

## ETHNICITIES AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

URGENT PROBLEMS OF  
THE WESTERN CIRCASSIANS  
IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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## A B S T R A C T

**T**he author analyzes the most urgent problems of the Western Circassians (the Shapsugs of the Caucasian Black Sea coast and the Adighe of the Republic of Adigey) caused by the 2014 Winter Olympics in the Krasnodar Territory, as well as the religious context that took shape after the election of the new mufti of the Republic of Adigey in December 2012.

The article is based on ethnographic field polls carried out in areas populated by Western Circassians, leading the author to conclude that the government should pay more attention to the social, economic, and cultural problems of the Shapsugs of the Black Sea coastal area and concentrate on preventing Islamic radicalization in the Republic of Adigey.

**KEYWORDS:** *Shapsugs of the Black Sea coast, Olympic Games, the problem of the Circassian language, the International Circassian Association of Shapsugs, Adyge Khase, congress of the Muslims of Adigey, Kabardino-Balkaria, Islamic leaders, mufti of the Republic of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory.*

## Introduction

In the 21st century, the Western Circassians of the Republic of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory became fully aware of the negative impact of the “new” policy of the Russian Federation and the republican authorities (shaped to a great extent by the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi), as well as of the activities of the local Muslim community. I would like to dwell here in greater detail on the urgent problems of the Western Circassians living in two constituent territories of the Russian Federation—the Krasnodar Territory and the Republic of Adigey—mainly between Sochi and Tuapse, as well as along the Black Sea coast.

### The Shapsugs of the Black Sea Coastal Area

In 2008, I conducted a comprehensive study to find out *the extent to which the Shapsugs of the Black Sea coastal area have been preserving their identity in the 21st century*; the results were summarized in the “Issledovania po prikladnoy i neotlozhnoy etnologii” (Studies of Applied and Urgent Ethnology) Series published by the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology, RAS.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of Sochi as the venue for the 2014 Winter Olympics proved to be of immense significance for the Black Sea coastal area and caused huge social, economic, and cultural shifts in the life of the Shapsugs of the Tuapse and Lazarevskoe districts of the Krasnodar Territory.<sup>2</sup>

### Social and Political Life

In the last few years, the International Circassian Association, Adyge Khase, a public organization of the Shapsugs of the Black Sea coastal area chaired by Majid Chachukh, has been concentrating on the problem of its official attitude toward the 2014 Winter Olympics.

It called on its members to support the Sochi Olympics, which cost the International Circassian Association its popularity among the Shapsugs: many of them were very unhappy that the International Circassian Association had failed to acquire privileges and preferences for the community in exchange for its support of this major international sports event.

Ruslan Gvashev, one of the founding fathers of the Adyge Khase (earlier a research fellow at the Sochi history museum), is one of the most active critics of Chairman Chachukh.<sup>3</sup>

On 30 April, 2011, the congress of the Adyge Khase elected Ruslan Gvashev as chairman of the Council of Elders of the Black Sea Area. Speaking at the congress, the newly elected chairman pointed out that in recent years he had written several letters to the top figures of the Russian Federation, drawing their attention to the problems created by the Sochi Olympics. He pointed out that

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<sup>1</sup> See: I.L. Babich, *Problemy sokhraneniya identichnosti shapsugov Prichernomoria v XXI v.* Issledovania po prikladnoy i neotlozhnoy etnologii Series, Moscow, No. 213, 2009; I.L. Babich, “Prichernomorskie shapsugi: problemy sokhraneniya kultury,” *Filosofia, sotsiologiya, kultura*, No. 5, 2006, pp. 107-114.

<sup>2</sup> Makopse, Golovinka, Psebe, Shkhafit, Akhintam, Bolshoy Kichmay, Maly Kichmay, Khajiko, Tkhagapsh, Bolshoe Pseushkho, Maloe Pseushkho, Tsyypka, Aguy-Shapsug as well as Lazarevskoe, an urban-type settlement, and the cities of Tuapse and Sochi.

<sup>3</sup> Ethnographic field materials of the author (further PEMA), Vol. 1, File 1, interview with A.Kh., the aul of Bolshoi Kichmay, 3 November, 2013.

*the authorities of the Krasnodar Territory practically ignored the Circassians in general and the Shapsugs in particular, who are the area's "autochthonous population."* In one of his letters he wrote: "We are deeply convinced that only the President of the Russian Federation can defuse the tension created by the future Olympics and the upcoming 150th anniversary of the end of the Russian-Caucasian War of 1817-1864 in 2014 and show us reasonable prospects."<sup>4</sup>

In one of his letters, Ruslan Gvashev informed Moscow that for over a decade the Adyge Khase, as an official Shapsug-Circassian structure, had been trying in vain to insist that the Federal Law of the RF On the Autochthonous and Numerically Small Peoples of the RF, which included the Shapsugs-Circassians, should be executed in the Krasnodar Territory.

Ruslan Gvashev is convinced that this explains why the rights and interests of the Shapsug-Circassians of the Black Sea area are neglected and the problems remain ignored. There is no official list of the places of their traditional settlement and economic activity; there is no decision to make the Circassian language an obligatory part of the school curriculum. The official Charter of the Krasnodar Territory says nothing about the Adighe-Circassians (the autochthonous people) or the Shapsug-Circassians (an autochthonous minority of the Krasnodar Territory).

He believes that the anthem of the Krasnodar Territory based on a Cossack song of the time of World War I calls for annihilating the basurmans (which he interprets as "followers of other than Christian faiths").

In October 2013, Gvashev stressed, in an interview with Reuters, his negative attitude toward the republican authorities and the local public organizations because of their posture regarding the upcoming Sochi Olympics. He stressed that "specialists in the Caucasus and members of the Adighe-Circassian community were not invited to discuss the design or implementation of the construction projects related to the future Olympic Games; this failure buries the unique material culture of this people. We were not given the opportunity to move the remains of our ancestors to new places. Urgently forming a commission of archeologists, ethnologists, ethnographers, and members of the autochthonous people—Adighe-Circassians—could have minimized the losses. Neither the media, nor officials mentioned the fact that the center of Sochi and Krasnaia Poliana (Kbaade) were the historical homeland of the Adighe-Circassians and Ubykhs (one of the sub-ethnicities of the Adighe-Circassian ethnicity); today, they no longer live there. The year of the Olympics is the year of the 150th anniversary of the end of the Caucasian War, which pushed the local peoples to the brink of extinction. This explains why the majority of us are very negative about the upcoming international sports event. The odious statements coming from federal officials are adding tension to the already tense situation."

Today, one of the settlements (the aul of Bolshoy Kichmay in a picturesque valley) has been chosen as an example of "Shapsug prosperity." It has everything up to and including the Internet; there is also a new school (built by the efforts of its former director A. Gvashev long before it was decided to make Sochi the capital of the next Winter Olympics).

The local authorities, however, have usurped the right to present the school as evidence of their care for the Shapsugs. The aul is a shopwindow of sorts: all guests are invariably taken there. In October 2013, Kabardins, graduates of the Kabardino-Balkarian State University ("loyal to Putin" according to one of our interviewees), were treated to a concert in Lazarevskoe, where the local Cossacks greeted them "on the land of Lazarev."<sup>5</sup>

The Shapsugs are worried about the rapid "Russification" of their settlements. Some think that "Governor of the Krasnodar Territory Tkachev and his representatives are convinced that the Black Sea lands populated by the Shapsugs are in fact Cossack lands. They say: 'We conquered these lands and they became ours.' Local officials say that 'there were not enough ships to move all the Circas-

<sup>4</sup> [www.natpress.net].

<sup>5</sup> PEMA, Vol. 1, File 1, interview with A.Kh., Bolshoy Kichmay, 2 November, 2013.

sians to Turkey.<sup>6</sup> In other words, the Shapsugs believe that the local authorities are acting from the position of strength.”<sup>6</sup>

The Shapsugs’ contribution to the Olympic Games was limited to two spheres:

- (1) dance and singing groups performing together with the Cossack and folklore groups of other peoples functioning at the Center of National Cultures in Lazarevskoe; and
- (2) an exhibition of everyday Shapsug life and culture together with exhibitions of other peoples of Russia; *it was implied that the political difficulties between the Circassians and the Russian Empire should be kept strictly outside the exhibition’s scope.* The local authorities were invited to organize A Circassian Household exhibition in the Imereti Valley based on the collections of the Museum of Local Lore in Lazarevskoe and the national museum of the Republic of Adigey.<sup>7</sup>

The reasons why the International Circassian Association failed to achieve an agreement with the Olympic Committee of the RF on creating souvenirs portraying Circassian national ornaments was one of the issues that troubled our interviewees. The local public leaders were convinced that Shapsug businessmen (and there are businessmen among the Shapsugs) would have never done this for the simple reason that the right to go into business in the Black Sea area is reserved for those who are loyal to the local authorities and, therefore, would not interfere with the preparations for the Olympics.

On the other hand, concentrating on the Circassian problem contradicts the “vector of tolerance” in Russia’s politics, so the Shapsug businessmen preferred to stay away lest they upset the preparations.

There are problems in the linguistic sphere as well. Here is an example. In the Shapsug villages, the names of streets are written in Russian; on the eve of the Olympics they were also given in Latin script. The Shapsugs’ request to write the names in Circassian was declined for the following reason: “The Circassian language is not a regional language in the Krasnodar Territory.” This means that the auls in the Krasnodar Territory should use *the Russian language* for the names of streets. If they had been in the Republic of Adigey, the Circassian language could have been used to name them.

Here is another example. A monument to a Shapsug hero erected in Bolshoy Kichmay had an inscription in Circassian; the local authorities asked for it to be written in Russian too. Even though this was a fair compromise, since officially the inscription should only have been in Russian, the Shapsugs were dissatisfied.

The leaders of the Shapsug public movement are convinced that the youth “do not agree with the Sochi Olympics” because “Russia has failed to recognize the Shapsugs as an autochthonous people of the Black Sea Area, thus losing the chance to reconcile the peoples.”

My ethnographic field studies, however, proved that the leaders are not entirely correct: there were young men (mostly students of Sochi higher educational establishments) ready to work as volunteers at the Olympic Games.<sup>8</sup> (The local authorities actively promoted the Sochi Olympics at schools.)

One of our young Shapsug interviewees said that he wanted to work as a volunteer and added that he was amazed to learn that Circassian websites abroad were calling for a boycott of the Sochi Olympics “because they are being organized on land drenched in blood.” He added that he would have liked the leaders of the Sochi Olympics to point out that the games were being organized on the land of the Shapsugs.<sup>9</sup>

It seems that, on the one hand, the Olympic Games were used by the Circassian (more specifically Kabardin) human rights movements as a pretext; this means that the Shapsugs and their prob-

<sup>6</sup> PEMA, Vol. 1, File 2, interview with A.G., Bolshoy Kichmay, 5 November, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 1, interview with A.Kh., Bolshoy Kichmay, 3 November, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 2, interview with A.G., Bolshoy Kichmay, 5 November, 2013.

<sup>9</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 3, interview with R.A., Golovinka, 7 November, 2013.

lems were used as instruments of alien politics. On the other hand, the Shapsugs themselves tried to capitalize on the Sochi Olympics, but instead of addressing social, economic, and cultural problems, they plunged into politics.

## Reproduction of the Ethnic Circassian Culture

Today, the ethnic Circassian culture is preserved among the Shapsugs through Circassian language and literature classes and optional history lessons in school, which include history of culture and everyday life. History of the Kuban Region (not the Circassian history) is another part of the school curriculum, because the Shapsug auls administratively belong to the Krasnodar Territory.

The Circassian literary language is indispensable for the Shapsug national identity; in most schools, however, it remains an optional subject. In Bolshoy Kichmay, it forms part of the school curriculum thanks to the efforts of its former director A. Gvashev, even though the number of hours is obviously inadequate (see Table 1).

*Table 1*

**Number of Hours per Week of Circassian Language and  
Literature Classes in the 2nd-11th Grades  
at the Secondary School of Bolshoy Kichmay**

Grade	Circassian Language	Circassian Literature
2nd	2	—
3rd	1	1
4th	1	
5th	2	1
6th	1	—
7th	1	1
8th	2	1
9th	—	1
10th	1	1
11th	1	2

In recent years, the number of hours dedicated to the ethnic culture was reduced to increase the number of hours of physical education and the history and culture of the Kuban Region.<sup>10</sup>

Today, Shapsug children are fluent in the Circassian literary language (based on the dialect used by the Temirgoy tribe), which they study in school, but are practically ignorant of the language used in everyday life. An interviewee in Golovinka told us that he had been aware of his Circassian (Shapsug) ethnicity since the age of 10, even though he did not know either the Circassian literary language

<sup>10</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 2, interview with A.G., Bolshoy Kichmay, 5 November, 2013.

or its everyday (Shapsug) variant.<sup>11</sup> When asked why he preferred to call himself Circassian he explained that the world knew more about Circassians than Shapsugs, but added that during the recent population census his father had registered himself and his son as “Shapsugs.”

Bolshoy Kichmay has an ethnographic museum; the office of the Circassian language and literature at the local school displays a map of Circassia before the Russian-Caucasian War and the tamgas (family symbols); schoolchildren can watch films about the history, traditions, and customs of the Circassians.

The school has an anthem written by its director A. Gvashev and a tamga designed by him showing the attributes of Circassian culture: a three-legged table, cradle, dagger and a fur hat.

Many of the elements of the Circassian culture and morals affect and correspondingly adjust the behavior of the young people<sup>12</sup>; even children are fond of drawing national rites and holidays.

Young people are aware of how the behavior of the local Shapsug community and the people who come to the seaside resorts differs.

Marriage and funeral folk traditions are faithfully observed.<sup>13</sup>

## Islam among the Shapsugs

Practically no auls have mosques; in some of them they are still being built (in the settlement of Novomikhaylovsky and the auls of Psebe and Aguy-Shapsug); in others there are prayer houses (the auls of Kalezh and Maly Kichmay; in the latter imam N. Umaru conducts services in N. Achmizova's house). There are only two functioning mosques: a new and impressive mosque in the aul of Bolshoy Pseushkho built in 2002 and the restored old mosque in the aul of Tkhagapsh.<sup>14</sup>

Unlike the other North Caucasian peoples, the Shapsugs are not enthusiastic Muslims; they have no single religious administration: the Muslims of the Tuapse District obey the district imam; while the Muslims of the Lazarevskoe District are subordinate to the imam of Sochi; both belong to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Republic of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory (SAM of RA and KT).<sup>15</sup>

Ardent Muslims among the youth go to mosques and perform namaz; there are Shapsugs who never go to mosques and never perform namaz, but who consider themselves to be Muslims.<sup>16</sup> A large number of young men know nothing about nekyakh (the Muslim marriage ceremony), but they are convinced that each man should pay kalym for his bride.<sup>17</sup>

On 8 December, 2012, B. Shkhalakhov, imam of the Tuapse District, convened a meeting of Muslims of the Krasnodar Territory in Shkhafit, a Shapsug aul; I. Shkhalakhov and M. Khasani, leaders of young Muslims of Adigey, were also present.<sup>18</sup> It was pointed out at the congress that several local Shapsugs studied at Islamic institutes. In November 2012, Ibrahim Shkhalakhov, a local Shapsug, was elected Deputy Mufti of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory.

<sup>11</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 3, interview with P.A., Golovinka, 7 November, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>13</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>14</sup> See: “Neugasimy svet islama: Vozrozhdenie Islama v Respublike Adigey i Krasnodarskom krae,” in: *TsPO Dukhovnoe upravlenie musulman RA i KK*, ed. by N.M. Emizh, Kachestvo Ltd, Maykop, 2011, pp. 110-122.

<sup>15</sup> See: A. Nibo, “Vozrazhdaia dukhovnost,” *Shapsugia*, No. 8, 2006.

<sup>16</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 3, interview with R.A., Golovinka, 7 November, 2013.

<sup>17</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>18</sup> See: “Sobranie musulman Chernomorskogo poberezhia,” *Svet*, newspaper of the SAM of RA and KT, No. 7 (65), 2012.

## Ethnic Culture and the Economy

Since 2008, the economic situation in Shapsug villages has considerably improved, which confirmed the local people, very much as people elsewhere in Russia, in their belief that money is the main value.<sup>19</sup> There are no traces of economic development in the Shapsug villages; people (young people in particular) are employed at the local spas.

Our interviewees (especially members of local intelligentsia) are convinced that the spa economy has a negative effect on young people and their behavior.<sup>20</sup>

Circassian-style cafes along the road leading to a tourist attraction called Thirty-Three Waterfalls beyond Bolshoy Kichmay serve barbeque, and there are dance groups to add local color. These trips, which are highly popular among tourists, bring in good money.<sup>21</sup>

Today, there are five or six such places in Bolshoy Kichmay; this fairly profitable business belongs to A. Gvashev, former director of the local school. It was expected to develop into *ethnic tourism* (I wrote about this five years ago).<sup>22</sup> Five or seven years ago, there were people interested in the history and culture of the Caucasian peoples (the Circassians in particular); today barbeque and dances are the main attraction.

The people who organize the trips pay agents who gather groups on the seashore and bring them to the auls. In winter, there are 2 to 3 parties a week; in summer, they are daily events.<sup>23</sup> The Mezdakh complex has a hotel, sauna, restaurant, billiard room, ethnographic museum, dolmen, and a basin with live trout set up along the road leading to the waterfalls; the dances performed for the tourists are a melee of different Caucasian dances. A folklore dance ensemble famous for its performances at the Mezdakh waterfalls advertizes itself as follows: "Impressive dances with daggers, swords and drums; unique interpretations of well-know dances and old legends. We will introduce you to the culture of all the peoples of the Caucasus."

These cafes are prepared to go to all lengths to earn money: the administration of one of them (Kavkaz) was ready to go as far as celebrating Halloween.

It seems that the Sochi Olympics did not affect the social, political, and economic life of the Shapsugs of the Black Sea coast, yet their traditional culture is strongly affected by the proximity of the Black Sea resorts and tourist economy; the culture of other Circassian groups (Adighe and Kabardin) living in other areas, is more or less protected against alien impacts. The traditional culture of the Shapsugs has been and remains an important part of their self-identity.

## A "Soft Islamic Revolution" in Contemporary Adigey

In the 1990s, the Muslim renaissance caused by the political changes and freedom of religion spread far and wide in the Islamic regions of the Russian Federation.

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<sup>19</sup> See: Field materials of the author. The Lazarevskoe District of the Krasnodar Territory, 2007 (further PMA). Notebook 1, Inventory 1, File 1.

<sup>20</sup> See: PMA, the Tuapse District of the Krasnodar Territory, 2007, Notebook 1, Inventory 2, File 10.

<sup>21</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 3, interview with R.A., Golovinka, 7 November, 2013.

<sup>22</sup> See: I.L. Babich, *Problemy sokhraneniya identichnosti shapsugov Prichernomoria v XXI v.*, p. 23.

<sup>23</sup> See: PEMA, Vol. 1, File 2, interview with A.G., Bolshoy Kichmay, 5 November, 2013.

In the Northern Caucasus, the emerging Islamic community went the same way as the other Muslim regions; there are, however, certain specifics attributed to local history, the degree of religiosity of the local people, the region's geopolitical situation, etc.

At all times, the Islamic revival in the Northern Caucasus has been a complicated and contradictory process; today it is deeply rooted in the far from simple interaction between Islam and politics and their mutual influence in Russia.

On 24 November, 2012, Maykop hosted a congress of the Muslims of the Republic of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory (the last one was held four years previously, on 12 November, 2008). Attended by 177 delegates out of the 225 invited, the congress in Maykop proved to be all-important for the religious life in the Republic of Adigey.<sup>24</sup> It should be said that I personally obtained the above figures while attending the congress; they are somewhat different from the figures (176 present out of 201 invited) quoted in the newspaper *Svet* (Light) published by the SAM of RA and KT.<sup>25</sup>

The congress heard the report of Nurbiy Emizh, Mufti of the SAM, who pointed out that the congress had been organized by an Organizing Committee headed by Ibrahim Shkhalakhov, one of the young Muslims,<sup>26</sup> and that he personally had not been involved.

Ibrahim Shkhalakhov was born in 1975 in Bolshoy Pseushkho, the Tuapse District; he graduated from the Marine Professional Technical College in 1993 and in 2007 became Deputy Mufti of the SAM of RA and KT and imam of the Main Mosque of Maykop. Significantly, he is one of the few of those sent to Islamic higher educational establishments in Saudi Arabia and Syria to complete the course.<sup>27</sup>

Nurbiy Emizh summarized the activities and financial status of the Spiritual Administration; the delegates had no questions and offered no comments.

The mufti stressed that in recent years many Circassians had developed the tendency to join all sorts of sects rather than attend mosques.<sup>28</sup> In 2012, the SAM responded with a decision that said in part: "Members of Circassian families, one of whom have joined a sect, may not be buried in Muslim cemeteries."<sup>29</sup>

Elections of a new mufti attracted a lot of attention; the older and the younger (around 40 years) generations could not agree on the candidate: the former wanted Mufti Emizh re-elected, while their opponents preferred to see one of the "young Muslims" in this post.

The final list of candidates included Mufti Emizh; imam of a Maykop mosque A. Kardanov; imam of the Main Mosque of the Republic of Adigey I. Shkhalakhov; and imam of the aul of Mafekh-abl Kh. Mukhamad, who had moved to the Caucasus from Kosovo. The latter three were members of the Organizing Committee.

Ibrahim Shkhalakhov, an outstanding and ambitious leader, left the race at the last moment in favor of Askarbiy Kardanov, an intelligent young man with no leadership talents, but with good contacts at the very top. As a candidate to the post he said that "the time has come to clear the way for the young" (the three contenders were around 40). Kh. Mukhamad, likewise, left the race in favor of Kardanov. The voting by show of hands gave 44 votes to Emizh and 125 votes to Kardanov.

It appears that we saw a "soft Islamic revolution" in the Republic of Adigey and the Krasnodar Territory that brought "young Muslims" to power in the republic's Islamic community.

<sup>24</sup> See: Field materials gathered by the author. Congress of the Muslims of the RA and KT, 24 December 2012, Maykop, Republic of Adigey (further PZA).

<sup>25</sup> See: "Sostoialia ocherednoy s'ezd musulman Respubliki Adygea i Krasnodarskogo kraia," *Svet*, No. 7 (65), 2012.

<sup>26</sup> [www.adigea.aif.ru].

<sup>27</sup> See: Field materials of the author, Republic of Adigey, Vol. 1, File 1, 25 November, 2012.

<sup>28</sup> See: I.L. Babich, "Protestanskoe dvizhenie v Adygee," in *Khristianstvo na Severnom Kavkaze: istoria i sovremennost*, ed. by I.L. Babich, L.T. Solovyeva, Moscow, 2011, pp. 162-185.

<sup>29</sup> PZA, 24 December, 2012, Republic of Adigey.



In the new context, the mufti will be a formal rather than a real leader; a neutral candidate was elected to allow the new Council of the SAM (which included the strongest figures from among the Organizing Committee and Shkhalakhov and Mukhamad, two former candidates to the post of mufti) to concentrate real spiritual power in its hands. Ibrahim Shkhalakhov preserved his post of Deputy Mufti of the SAM of RA and KT.

After December 2013, these people moved into the limelight of new Islamic reality in the Republic of Adigey; the fact that on 26 October, 2013, Deputy Mufti Shkhalakhov, rather than the mufti, was interviewed by *Argumenty i fakty* about the state of affairs in the local Islamic revival speaks volumes.<sup>30</sup> Here is another telltale fact: Emizh declined an invitation to the new Council of the SAM.

This was a *democratic* transfer of power from the old to the new Muslim forces (the so-called “young Muslims”), who have their own ideas about Islamic revival in the republic and who want to defend their right to introduce their own forms and methods very different from those used by Emizh.<sup>31</sup>

Here I want to summarize the 12-year term of Nurbiy Emizh as a mufti, as well as the realized and possible trends of his successor.

It should be said that the power struggle within the Muslim community and the Islamic institution is very typical of the North Caucasian republics. It has been going on endlessly in Kabardino-Balkaria, where the so-called young Muslims represented by A. Astemirov, M. Mukozhev, and others have been trying, for the last 10 to 15 years, to acquire “legal Islamic power” in the muftiat. Having tried, without much success, all the legal methods, they turned to illegal methods of struggle and suffered a crushing defeat from the republican and federal defense and security structures.<sup>32</sup>

On 13-14 October, 2005, groups of local Muslims attacked the buildings of the republican defense and security structures in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria.

The republic found itself in a new religious situation: the local Islamic community, after gaining strength in the 1990s, was ready to create a new reality for the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria in the Russian context.

On the other hand, the Northern Caucasus acquired a new seat of religious and political extremism: judging by the recent developments in the republic, a large part of the local youth is ready to join the political struggle under Islamic slogans.

Today, *the peaceful nature of Muslim renaissance in Kabardino-Balkaria and other Muslim republics depends on the degree to which the causes behind the 2005 events in Nalchik have been analyzed and taken into account.*

These events have separated the Islamic youth opposed to the SAM of Kabardino-Balkaria and the religious extremists opposed to the government and ready to use force. Igor Dobaev has pointed out that the political extremists and terrorists are not only calling for violence, but are also using it.<sup>33</sup>

Today, the religious context in the republic is greatly affected by an even fiercer *struggle for leadership at all levels of the Islamic community waged by exclusively legal methods.* At the first

<sup>30</sup> See: I. Shkhalakhov, “Radikalizatsiia islama iskhodit ot malogramotnykh liudei,” *Argumenty i fakty*, 26 October, 2013, available at [www.adigea.aif.ru].

<sup>31</sup> See: I.L. Babich, “The Republic of Adigey: Islam and Society at the Turn of the Century,” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 6, 2004, p. 58.

<sup>32</sup> See: I.L. Babich, *Antropologia vlasti i Islam*, Moscow, 2009; idem, “Sovremennye islamskie obshchiny v Kabardino-Balkarii,” *Rossia i musulmanskyy mir*, No. 7, 2003, pp. 48-61; idem, “Sovremennye islamskie dvizheniya v Kabardino-Balkarii,” in: I.L. Babich, A.A. Yarlykapov, *Islamskoe vozrozhdenie v sovremennoy Kabardino-Balkarii*, Moscow, 2003, pp. 76-112; I.L. Babich, *Islam i pravo v Rossii*, Islam i pravo v Rossii Series, ed. by I.L. Babich, L.T. Solovyeva, Moscow, 1994, Issue 1; *Pravovoy status islama na Severnom Kavkaze. Kabardino-Balkaria. Adigey. Krasnodarskiy Kray*, Islam i pravo v Rossii Series, Issue 3.

<sup>33</sup> See: I.P. Dobaev, V.I. Nemchina, *Novyy terrorism v mire i na yuzge Rossii*, Rostov on Don, 2005, p. 48.

stage, the sides strove to occupy the top posts in the Spiritual Administration; at the second, they are seeking influence on the republican authorities.

This suggests logical questions: Why did the young Muslims fail in Kabardino-Balkaria and fairly peacefully achieve their aim in the Republic of Adigey? What makes the confrontation between age groups in these republics different? Will the events in both republics follow the same pattern?

Throughout his twelve years of service, Mufti Emizh pursued a fairly consistent policy of Islamic revival; he paid much attention to the academic community, which was invariably aware of his friendliness and conscientious attitude toward his duties.

In 2002 -2006, I regularly discussed with him the practically inevitable confrontation between different generations of Muslims, especially in the context of what happened in October 2005 in Nalchik. The mufti was sure that he would remain in control and would be able to keep the young Muslims of Adigey within certain limits.

His confidence was not quite justified: young Muslims did come to power, but they never demonstrated the radicalism that was very obvious in Kabardino-Balkaria. It was a natural and even inevitable process, which could not be reverted by legal means.

Nurbiy Emizh, a shrewd and far-sighted man, accepted this, which made it possible to transfer power without confrontation. Aware of what was coming, he correctly assessed all the possible repercussions to refrain from accusing the young Muslim leaders of radicalism; he never tried to use his contacts in the upper echelons of power or incite the defense and security structures against the young Muslims—this had happened in Kabardino-Balkaria with lamentable results.<sup>34</sup>

The first year of the new SAM of RA and KT provided an answer to the question about the trends in the local Muslims' spiritual life.

Nurbiy Emizh worked with the older generation to uproot the false national and false Islamic (burial) traditions that had struck root by the early 1990s. Judging by I. Shkhalakhov's interview with *Argumenty i fakty*, the new people at the helm will concentrate on the younger generation: "We want to plant correct ideas about Islam in the minds of the younger generation through lectures, lessons, sermons, and talks with children."<sup>35</sup>

The new people strive to educate the youth, shape their spiritual conscience, and spread the rules of Muslim behavior among them.

This is further confirmed by an interview of Mufti Kardanov; still at the stage of preparations for the congress in Maykop, the Organizing Committee made up of members later elected to the Spiritual Administration exerted great efforts to draw the young men of the republic to its side. According to Shkhalakhov, today only two districts—Shovgen and Krasnogvardeysk—remain outside their influence.<sup>36</sup>

The deputy mufti believes that only five imams (out of the total 45) can be considered well-educated; he said that the Spiritual Administration was planning a series of lectures to raise the educational level of the others.

The deputy mufti spoke about the huge problems created by the Internet: the "moral values" preached by the Worldwide Web have little in common with what the muftiat strives to plant in young minds and hearts.

It seems that today the new people at the helm of the SAM are building a following among the republic's youth to acquire a strong social foundation in all the districts of the republic.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> See: I.L. Babich, "Sovremennye islamskie obshchiny v Kabardino-Balkarii," pp. 48-61; idem, "Sovremennye islamskie dvizhenia v Kabardino-Balkarii," pp. 76-112.

<sup>35</sup> I. Shkhalakhov, op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> See: Field ethnographic materials of the author. Republic of Adigey (further EMA), Vol. 1, File 2, 8 November, 2013, interview with A.K.

<sup>37</sup> See: EMA, Vol. 1, File 1, 6 November, 2013, interview with R.Ts.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the young Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria pursued a similar aim: they promoted their ideas of Muslim renaissance through the newly established Islamic educational system, which positively affected the minds of young Muslims all over the republic. Unofficial Islam represented by Astemirov and Mukozhev in particular attracted a large number of followers.

On 21 June, 2013, Head of the Republic of Adigey Aslan Tkhakushinov met Mufti A. Kardanov and imam of the Main Mosque of the aul of Mafekhahl M. Khasani<sup>38</sup> to discuss the burial rites the republic's population had acquired in the last twenty years. He pointed out that many of the novelties had nothing to do with Islam (in particular, funeral feasts on the 7th and 40th days after the death and after twelve months).

I have already written that Emizh was actively opposed to these novelties; the present leaders of the republic fully agree with this. In an effort to persuade people to abandon these rites as alien to the Islamic tradition, the president of the republic (very much like Emizh before him) talked to people all over Adigey. It turned out that the people wanted a madrassah to educate imams and educational courses for the effendi. President Tkhakushinov pays a lot of attention to what the people have to say and supports all acceptable ideas.

## Weakening Radicalization and Blocking Terrorism

Alexander Ignatenko has described how Islamic communities slip into radicalization: they are either tempted by the ideological garbs of social discontent stirred up by social and economic decline or by the active propaganda of Salafi ideas.<sup>39</sup>

It seems that *a combination of ideological and legal methods and the use of force* is the most efficient tool the government should arm itself with to return the social, political, and religious situation back to normal.

We should be keenly aware of the difference between the Islamic youth and the Wahhabis. According to Ignatenko, "Wahhabism is a political trend, the supporters of which rely on a very specific and highly subjective interpretation of Islam in an effort to preserve the status quo (by using force) in the Islamic countries in particular, and not only there."<sup>40</sup>

Igor Dobaev uses the term *neo-Wahhabism* to describe the ideology of religious extremism and terrorism with political hues.<sup>41</sup>

The events in Kabardino-Balkaria have supplied us with a clear understanding of the process of radicalization of the Muslim community to help us avoid similar developments in Adigey.

To lower the degree of "Islamic tension" in the republic *we should protect its youth against the "young Islamic ideology"* through the concerted efforts of the academic and creative intelligentsia to replace radicalism with positive *mountain ideology* rather than relying on the defense and security structures, which are doing their job anyway. Igor Dobaev has convincingly demonstrated that *educational efforts and propaganda of the right ideas should become more active.*<sup>42</sup>

The older generation of the local intelligentsia stays away from the Islamic revival and the efforts to formulate an ideology adjusted to the current public and social context expected to become

<sup>38</sup> See: *Svet*, No. 3 (68), 2013.

<sup>39</sup> See: A.A. Ignatenko, *Islam i politika*, Moscow, 2004, p. 22.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32

<sup>41</sup> See: I.P. Dobaev, V.I. Nemchina, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> See: *Ibid.*, pp. 270-271.

part of the moral foundation of the region's mountain communities. Islamic ideology is being created essentially from scratch: the national Caucasian cultures, which have a marginal role in the mountain communities, cannot stand opposed to the impact of Islamic revival.

R. Khanakhu and O. Tsvetkov, prominent experts in Adigey, who write a lot about Islam, have predicted a more vehement conflict between the "traditional" and "young" Muslims (of the older and younger generations of local Muslims).<sup>43</sup> I have a different view of the future of Islam in Adigey.

The "young Muslims" have already won and come to power through legal means. There is no need for them to keep on fighting the older generation for spheres of influence in the Muslim community, since the disagreements in the past were not over rites and rituals but over power.

This means that the young leaders will concentrate on brainwashing the republic's youth and will leave the older generation in peace.

The tension between the SAM of RA and KT and all sorts of administrative and, probably, defense and security structures will most likely increase to a certain extent in the near future.

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<sup>43</sup> See: R.Kh. Khanakhu, O.M. Tsvetkov, "Islamskaia obshchina v Adygee: vnutrenniaia dinamika i perspektivy evolutsii (po itogam sotsiologicheskogo issledovaniia)," *Vestnik Adygeyskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, Issue 1 (92), 2012, pp. 132-138.