's removal from office. Then, on **29 March 2015**, the Congress of Muslims of the Republic of Ingushetia convened a Council of *ulama* [Islamic experts] to discuss Khamkhoev's removal from office.<sup>182</sup> But on **24 March** Yevkurov announced that the Congress was adjourned. The decision to cancel the Congress which had already been announced was taken at a meeting between Yevkurov and the *ulama* of Ingushetia, during which many people said that holding a Congress of Muslims would lead to a split in society.

At the same time, Yevkurov said that the process of closing down the existing Council of Muftis as a non-governmental organisation had begun. Mufti Khamkhoev, in turn, called it a 'farce.' At the time this report was prepared, the Council of Muftis of Ingushetia was continuing to function as before.

On **1 March 2016** at about 2 p.m., a car filled with explosives blew up near Nasir-Kort mosque, as a result of which four persons were injured. On the night of **4 April 2016**, unknown men threw a grenade into the courtyard of the home of Assistant Mufti of Ingushetia, **Magomed Khashtyrov**, in the village of *Troitskaya* (in the *Republic of Ingushetia*), but no one was hurt.

## Grozny's influence

Not for the first year, the consistent tendency of the authorities in Chechnya has been to eliminate any dissent, including in the area of religion.

Even in **2009**, **Ramzan Kadyrov** publicly stated: '*I swear by the name of Allah! Wahhabis and those who give off even the slightest whiff of Wahhabism will be eliminated from Chechnya [...]*'<sup>183</sup> At the same time, in Ingushetia, head of the Republic **Yunus-Bek Yevkurov** launched a 'new deal', meeting with representatives of all religious movements (see previous section in this report). The following year, the 'new deal' approach was also tried in *Dagestan*.

<sup>182</sup> An alim (plural: ulama) is an expert on Islam.

<sup>183</sup> From a statement by R. Kadyrov on **23 May 2009** on Grozny television channel during the programme 'Itogi' ['Results'] at 8 p.m.

Kadyrov has never made any secret of the fact that he is annoyed that the religious policies of neighbouring republics differ from Chechnya's, and he has not stopped attempting to influence the situation in other North Caucasus republics – indeed, he has redoubled his efforts.

This was clearly the reason for organising the largest forum of spiritual leaders [*madzhlis*] in recent years on **2 February 2016** in *Achkha-Martan* (in the *Republic of Chechnya*). The forum brought together not only representatives of the official Sufi spiritual leadership, but also descendants of the Prophet **Muhammad**, and descendants and followers of sheikhs who spread Sufi Islam in the North Caucasus. The main theme of all the speeches was the struggle with enemies of 'true Islam' - that is, with all Muslims who do not recognise the authority of the Sufi sheikhs. Those gathered were unanimous in calling for tough opposition in *Dagestan, Ingushetia and Chechnya* to all varieties of non-Sufi Islam, which was described as 'Wahhabi' or 'pseudo-Salafi.' They decided to repeal any joint decisions by religious councils or organisations if 'even so much as one pseudo-Salafi' participated or participates. Any dialogue, any attempt to find a common language and work out a compromise between different movements in Islam was essentially declared impossible.

Representatives of the Ingush delegation spoke out at the Forum, including the Mufti of Ingushetia, **I. Khamkhoev**. The names of two Ingush religious figures - Imam **Kh. Chumakov** and Sheikh **I. Tsechoev** - were repeatedly mentioned, with those present alleging that they were supporters of 'Wahhabism' and vilifying them in every way. Kadyrov went even further: he called them 'Satan's gang' and 'vermin,' saying that if they ever tried to intervene in Chechnya, they would lose their heads, and vowing to fight Salafi preachers even outside Chechnya: '*We don't care whether they are in Chechnya, Ingushetia, Dagestan or even North Africa. If in the local communities they can't stop these vermin and if they don't come to their senses and repent, they will get what's coming to them.*'<sup>184</sup>

He commented directly on the situation in Dagestan: '*What do we see today in Dagestan? First they closed [Salafi] mosques, then they re-open them. The fact that they began taking these people into account has only complicated this whole situation.*'<sup>185</sup>

The Forum in Achkha-Martan cannot but have alarmed the leaders of neighbouring republics. It was clear that Kadyrov is, in effect, using it to spread his influence on his neighbours' affairs. The secular authorities in Ingushetia have been forced to try to regain the initiative from Mufti Khamkhoev in terms of contacts with the Chechen leadership. Yevkurov spoke with Kadyrov over the phone and on **5 February** Kadyrov posted on his Instagram account: '*Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and I have had a conversation. We agreed to joint efforts to resist any extremism, including Wahhabism...*'<sup>186</sup>

On **22 February** Kadyrov came to *Magas* for the first time in a long while, and met with the head of Ingushetia. There are, of course, a number of serious unresolved problems between the two republics, above all the question of the demarcation of the boundary and the issue of Chechnya's territorial claim to the villages of the *Sunzha district* in Ingushetia.

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<sup>184</sup> [http://kavpolit.com/articles/my\\_budem\\_borotsja\\_s\\_vahhabistami\\_vezde\\_v\\_chechne\\_i-23179](http://kavpolit.com/articles/my_budem_borotsja_s_vahhabistami_vezde_v_chechne_i-23179).

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

<sup>186</sup> <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2913081>.



In this context, it is particularly important that religious issues were the topic of the two politicians' first personal conversation in a long time. They appear to have discussed the situation of the Salafi community and its leaders in Ingushetia and the status of Ingush muftis in the reform of religious governance which **Yevkurov** has announced. The press service of the head of Chechnya picked up on only one detail from the meeting: Kadyrov's lengthy warning to his Ingush counterpart about the danger of '*religious movements which contradict the Quran, the Sunnah, the Qadiri tariqa and Naqshbandi tariqat.*' The names of the leaders of these 'dangerous' movements are known to all, Kadyrov stressed. He was more outspoken on his Instagram account: '*We have agreed that in Chechnya and Ingushetia **there must not be** [emphasis added by Memorial Human Rights Centre] any religious movements which contradict the Quran, the Sunnah, the Qadiri tariqa and Naqshbandi tariqat.*'

In the light of the above, it is not surprising that it is widely believed in Dagestan that the closure of Salafi mosques, the arbitrary detention of worshippers praying in these mosques, and the arrests of imams were all carried out not least as a result of Grozny's influence.

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However, the neighbouring Republic of Chechnya also attempts to influence the situation in Dagestan with regard to other issues. It is well known that Kadyrov has developed extremely hostile feelings towards some political 'heavyweights' in Dagestan, yet has become friendly with others.

On **23 April 2014**, the head of Chechnya spoke at a meeting of the board of the Interior Ministry in Chechnya about connections between the mayor of *Khasavyurt*, **Saigidpasha Umakhanov**, and the insurgency.<sup>187</sup> Umakhanov replied to this accusation as follows: '*As I was a close friend of the late Akhmat-Khadzhi Kadyrov, my religious and moral beliefs do not allow me to enter into an argument with his son, whose achievements we see and appreciate. [...] Ramzan Kadyrov does a lot to preserve stability in the Chechen Republic, which sometimes ricochets onto neighbouring regions. The recent attempt on my life is evidence of this.*'<sup>188</sup>

A verdict was pronounced in the case of the attempt on Umakhanov's life on **17 February 2015** in Dagestan. Two residents of Chechnya, **Badruda Dzhabrailov** and **Ramzan Kachaev**, were sentenced to 9 and 12 months' imprisonment, respectively. In the court case, **Shaa Turlaev**, an adviser to Ramzan Kadyrov<sup>189</sup>, was named as organiser of the assassination

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<sup>187</sup> <http://kopomko.ru/ramzan-kadyirov-o-saygidpashe-umahanove>.

<sup>188</sup> <http://kopomko.ru/zayavlenie-saygidpashi-umahanova-po-povodu-obvineniy-ramzanova-kadyirova-polnyiy-tekst>.

<sup>189</sup> Shaa Turlaev was an active participant in the armed units of the self-proclaimed Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. In 2004, after being wounded, he surrendered once his safety was assured by Ramzan Kadyrov and he was amnestied. His leg was amputated, but once he had convalesced he was appointed as an adviser to Kadyrov. Turlaev's main function is intelligence work on current and former members of the insurgency. He has been a defendant in several criminal cases involving killings or attempted killings of people who are enemies or opponents of the leadership of the Chechen Republic: the case of **Umar Israilov** (killed in January 2009 in Vienna), the case of **Ruslan Yamadaev** (killed in 2008 in the centre of Moscow), the case of the attempted murder of **Magomed Ocherkhadzhi** in Norway, and the case of the attempted murder of **Isa Yamadaev** in Moscow. Turlaev is on international and federal wanted lists. According to many accounts, Shaa Turlaev lives openly in Chechnya and moves freely within the

attempt, and is wanted as a suspect. According to investigators, Turlaev handed over money and weapons: armour-piercing ammunition and a sniper rifle intended to enable silent fire, without a flame, with high accuracy and the ability to kill. **Ruslan Bakruev**, Turlaev's bodyguard, was also prosecuted on the grounds that he allegedly adjusted the sniper rifle for the potential killer.<sup>190</sup>

According to media reports, Saigidpasha Umakhanov was removed from the post of head of administration in Khasavyurt because of pressure from Ramzan Kadyrov.<sup>191</sup>

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R. Kadyrov has a completely different relationship with another 'heavyweight' of Dagestan politics, **Sagid Murtazaliev**. After being World Champion in freestyle wrestling *in the first decade of the 21st century*, he gave up being a sportsman and turned into a young, charismatic, ambitious politician who to a considerable extent controlled the flatlands of *North Dagestan (the Babayurt, Kizlyar, Tarum and Yuzhno-Sukhokum districts)*. His last post was as head of the Republic of Dagestan's Pension Fund.

Murtazaliev has become a friend of Kadyrov's and has in many ways copied both Kadyrov's way of working and his dress style. Murtazaliev is often called the 'Dagestani Ramzan' and the 'most brutal' politician in Dagestan. Chechen President Kadyrov has said he has a brotherly relationship with Murtazaliev. This has made many believe that Murtazaliev is an agent of 'expansionism' for Kadyrov, who has long laid claim to the role of regional leader of the North Caucasus. The 'Chechen' connection is one of the most popular explanations for Murtazaliev's removal from Dagestan's political field (see the section on 'The fight against clans in Dagestan' in this report). Perhaps Murtazaliev's striking likeness to Kadyrov frightened many people both within Dagestan and at federal level.

*On 24 January 2016*, once legal proceedings had begun against S. Murtazaliev and he had been declared a wanted man, there was an attempt to hold a motor rally in Dagestan 'in support of the head of Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov and Russian President Vladimir Putin, and to protect Sagid Murtazaliev.' (Shortly before this, Ramzan Kadyrov had publicly called for reprisals against the Russian opposition, and on *22 January* the authorities held a mass demonstration in *Grozny* in support of the head of Chechnya.<sup>192</sup>) The motor rally was intended to show the high level of authority enjoyed by the head of Chechnya within Dagestan and to condemn the harassment of his protégé, Murtazaliev. The motor rally's organisers were well aware that freedom of assembly, guaranteed by the Constitution, does not exist in today's Russia, and so decided not to apply for official permission to hold the event. They felt that holding up portraits of Putin and Kadyrov would give them *carte blanche* to travel along the roads of Dagestan, but they were mistaken: the rally was nipped in the bud by soldiers from Dagestan's riot police force (OMON).

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territory of the Republic. The file on the case of the attempted murder of Saigidpasha Umakhanov contains the words: "It is not possible to establish Shaa Turlaev's whereabouts."

<sup>190</sup>For further details about the case, see: *Novaya gazeta*, No. 24, 11 March 2015, by E. Milashina. 'Tender' <http://www.novayagazeta.ru/inquests/67571.html>.

<sup>191</sup><http://kopomko.ru/saygidpasha-umahanov-ushel-pod-pressingom-ramzana-kadyirova/>.

<sup>192</sup><http://memohrc.org/news/chechnya-v-groznom-proshel-miting-v-podderzhku-ramzana-kadyrova>.

## Kabardino-Balkaria: a low-level conflict

The fight against the armed insurgency in *Kabardino-Balkaria* is 'functioning normally': people are detained, abducted and killed on the basis of their affiliation - real or perceived - to the extremist underground, but in a quiet, 'businesslike' way, without any hysterical media campaigns.

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In *September 2014*, during a round-table discussion held in the office of the Kabardino-Balkaria Centre for Human Rights in *Nalchik*, the main problems discussed related to the violation of human rights during counter-terrorism activities. The round table was initiated by the Centre's lawyer, **Eva Chanieva**.<sup>193</sup> She noted the increase in the number of people detained by law enforcement agencies on suspicion of being involved with the illegal armed groups. Typically, police stop and detain people on their way to work or while at the mosque. Ammunition and drugs are usually found in the detainees' possession. For the first 24 hours, relatives do not know where the detainee is. Illegal methods - torture and psychological pressure - are often used during this period. Detentions and interrogations are often carried out by people wearing masks. Memorial Human Rights Centre described such cases several times in the course of 2014.<sup>194</sup>

Chanieva suggested launching preliminary investigations against police officers who commit illegal actions while hiding their faces behind masks in order to find out their identities, since no investigation would go far if all it came to was the opening of criminal cases against 'unidentified persons'. A law enforcement official must certainly know the identities of the members of the team sent to detain a suspect. If guilty officers receive a fair punishment, it will deter the rest from behaving similarly.

Chanieva noted a particular problem inside the legal profession. Some lawyers cooperate criminally with security forces against their clients' interests. She suggested combining the efforts of lawyers and law enforcement agencies in order to prevent violations of the right to legal defence.

Lawyers and human rights activists produced numerous examples of law enforcement officers not letting lawyers protect the rights of detained clients, or even using physical force against lawyers (in the presence of investigators, prosecutors and police officers) and removing them from police stations. They noted that detainees have been forced to refuse to see their lawyers, and that people are ready to sign any confessions or documents after having been submitted to torture, psychological pressure or the use of other unlawful methods. The lawyers

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<sup>193</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-advokaty-siloviki-i-pravozashchitniki-obsudili-problemy-soblyudeniya-prav>.

<sup>194</sup> See, for example, the following materials: <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-pri-nevyasennykh-obstoyatelstvakh-ischez-zhitel-baksanskogo-rayona>; <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-podozrevaemogo-pytali-v-ivs-baksana>; <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-mestnyy-zhitel-zhaluetsya-na-pytki-i-fabrikaciyu-protiv-nego-ugolovnogo>; <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-pohishchennogo-obnaruzhili-v-otdele-policii>.

and activists said that a detainee usually learns about their right not to be compelled to testify against themselves (Article 51 of the Constitution of the Russian Federation) only at the end of the investigation, and that the investigator simply does not tell the detainee their rights. Instead, the investigator talks about 'special treatment', a simplified form of a trial, which involves a plea bargain: the defendant has to accept the charges against him, after which the legal proceedings boil down to deciding the type of punishment and length of sentence, without an examination of the evidence in court.

Representatives of the Prosecutor's Office, investigators and the police who spoke during the round table partially acknowledged the problems identified by the lawyers. They cited statistics showing that reports of crimes, registered at the Prosecutor's Office and the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic's branch of the Russian Federation Investigative Committee, relating to the unlawful use of violence against citizens by law enforcement officials peaked in the **2011-2012** period, while the number decreased in the **2013-2014** period.

After the round-table, there was an attempt to disbar Eva Chanieva, the lawyer who initiated the event, from being able to represent clients in court, supposedly on the grounds of making 'incorrect statements regarding the lawyer community' at the round table. There is reason to believe that these attempts by the leadership of the Bar Association of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic were made under pressure from FSB officers.

Unfortunately, all issues raised at the round table remain valid for the Republic.<sup>195</sup>

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The Republican Commission for Adaptation, chaired by the secretary-general of the Security Council of the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic (KBR), **Ruslan Eshugaov**, was formed on **24 January 2014**. To date, however, it has only been formally set up, but has not actually started work. In **2014**, human rights activists prepared new draft regulations for the Commission for Adaptation, and expected them to be approved by the head of the Republic, **Yurii Kokov**.<sup>196</sup> The Commission for Adaptation only started work in **2016**. It was 'reactivated' in the *summer of 2015* when a new ministry was created to coordinate the executive authorities' activities with regard to the prevention of extremism and the conduct of youth policy in KBR. The ministry was headed by **Zalim Kashirokov**. On **17 February 2016**, the Commission held a meeting at which it decided to assist **Inna Blenaova**, accused of being involved with the illegal armed groups, and to petition Nalchik municipal court for leniency in sentencing her. The Court granted the Commission's request.<sup>197</sup>

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<sup>195</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-zhitelya-nalchika-pytkami-vynudili-priznatsya-v-hranenii-granaty-i>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/261544>;

<http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-v-urvanskom-otdele-policii-izbit-advokat>;  
<http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-podozrevaemogo-pytali-v-ivs-goroda-baksan>

<sup>196</sup> [www.memo.ru/d/210458.html](http://www.memo.ru/d/210458.html); *Kavkazsky uzel*, 21.9.2014.

<sup>197</sup> <http://memohrc.org/news/kabardino-balkariya-komissiya-po-adaptacii-k-mirnoy-zhizni-byvshih-boevikov-okazhet-pomoshch>

## ***The verdict in the case of the attack on Nalchik in 2005***

An important event in the KBR during the **2014-2016** period was the verdict handed down in the case of those accused of an armed attack on government offices in *Nalchik* on **13 October 2005**.

In that event, more than 140 people were killed (32-35 of whom were law enforcement and military personnel, 92-95 alleged attackers and 12-15 civilians) and 200-250 people were injured during two days of fighting between security forces and insurgents. The background to the events have been examined in a Memorial Human Rights Centre's report: 'Kabardino-Balkaria: on the road to disaster.'<sup>198</sup>

A fair and just verdict in the case would have had a positive impact on both the situation in the North Caucasus and on society as a whole.

The legal proceedings against 58 defendants lasted almost six years. On the one hand, in the course of the preliminary investigation and the trial, some of the defendants were proven guilty. On the other hand, it became obvious that the evidence for many of the defendants' alleged crimes was highly questionable because it was based primarily on their 'confessed' testimony given under torture at the beginning of the preliminary investigation, and on statements given by other defendants at the same time. There is hard evidence, including forensic analysis, photographs and videos indicating evidence of beatings, that detainees were physically abused during the criminal case itself. Some of the defendants recognised their torturers, mostly case officers called as witnesses, when in the courtroom. Despite the extremely serious evidence of torture, the victims' requests for leniency were rejected, and there has not been a single prosecution for torture.

During the proceedings it was proved that some of the accused - for example, **Rasul Kudaev**<sup>199</sup> and **Kazbek Budtuev**<sup>200</sup> - were totally innocent.

The day before the verdict, Memorial Human Rights Centre wrote the following: '*A fair and just verdict in the case would have a positive impact on both the situation in the North Caucasus and on society as a whole. Those guilty of participating in the attack should be punished, those innocent acquitted, and people who took up arms but refused to fire them should be treated with leniency. Only a just verdict will ensure that similar tragedies do not occur again in the future and will contribute to reconciliation between the parties to the conflict in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic.*'<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>198</sup> <http://memohrc.org/books/kabardino-balkariya-na-puti-k-katastrofe-predposylki-vooruzhyonnogo-vystupleniya-v-nalchike-13>.

<sup>199</sup> <http://memohrc.org/uploads/files/1151.pdf>; <http://memohrc.org/uploads/files/1150.pdf>; Memorial Human Rights Centre recognises Rasul Kudaev as a political prisoner - see <http://memohrc.org/special-projects/delo-kudaeva>.

<sup>200</sup> The inadmissibility of the 'evidence' of guilt in K. Budtuev's trial became clear even to the court, which therefore decided on 21 June 2010 to change his form of pre-trial detention from police custody to house arrest. This was subsequently replaced by a travel ban. <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/170486/> Regardless of Budtuev's innocence, he was sentenced to 4 years and 10 months in prison - the time he had already spent in remand prison. <http://memohrc.org/uploads/files/1152.pdf>.

<sup>201</sup> <http://www.memo.ru/d/220118.html>.



The verdict announced on **23 December 2014** was excessively harsh and unfair. All 57<sup>202</sup> defendants in the so-called 'case of the 58' were found guilty. Five of them, including **Rasul Kudaev**, were sentenced to life imprisonment; eight people were sentenced to 20 or more years in prison; 40 defendants were sentenced to between 10 and 20 years in prison; and four people were sentenced to less than 10 years, three of whom were in fact released in the courtroom (since the period of pre-trial detention which they had already served exceeded the designated sentence). People were convicted even when the evidence against them was very weak.

On **26 January 2016**, the KBR Supreme Court pronounced its ruling on an appeal lodged by those imprisoned. The court refused to reduce the sentences of the men imprisoned for life. The appeals court did decide to reduce the terms of the other men's prison sentences, although their prison terms were reduced only by a small proportion.

Without questioning the need for guilty parties to be punished fairly and appropriately, Memorial Human Rights Centre notes that the total innocence of some of the prisoners has been argued for and proven over many years by lawyers and human rights activists.<sup>203</sup>

In several cases, the court did not take into account the defendants' extenuating circumstances: the fact that they had refused to take part in hostilities and had surrendered to the authorities. According to **Oleg Orlov**, director of Memorial Human Rights Centre's 'Hot Spots' programme, the verdict is not only unfair, but also unlawful: *'Yes, those guilty should be punished, but in this case convictions were handed down both to guilty parties and to people against whom the case for the prosecution had entirely collapsed in court. For example, defendant Azamat Akhkubekov declined to participate in an armed attack on a police post on 13 October 2005. He did not fire a single shot and then voluntarily turned himself in to the authorities. These facts were confirmed by the Deputy Prosecutor General for the Southern Federal District, I. Sydoruk<sup>204</sup>, but Akhkubekov was nonetheless sentenced to 15 years in prison.'* A harsh sentence is a clear signal to those who remained in the insurgency: *'There will be no leniency. Whether or not you shoot, whether or not you surrender, you will still get a harsh and unjust sentence.'*

According to human rights activist **Valery Khatazhukov**, *'The authorities and the court had the opportunity to demonstrate goodwill and humanity. No one is saying that there shouldn't be punishments, but it is crucial to be objective and fair.'*<sup>205</sup>

Experts believe that the State has failed to eliminate the factors contributing to youth radicalisation over the 11 years since the insurgent attacks in Nalchik in 2005, and that the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic has so far been unable to overcome the effects of the insurgency.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> One of the accused did not live to see the verdict.

<sup>203</sup> [www.memo.ru/uploads/files/1580.pdf](http://www.memo.ru/uploads/files/1580.pdf).

<sup>204</sup> [http://www.kavpolit.ru/articles/kto\\_sozdaval\\_podpole\\_okonchanie-327](http://www.kavpolit.ru/articles/kto_sozdaval_podpole_okonchanie-327).

<sup>205</sup> *Kavkazskaya politika*, 6.1.2015.

<sup>206</sup> <http://memohrc.org/monitorings/eksperty-zayavili-o-sohranении-faktorov-radikalizacii-spustya-10-let-posle-napadeniya>



## Conclusions and forecasts

1. The North Caucasus has seen an almost complete return to the methods of State terror and a rejection of almost all elements of the 'new deal' which was introduced in some republics between 2009 and 2012. This 'new deal' was designed to complement the security forces' methods of combating the terrorist underground with 'soft power' methods: dialogue with different sectors of society, collaboration with human rights defenders, maintaining the rule of law during counter-terrorist operations, reintegrating insurgents willing to lay down their arms into civilian life, and promoting dialogue between followers of different movements within Islam. During this 'new deal' period in Ingushetia and Dagestan there was a marked change in trends: from the growth of armed insurgent activity (as defined by the number of military and law enforcement personnel killed or wounded) to its decline. Now, however, the only North Caucasus republic in which elements of the 'new deal' are still being implemented is Ingushetia.

2. The terrorist underground's activities also continued to decrease in subsequent years: in 2013 there was two-thirds the level of activity in 2012; in 2014 there was half as much terrorist activity as in 2013; and in 2015 there was less than 30% as much terrorist activity as in 2014. Insurgent activity had declined so much by early 2016 that cases in which security officials died or were injured were isolated incidents.

Two factors promoted this decrease: intensive work by the Russian security forces, and the heavy flow of a significant group of people - those who would have constituted the insurgency's mobilisation base - from the North Caucasus to the Middle East.

This radical reduction in insurgent underground activity seems to have given law enforcement officers the opportunity to convince the Russian leadership that relying solely on the use of force, without regard to the rule of law and human rights, would be a more reliable way to combat terror (and even control society) than using 'soft power'.

However, new cases of security officials being killed or injured in spring 2016 show that the armed insurgency has not been completely defeated. Disregard for human rights by law enforcement agencies in the fight against terrorism inevitably renews the insurgency's support base and strengthens the position of Islamic State - a group banned in Russia - in the North Caucasus.

3. There is an ongoing crackdown on the large Salafi community in Dagestan.

Thousands of people have been put onto a 'watch list'. This grossly violates citizens' constitutional rights. The harassment of Dagestan's Salafi community has included the closure (or attempted closure) of mosques, the falsification of criminal cases, mass illegal detentions and abductions. Perhaps the proponents of this policy genuinely believe that their actions will contribute to making the Republic more stable, but this is a huge mistake.

It is more likely that it is a deliberate policy on the part of powerful forces - within both Dagestan and federal security agencies, as well as in neighbouring Chechnya and in Moscow's corridors of power - which can only function in extreme situations and solely within the paradigm of State terror. For them, confrontation and the suppression of any form of dissent, including religious dissent, is a familiar and desirable state of affairs. They find the idea of constructive dialogue between government and society unacceptable.

In any case, the policy of total suppression of religious dissent, the authorities' refusal to use 'soft power', and their reliance on methods of State terror in combating the armed insurgency creates a sizeable group of people who are disaffected and resentful of the authorities.

Since it is impossible for citizens to participate legally in public and political life and to protect their rights by way of the law and the rule of law, there is an inevitable increase in tension. Like a pressure cooker without a safety valve, this situation will eventually become explosive.

The most active of those who are disaffected and resentful can join jihadist groups outside Russia, but the vast majority stays at home. Some of them may constitute a reserve force, ready for mobilisation. As a result, experienced fighters who have returned from the Middle East may have a veritable Islamist army at their disposal. Fighting this element promises to be extremely difficult for the Russian security forces.

4. Meanwhile, in recent years in the North Caucasus, among the moderate Salafis there have appeared leaders who condemn violence and armed struggle against the State. Extremists who belong to Islamic State, which is banned in Russia, openly call such people 'traitors.' Instead of conducting a dialogue with these moderates, however, the State harasses them. This is a harmful and short-sighted policy.

5. A 'State within a State' has essentially been created in the Chechen Republic, first during the long years of struggle against separatists, and then during the fight against the terrorist underground using methods of State terror. The cure turned out to be worse than the disease.

In the Chechen Republic there are no means by which residents can influence the authorities. Criticising the authorities in any way, however innocently, can put a person's life in danger. Popular initiatives which are independent of the authorities are banned.

Under these conditions, Chechnya's relative stability is only maintained by the constant, brutal, blatant use of force.

6. The existence on the territory of our country of an enclave where a totalitarian regime has been established represents a serious danger for the future of the rule of law and the protection of the rights of all citizens in Russia. However, there are clearly powerful forces which hope that the whole country will go in the same direction as Chechnya.

Meanwhile, Ramzan Kadyrov and his entourage are trying to spread to the rest of Russia the methods of suppressing dissent which they have implemented in Chechnya. They are making a particular effort with regard to Chechnya's neighbouring republics: Dagestan and Ingushetia.

7. In recent years, the Republic of Ingushetia has become one of the most peaceful and stable republics in the North Caucasus. Attempts to get Ingushetia to follow the example of Chechnya and Dagestan in suppressing freedom of conscience and in harassing dissidents may undermine the situation in Ingushetia.

8. The practice of the security forces of driving out everyone they suspect of being an 'undesirable element' leads to people leaving the North Caucasus. While some of those who leave are potential supporters of the armed insurgency, others are young people who are socially and economically active and not involved in terrorism (most of these go to Turkey). This trend

towards emigration dashes all hopes for the modernisation and successful development of the North Caucasus region.

9. The verdict in the case of the armed attack on government offices in Nalchik on 13 October 2005, as well as many other unjust verdicts, does not help calm the situation in the Kabardino-Balkaria Republic.