

## RELIGION IN SOCIETY

**RELIGION:  
POLITICAL FACTOR  
IN THE MUSLIM REGIONS OF RUSSIA**

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**ABSTRACT**

**T**oday, the religious factor has become a part of the political processes and as such a catalyst of stabilization/de-stabilization of political space. This means that to ensure social and state security, we should identify the mechanisms and technologies that add political dimensions to religion. For several decades, politically biased religious organizations and their destabilizing influence remained limited to certain regions of the world.

Today, radical Islamic movements threaten not only individual states and re-

gions, but also the world community as a whole. Islamic extremism is no longer a local problem—it has become a transnational phenomenon. In the last few years, Islamic radicalism has spread far and wide to certain regions of the CIS (I have in mind Central Asia) and Russia (the Northern Caucasus, the Volga Area and Siberia). For a long time the North Caucasian peoples have been taught to think that the national and religious factors were inseparable; they were united by their religion, while the confession that was taking shape on the na-

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*tional soil imbibed local customs, traditions and rites.<sup>1</sup> Similar processes are unfolding among the Islamic peoples of Siberia and*

<sup>1</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, "Ethnocultural Communication Systems in the Northern Caucasus and the Problem of Radical Islam," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 4, 2016, pp. 71-79.

*the Volga Area.<sup>2</sup> This adds urgency to the subject discussed and makes it much more interesting.*

<sup>2</sup> See: N.G. Khairullina, I.S. Karabulatova, M.F. Shvedova, K.K. Koyshe, "Tatars of Siberia: Religious Rebirth and Identity Problems," *Terra Sebus: Acta Musei Sabesiensis*, No. 7, 2015, pp. 565-583.

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## *Introduction*

Today, Islamic radicalism strongly affects the political processes unfolding in Russia, therefore, I have concentrated on the specifics of the impact of Islamism in Russia and the similarity/dissimilarity between the practices of multiculturalism in the Russian Federation and those in other countries. The phenomenon of radical Islam in Russia is the subject matter of the study.

As distinct from other world religions, Islam (and most of its trends) permeates all aspects of life and is orientated toward social and political problems. It is more than a model of the ideal "just and fair" society: it

- (1) directly points to violence as a means of achieving the desired ideal or its protection (the concept of jihad);<sup>3</sup>
- (2) offers a carefully substantiated doctrine of the Muslim state with a clearly outlined set of formal features,<sup>4</sup> the most important being a Muslim ruler guided by the Muslim law.

It is no less important to note that in the final analysis, Islam presupposes unlimited territorial expansion. According to the concept of jihad, everything that is not related to the "territory of Islam" (dar al-islam) is (at least potentially) the "territory of war" (dar al-harb). Today, Muslim countries blame non-Islamic countries for being economic constraints. In Russia, the peoples of the Northern Caucasus still remember the national liberation wars. In fact, the "Islamic factor" has acquired more importance as connected with the memories of the nineteenth-century liberation war, led by Shamil, and the uprising of 1877.<sup>5</sup> Today, this justifies extremist (terrorist) practices.

Confessional identity is realized through the Islamic cultural tradition, knowledge of the history of Islam, Arab language, foundations of Islamic theology, "fiqh," that is, at the level of Islamic religious education. According to the Committee for Religious Affairs of Daghestan, there are 17 Islamic universities with 43 branches, 113 madrasahs and 278 maktabs with a total number of 14,000 students in the republic. In the whole of the Southern Federal District of Russia there are 32 Islamic universities.

<sup>3</sup> For the list of the NGOs in relation to which the court passed the enacted decision of liquidation or banning activities based on the Federal Law on Opposition to Extremist Activities, see [[http://minjust.ru/nko/perechen\\_zapret](http://minjust.ru/nko/perechen_zapret)], 23 February, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> See: A. Malashenko, *Moy islam*, Rossiyskaia politicheskaya entsiklopedia, Moscow, 2010.

<sup>5</sup> See: A. Malashenko, *Ramzan Kadyrov. Rossiyskiy politik kavkazskoy natsionalnosti*, Rossiyskaia politicheskaya entsiklopedia, Moscow, 2009.

Some of them are working as schools without licenses or registered teaching programs. The following factors contribute to the spread of Islamic radicalism in Russian society:

- (1) the problem of religious education;
- (2) social and economic factors;
- (3) emigration and immigration as political factors.

Experts use the term “re-Islamization” to define the processes, unfolding on the eve of the Soviet Union’s disintegration and in the first post-Soviet decade in the Russian Federation.<sup>6</sup> The subject of this article requires clarification of the ways the Islamic community is organized in the territory of Russia. There is no united Muslim community: Muslims form two loosely connected Islamic communities: the North Caucasian and Tatar-Bashkir. Both are widely represented in Moscow and the Moscow Region. The fact of their more or less independent (territorially and mentally) existence should be taken into account by those, who study the processes of Islamization in Russia. The movement toward early Islam can be described as a response to the inability of the elites in Muslim countries to establish a legitimate social order within a viable political structure.

## Methods and Materials

The concepts, elaborated by Karl Mannheim and Zygmunt Bauman, have been used as the methodological basis for the study of the phenomenon of religious radicalism as a form that crops up in political ideologies and political organizations. The organizational aspects of the phenomenon of politicization of religion were interpreted by J. Greenberg, R. Baron, D. North, J. March, and J. Olsen in the context of the general theories of organization and political institutionalization.

The present author has relied on the following scholarly methods of research: systems analysis, in which case the interrelated structural-functional approach and input/output analysis were used; comparative evaluation, based on the categories of similarity and dissimilarity to identify similar, identical or different characteristics of political institutions or processes. Also used were case studies as tools to identify patterns and to obtain the necessary synthesis, considerably enriching the theory of politics. Examined were historical characteristics: synchronous, which presuppose the studies of phenomena in their historical contexts; chronological, or the study of historical events in chronological order; and diachronic, focusing on periodization and historical parallels, historical modeling as applied to political science in general, political processes, technologies and institutions. In addition, the work involved using the systemic functional measurement; content analysis of documents; descriptive and correlational characteristics; and instruments of political estimation.

Various documents served as an empirical basis of politological scholarly studies have made it possible for the author to identify the main trends of politicization of religion and clericalization of politics. The extensive body of documentation material makes it possible to extend the estimation characteristics to an indefinite period.

## Results

Politicization of Islam can be interpreted as acquiring a political status by the processes, phenomena and problems that had no political status. It was launched by the failure of the traditional

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<sup>6</sup> See: *Ibidem*.

methods of dealing with the problem, its high social consequence in the eyes of society and its artificial politicization. Indeed, politicization of Islam is a multifactorial and complex process, associated with using religious ideas for political purposes, justifying political actions and mobilization for non-religious purposes. Political Islam is highly popular in the ummah (a supra-national community with a common history), because of its varied functions (political, social, psychological, and economic) in the context of the Islamic world.

Over two thousand religious organizations in the Republic of Daghestan represent all confessions of Russia.<sup>7</sup> While 64.1% of the polled describes themselves as religious people, only 38.7% observes religious rites and 25% does not observe them at all. At the same time, there are about 200 thousand deeply religious Muslims in the region. The results of the studies testify that the type of religiosity (or religious people) that predominates in Daghestan is not connected with regular religious practices. The attitude toward religion among the Daghestan ethnicities varies: 38% of Avars describe themselves as religious people; the same can be said about 20% of Darghinians; 14% of Kumyks; 10% of Lezghians; 4% of Laks, and 14% of other ethnicities. The share of Wahhabis and members of tariqats among the deeply religious Muslims is negligible—not more than 3 to 4%.

The extremist ideology of Wahhabism is spreading everywhere in the republic, whose geopolitical role has been changed. Independence of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia in the Caucasus and the mounting political instability in Chechnia and other republics of the Northwestern Caucasus made Daghestan the key geopolitical entity in the south of Russia.

Wahhabism was mainly gaining popularity due to numerous internal factors: social and economic instability, unemployment, poverty, individual vulnerability, criminalization of different aspects of everyday life, degradation of morals and ethics, domination of the clan system in the Muslim North Caucasian regions, as well as Moscow's vague regional politics and a low regard for the spiritual status of the clergy. Re-Islamization is most prominent in the Northwestern regions, especially among the Avars, Darghinians (with the exception of Kaytags) and Kumyks and is much less prominent among the Lezghians, Laks, Tabasarans, Darghin-Kaytags.

Islam can be described as the main determinant of social awareness among the peoples of Daghestan and manifests itself in two ways:

- (1) widening and deepening religious convictions in those, who have familiarized themselves with the profound and existential sides of the faith and the Koran;
- (2) interest in the ritual side of Islam, caused by the revival of Islam in Daghestan.

Until 1991, there was no system of religious education in Daghestan; the clergy and teachers of Islam were trained at the Mir-Arab madrasah in Bukhara. In the first half of the 1990s, the educational system was chaotically restored, the process that the institutionalized clergy could not control. Today, Wahhabis are setting up a clandestine network in the regions with Muslim populations with money they get from other countries, together with instructions and orders. This is going on outside the North Caucasian republics as well: in the Stavropol Territory, Astrakhan and Volgograd regions, in Moscow and other big cities of the Russian Federation. In fact, conflicts might flare up in all the regions of European Russia where Muslims live in compact communities—in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, the Volga Area, Mordovia, Nizhniy Novgorod, etc. Today, a protracted court procedure against a Muslim community that bought the local House of Culture for religious purposes is going on in the Moscow Region. Local activists are adamant in their opposition to a Muslim cul-

<sup>7</sup> See: "Komitet po delam religii Dagestana podvel itogi raboty za 2015 god," available at [<http://checheninfo.ru/75405-komitet-po-delam-religii-dagestana-podvel-itogi-za-2015-god.html>], 23 February, 2017.

tural center in the town of Elektrogorsk (Moscow Region); they have already lodged a collective petition with the law enforcement agencies.<sup>8</sup> Muslim leaders have concentrated on the penitentiary system of Russia seen, according to Mufti Sheikh Ravil Gainutdin, as one of the main paths leading to genuine faith.<sup>9</sup>

Social and economic problems are no less important for the development of radical Islamism. The standard of living collapsed together with the Soviet Union. The demographic growth created land deficit in the mountain regions that forced people to find employment in towns and cities. No wonder, the Muslim regions of Russia (the Northern Caucasus, Siberia and the Volga Area) have acquired a huge number of young unemployed people, driven to Islam by inadequate spiritual teachers.

The “religious renaissance of the twenty-first century,” now underway, is a product of the efforts of the political elite to reorganize the political space to extract maximum profits, as well as of the liberation of the colonial world and the desire of the ethnic elites to re-channel the money flows and power resources in their favor. This made the opposition between the spaces-civilizations along the axis of meta-factors even more violent. Religion and the demographic changes, caused by migration processes, can be described as factors of conflicts.

## Discussion

Much has been written and is being written to prove or disprove the impact of Islamic radicalism on the policies of the countries that have to cope with the problems of Islamism in their territories, namely, Germany, France and, of course, Russia. Numerous studies of the problem of interaction between cultures, religions, nationalities and ethnicities are carried out in the countries, where the problem of Islamism cannot be treated lightly. In Russia, in particular, it remains one of the main concerns: Islamic radicalism relies on a wide foundation for its development, while the state still finds it hard to cope with the problem. In the 1990s, the Islamic factor in the life of the Russian society was gradually coming to the fore; hence, a considerably bigger number of relevant published studies. There is no agreement about the main causes of Islamic fundamentalism. The following works, dealing with the process of politicization of the Islamic world and the Islamic factor in individual countries by Russian (V. Akhmedov, I. Gabdrifkov and co-authors, M. Gusev, S. Grachev, O. Kolobov, V. Dontsov, I. Karabulatova, B. Koybaev, L. Sjukijainen, A. Malashenko, N. Mosaki, and others)<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See: “V Podmoskovie podaly v Prokuraturu protiv musulmanskogo tsentra,” available at [<https://golosislama.com/news.php?id=30795>], 22 February, 2017.

<sup>9</sup> See: “Daufit Khamadishin: “Kogda osvobodzhaiushchiysia iz mest lisheniia svobody stanovitsia izgoem v obshchestve, put k vere neobratim,” 22 February, 2017 [<http://dumrf.ru/regions/event/11961>], 24 February, 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See: V. Akhmedov, *Rol islamskogo faktora v obshchestvenno-politicheskom razvitii arabskikh stran Blizhnego Vostoka i ego evoliutsia v usloviakh siriyskogo vosstaniia (90-e gg. XX-nachalo XXI v.)*, Moscow, 2015; I.M. Gabdrifkov, I.S. Karabulatova, L.G. Khusnutdinova, Kh.S. Vildanov, “Ethnoconfessional Factor in Social Adaptation of Migrant Workers in the Muslim Regions of Russia,” *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, Vol. 6, No. 3, Supplement 4, 2015, pp. 213-223; S.I. Grachev, O.A. Kolobov, *Radikalnye techeniia islama: zarubezhny opyt protivodeystviia i ego ispolzovanie v Rossii*, NNGU Publishers, Nizhniy Novgorod, 2007; M.N. Gusev, “Islamskiy faktor vneshnepoliticheskogo vektora kursa stran Yugo-Vostochnoy Azii,” in: *Blizhniy Vostok i sovremennost*, Moscow, 2006; V.E. Dontsov, *Politicheskie protsessy i instituty v usloviakh preodoleniia natsionalnogo raskola: na primere Yemena*, Moscow, 1991; I. Karabulatova, op. cit.; B.G. Koybaev, *Blizhniy Vostok: informatsiia i regionalnaia bezopasnost*, St. Petersburg, 2002; A.V. Malashenko, “Islam i politika v gosudarstvakh Tsentralnoy Azii,” *Tsenralnaia Azia i Kavkaz*, No. 4 (5), 1999; N.Z. Mosaki, *Kurdistan i kurdskiy vopros v politike Zapada i Rossii (90-e gody XX v.-nachalo XXI v.)*, Moscow, 2011; L. Sjukijainen, “Islam vs. Islam. On Islamic Alternative to Extremism and Terrorism,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3 (15), 2002.

and foreign authors (C. Valentine, C. Buchet, D. Novotný and co-authors, V. Hale, R. Spencer, W. Kilpatrick, L. Southern) deserve special mention.<sup>11</sup>

Local journalists add a lot of tension to vehement disagreements between confessions.<sup>12</sup> From the very beginning, the cultural Islamic center, organized several years ago in Vostryakovo, outside Moscow, attracted and still attracts a lot of attention of special services and neighbors, as well as migrant workers; their presence in great and growing numbers has widened the gap between the local people and migrants.<sup>13</sup> Members of the religious movements, banned in Russia, appeared in the Moscow Region; a group of religious fanatics that belonged to the criminal GTA group, operating under the guise of members of a terrorist jamaat, was engaged in killing drivers on the Don highway next to Domodedovo.

The Russian laws keep radical forces of all hues outside the political process and public politics: the parties, whose activities, ideologies or aims do not comply with the Federal Law on Political Parties, have no chances of being legally recognized.

At the same time, the revolution in the sphere of communications, as an element of globalization and the result of modernization, is a factor of social and political activities of the broadest layers of population, who are ready to defend their rights up to and including the right to profess any religion.

## Conclusion

Islamic radicalism is not limited to Russia— acts of terror occur throughout the entire world. Some authors write about self-radicalization, which means that today there is no need for those of the young Europeans, who want to be converted to radical Islam and join terrorist organizations, to go to Muslim countries.<sup>14</sup> The communication networks that have spread across the world have added special urgency to the so-called network wars<sup>15</sup> that make the task of the law enforcement agencies much harder.

The obvious discrepancies between the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad and the highly negative realities of our days are not infrequently interpreted as stemming from moving away from

<sup>11</sup> See: C. Valentin, *La France, champ de bataille privilégié de l'islam politique*, Paris, 2017; "Christian Boucher protiv islamofobii," available at [<http://www.nb-info.ru/revolt/bushel.htm>], 23 February, 2017; D. Novotný, A. Belhaj, M. Čejka, A. Savovová, J. Kužvart, "The Changing Security Situation in the Maghreb," available at [[http://www.anatem.info/articles/securite\\_maghreb.pdf](http://www.anatem.info/articles/securite_maghreb.pdf)], 23 February, 2017; V. Hale, "Islam Academic: Migrants Want Eurabia, Globalists Using Migrants to Destroy the West," 14 August, 2016, available at [<http://www.breitbart.com/london/2016/08/14/islam-academic-migrants-want-eurabia-globalists-using-migrants-to-destroy-the-west/>], 23 February, 2017; R. Spencer, *The Complete Infidel's Guide to Iran*, New York, 2016; W. Kilpatrick, *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Jihad (The Politically Incorrect Guides)*, New York, 2016; L. Southern, *Barbarians: How Baby Boomers, Immigration, and Islam Screwed My Generation*, New York, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> See: "Pravoslavnye Moskvyy i Podmoskovia prosiat perepodchinit islamskie obshchiny Tsentralnoy Rossii muftiyu Tadjuddinu," available at [<http://www.pravoslavie.ru/24429.html>], 23 February, 2017; E. Sazhneva, "V islamskom tsentre pod Moskvoy iz zhenshchin izgoniaut dzhinnov," available at [<http://www.mk.ru/social/2016/10/27/v-islamskom-centre-pod-moskvoy-iz-zhenshchin-izgonyayut-dzhinnov.html>], 23 February, 2017.

<sup>13</sup> See: I. M. Gabdrāfikov, I.S. Karabulatova, L.G. Khusnutdinova, Kh.S. Vildanov, op. cit.

<sup>14</sup> See: I. Karabulatova, B. Akhmetova, K. Shagbanova, E. Loskutova, F. Sayfulina, L. Zamalieva, I. Dyukov, M. Vykhrystyuk, "Shaping Positive Identity in the Context of Ethnocultural Information Security in the Struggle against the Islamic State," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 1, 2016, pp. 84-92.

<sup>15</sup> See: P.V. Barsukov, I.S. Karabulatova, S.V. Nekrasov, I.V. Akhmetov, O.V. Mamatelashvili, F.F. Khizbulin, "Transformatsia sotsialnogo povedeniya v kontekste sovremennykh politicheskikh krizisov nachala XXI v. kak rezultat etnopoliticheskogo diskursa 'setevykh voyn'," in: *Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie i gumanitarno-filosofskie problemy sovremennoy nauki*, Vol. 3, Moscow, Ufa, Rostov on Don, 2015, pp. 60-70; G.V. Osipov, I.S. Karabulatova, G.F. Shafranov-Kutsev, E.R. Kucheryavaya, S.D. Galiullina, L.R. Sadykova, "Problemy etnokonfessionalnogo ekstremizma v Rossii kak otrazhenie deviatykh protsessov v obshchestve," in: *Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie i gumanitarno-filosofskie problemy sovremennoy nauki*, Vol. 2, Moscow, Ufa, Rostov on Don, 2015, pp. 8-17.

religious injunctions, moral degradation of society and abandonment of the traditional norms. “Postmodern” environment, mounting economic, social and political instability and the phenomenon of the “geopolitical chaos” have created a context, in which all sorts of religious factors can affect social life up to and including the problem of social fairness, political system and the system of power relations.<sup>16</sup> This is closely connected with the idealization of the first ummah as a society, in which the egalitarian ideals of the lower classes (that suffered more than all other social groups because of the failures of social and economic reforms in the developing countries) were fully realized.

Overall, one can say that the specifics of Islam, as religion, played the main role in using it as the basis of the extremist ideology in Muslim countries. Due to this the optimal ideological forms that Islam has added to extremism can play a great, but probably not a decisive role in its spreading appeal.

The state should ensure security, hence measures are taken to restrain individual terrorists and terrorist organizations that have hoisted the banner of radical Islam. The laws adopted and applied in the Russian Federation are effective, albeit to a lesser degree than expected. Today, radical Muslims are kept outside the open political process: their parties and organizations are banned, while much is being done to stem the proliferation of the ideas of radical Islam.

Today, Russia wants to exclude Islamists from the political process by proliferating the traditional Islamic norms and values, police means and methods and even physical liquidation of Islamists. However, Islamism remains and will remain one of the biggest threats for many years to come.

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<sup>16</sup> See: E. Ermakova, M. Jilkisheva, G. Fayzullina, I. Karabulatova, Kh. Shagbanova, “The Media and Fiction: Postmodernist Discourse of Contemporary Terrorism in the Context of Apocalyptic Rhetoric,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 17, Issue 2, 2016, pp. 61-69.