

WHY THE MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS OF RUSSIA SPLIT

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Liberalization of Muslim Life and Moving Toward the Split

In Soviet times the Muslims of the Russian Federation were supervised by two structures: the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the European Part of the U.S.S.R. and Siberia (SAMES) with headquarters in Ufa and the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus (SAMNC) based in Makhachkala. The former was headed by Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin elected on 19 June, 1980; and the latter by Makhmud Gekkiev.

In May-October 1989 Balkar Gekkiev and acting muftis, Kumyk Magomed-Mukhtar Babatov and Darghin Abdullah Aligadjiev, were successively dismissed from their posts; another acting mufti, Darghin Akhmad Magomedov, was elected; by December 1989 the kazi of Karachaevo-Cherkessia, Ismail Berdiev, of Checheno-Ingushetia, Shakhid Gazabaev, and of Kabardino-Balkaria, Shafiq Pshikhachev, withdrew from the SAMNC.

The North Caucasian developments supplied the Tartar Muslims with certain ideas: according to Nafigullah Ashirov (who headed the SAMES department for economic activities), in May 1990, at a SAMES plenary meeting, Gabdullah Galiullin, Mukaddas Bibarsov, and Umar Idrisov put forward a demand to set up regional muhtasibats autonomous of Ufa. Tadjuddin refused to second their proposition. At the SAMES Fifth Congress on 6-8 June, 1990, the majority of 700 delegates supported Tadjuddin and praised, or even acclaimed him. As a result, he was reelected with the high spiritual title of Sheikh-ul-Islam. Gabdullah Galiullin, who made a feeble attempt to raise the question of autonomous muhtasibats, was cut short by Ashirov, who said that the place and time were ill-chosen. Later Ashirov said that for some time their personal relations remained strained.¹ Immediately after the congress, the groups of delegates who stayed in a Ufa hotel said among themselves that “the congress was a formal one; it changed nothing and resolved no problems.” Having failed to suppress the internal contradictions, Tadjuddin agreed to accept some of its demands: on 15 January, 1991, the meeting of the presidium called to “improve administration of the Muslim community” passed a decision on setting up 25 muhtasibats. This inspired the opposition to fight until victory.

The money that started coming to the Russian Federation as soon as the activities of the foreign Islamic foundations were liberalized was one of the reasons behind the tension between Tadjuddin and the regional leaders. In January 1991, head of the SAMES foreign department, Rashid Gilmanov, admitted that SAMES was maintaining contacts with 45 countries: “The closest contacts were established with the Muslim World League (MWL), which negotiated a gift of 1 million copies of the Koran for the Soviet Muslims from the king of Saudi Arabia and with the World Muslim Congress based in Karachi (Pakistan). SAMES was negotiating with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB). We actively exchange delegations with the Waqf and the Islamic Affairs Ministry of Kuwait.”²

On 29 December, 1990-1 January, 1991, a delegation of a united mission of the Saudi IDB offices and the Hayat Al Igasa al-Islamiyya al-Alyamiyya (International Islamic Relief Organization) headed by Korkut Ozal, member of the IDB board in Turkey and brother of the Turkish president, visited Kazan on an invitation from SAMES. Korkut Ozal stated that his bank was prepared to directly invest in the economy of Tatarstan, help build a new mosque in Kazan and madrasahs in Kazan and Zelenodolsk, and restore the currently used mosque.³

In 1991, the United Arab Emirates allocated \$250,000 to SAMES, the money, according to Tadjuddin, being frozen in the bankrupt Vneshekonombank of the U.S.S.R. On 4 January, 1992, Tadjuddin concluded an agreement with the IDB on a loan of \$1,414,000 for building three mosques (in Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and Moscow,) six centers of Koranic studies and the transfer of the Tartar and Bashkirian writing into Arabic script⁴ (!). (By September 1992, \$410,000 had been transferred, the rest was never received.) In February 1992, the government of Tunis created 33 stipends for Muslims from the CIS (including Russia) at the Islamic az-Zaytun University.⁵ The Kuwait delegation that attended the opening of the Al-Tauba (Repentance) Mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny in July 1992 presented SAMES with a check for \$140,000.

Earlier, on 15 May, 1992, at a reception in the Moscow Metropol Hotel on the occasion of the opening of the Saudi embassy in Moscow, Tadjuddin said: “We have always maintained contacts with Saudi

¹ A taped interview N. Ashirov gave to the present author.

² “Predstavitel Dukhovnogo upravleniya musul'man evropeyskoy chasty SSSR o sotrudnichestve so stranami islama,” *PostFactum*, 18 January, 1991.

³ See: “Islamskiy bank—Tatarstanu,” *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 5 January, 1991.

⁴ See: “1.5 mln doll. poluchil iz Saudovskoy Aravii glava Dukhovnogo upravleniya musul'man evropeyskoy chasty SNG i Sibiri mufti Talgat-khazrat Tadjuddin,” *PostFactum*, 5 February, 1992.

⁵ See: “Mufti Tunisa schitaet, chto musul'mane Rossii malosvedushchi v religioznykh delakh,” RIA Novosti, 28 February, 1992.

Arabia, which enjoys great authority in the Muslim world. Today our contacts will become even broader. Saudi Arabia can extend invaluable assistance to the faithful of Russia and other post-Soviet states in reviving Islamic spirituality and cultural traditions, in restoring Muslim temples, and in pilgrimages to the holy places. Ambassador of Saudi Arabia Abdel Aziz Al Hojja responded with: "We intend to help build a large complex with a mosque, ritual facilities, a library, and classrooms for teaching Islam and the Arabic language in Moscow." Saudi King Fahd ibn Abdel Aziz promised unattached investments and aid to the post-Soviet Muslim regions.⁶

In May-June 1992, all poor Muslims of Moscow, Ufa, and other cities received 5 kg of flour, 2 kg of rice and 1 kg of oil bought using money from the Saudi Ibrahim bin Abdulaziz al-Ibrahim Foundation. In the main Moscow mosque alone, "over 6,000 people received food parcels,"⁷ even though the main Muslim holidays, Ramadan Bayram and Kurban Bayram, gather from 2,000 to 3,000 people, not all of them destitute.

Part of the money from Saudi Arabia and other countries came in cash: "I personally wrote out a receipt (Talgat first wrote it and told me to copy it) that in 1992 Tadjuddin received \$200,000-250,000 from Omar Nasyr, Secretary General of the Muslim World League. There was an agreement to build the Kul-Sharif mosque in Kazan and a central mosque in Ufa. The money for the projects arrived in cash; the mosques were never built, naturally. Later he gave the money to Moscow businessmen for business purposes: some of it was never returned—he was obviously cheated. Some of the money was used to build five or six cottages near Ufa: for himself, his son Mukhammad, his son-in-law, Nail, from Ulianovsk, who was married to Zulfia, Talgat's second daughter, and for his driver Marat," said N. Ashirov.

In contrast to Tadjuddin, his future opponent Gabdullah Galiullin could not smoothly appropriate the aid: in 1991, a criminal case was instigated against him (which never reached the court) based on the disappearance of a batch of disposable syringes, humanitarian aid from Saudi Arabia, from the storehouse at the Mardjani Mosque.⁸

The feelings of those who watched how Tadjuddin was spending huge sums without any control (and without them) can be easily imagined. On 28 May, 1992, SAMES was shaken by the first open political conflict: Tadjuddin called on the Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (RT) to boycott the constituent conference of the Islamic Center of the RT called by the fundamentalist Islamic Revival Party, the Milli Mejlis (the so-called parliament of the Tartar nationalists; Galiullin headed its commission for religion) and the Mardjani Society. Muhtasib Gabdulkhak Samatov voiced a similar call on television. The conference did take place on 29 May in Kazan. Its chairman, Gabdullah Galiullin, said: "The Islamic Center of the RT was not created to oppose the republic's muftiat or to encourage the Muslims to withdraw from it. We want to address the problems not included in those dealt with by the Spiritual Administration and its headquarters in Ufa. What we find acceptable is not often acceptable for the Spiritual Administration operating in Russia"⁹ (!). Galiullin was close to the Tartar national-radicals; he is still friendly with Fauzia Bayramova, leader of Ittifak, the extremely radical National Independence Party. On 12 April, 1992, the Islamic Revival Party supported by Mukaddas Bibarsov met for its regional conference in Saratov (Heydar Jemal was one of its most prominent leaders).

On 13 October, 1992, the Azatlyk and Ittifak parties, the All-Tartar Public Center and the Suverenitet Committee organized a meeting in Kazan "in memory of the Muslims who died in 1552 when defending the city against the troops of Ivan the Terrible." It started with a namaz in memory of the dead defend-

⁶ "V moskovskoy gostinitse 'Metropol' sostoialsia diplomaticheskii priem po sluchaiu otkrytia posol'stva Saudovskoy Aravii v Rossii," RIA Novosti, 15 May, 1992.

⁷ "V Moskovskoy sobornoy mecheti provoditsia blagotvoritel'naia aktsia po besplatnoy razdache produktov pitania," *Federatsia* (Moscow), 6 May, 1992; "V techenie trekh dney invalidy i pensionery Ufy poluchali gumanitarnuiu pomoshch v ramkakh programmy 'Miloserdie'," *Aksept* (Ekaterinburg), 16 July, 1992.

⁸ See: M. Dmitriev, D. Seitov, "Anatomia kriminal'nogo mira," *Vecherniaia Kazan*, 6 April, 1996 (reprinted from *Moskovsky komsomolets*).

⁹ "Sozdanny 29 maia v Kazani Islamskiy tsentr Tatarstana ne poluchil podderzhki muftia Talgata Tadjuddina; Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin prizval musul'man ne sobirat'sia na konferentsiu musul'manskikh obshchestv i dvizheniy v Kazani, odnako 29 maia ona sostoialas," *PostFactum*, 1 June, 1992.

ers and a sermon delivered by Talgat Tadjuddin (who earlier accused his opponents of radical nationalism) on Freedom Square. Tadjuddin read another namaz in the Kazan Kremlin and called on the people to cherish mutual understanding between neighboring peoples, and “to seek ways to their hearts” (the majority of the meeting insisted on Tatarstan’s independence).¹⁰ On other occasions Tadjuddin was also radical. He said in particular: “The Muslims have no opportunities equal to those of the Christians, while their number in Russia has reached 10 to 12 million and is growing. It is very rarely that the Islamic leaders are given an opportunity to speak in public; they have no assistance comparable to that received by the Christians in restoring mosques, most of which are in a sad state indeed. I am especially aggrieved by the passivity with which the authorities are watching the media sling mud at Islam, how they disseminate lies about what the Muslims want and accuse them of aggressiveness. Even in the parliament there is much groundless talk about the notorious ‘Islamic threat’ and the ‘nationalist-separatist’ intentions of the leaders of the Muslim regions.”¹¹ Tadjuddin, however, never fully supported the nationalists: on 20 March, 1992, Ponchaev, his closest ally and the imam-hatyb of St. Petersburg (today he is one of the Tadjuddin muftis), spoke out against Tatarstan’s independence.

The Spiritual Administrations of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan, Tiumen and Saratov Regions Withdraw from Talgat Tadjuddin’s Authority

The SAMES-sponsored Business Community Forum, “Muslims and the New World Order, Reality, and Prospects for Future Cooperation,” which took place on 16-22 July, 1992 in Moscow, Ufa, and Naberezhnye Chelny, started the split. It attracted 700 prominent Muslim figures from the CIS and 27 states of the “far abroad” (the UAE, Kuwait, Afghanistan, Turkey, the U.S., Canada, etc.). On 20 July, the Al-Tauba Mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny was opened as part of the congress agenda to commemorate the 1100th anniversary of Islam in Great Bulgar; on 22 July the main mosque was also opened there; and in Nizhnekamsk the local mosque, which still in the process of construction, acquired a spire on its minaret.

Here is what Nafigullah Ashirov has to say: “Before the Al-Tauba Mosque was opened Talgatkazrat spent about 15 or 20 days in a mental hospital in Ufa. Ravil Gainutdin and Gabdullah Galullin visited him regularly; I never left him; I know his doctor. He spoke gibberish at the mosque opening. There were two priests at the ceremony; they entered the mosque together with the rest of us. Suddenly Tadjuddin started reading a namaz; the priests could not leave—the crowd was too dense. They had to kneel together with the Muslims. When the namaz ended, Tadjuddin said: this is the first time in the history of Russia that Muslims and Christians prayed together. These priests were very angry because they were deliberately trapped. When they asked why there were crosses and Stars of David on the mosque Tadjuddin explained that Christians would pray to the crosses, and Jews to the stars of David. This would be their common temple; gradually the three religions would merge and there would be friendship across the world. This was all gibberish. On the way back, at two or three o’clock in the morning we reached Kandara-kul Lake near the town of Oktiabrskiy. There he forced all of us to bathe nude; he undressed himself and used his knife to cut the elastic of the shorts of those who were not fast enough. The car trunks were packed with Anis brandy; he and his people were drinking non-stop.”

¹⁰ See: “13 oktiabria Kazan otmetila den pamiati musul’man, pavshikh v 1552 g. pri zashchite goroda ot voysk Ivana Groznogo,” *PostFactum*, 13 October, 1992.

¹¹ “Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin schitaet, chto musul’mane ne imeiut poka takikh zhe shirokikh vozmozhnostey dlia otpravlenia kul’ta, kakimi pol’zuiutsia khristiane,” RIA Novosti, 15 April, 1992.

Tadjuddin has another story to tell: “When in Naberezhnye Chelny I was attacked by 120 people, none of whom I had even seen in the town mosque, even though I frequently led praying there. They were mostly Ittifak (Unity) people—their party should have been called Iftirak (Dissent). In full view of all they destroyed the stained glass windows with crosses and stars.”¹² To all questions about his mental health, Tadjuddin answered that he had a medical document about his hospitalization in a psychiatric hospital in 1969: “Everybody knows that I ended up there ‘by mistake,’ for my political views.”¹³

Mukaddas Bibarsov, leader of the group of dissenters, had the following to say about later events: “On 12 August, 1992, 30 people—imams and shakirds invited to attend the course of the Imam Muhammad ibn Saud Islamic University—got together for a meeting in Naberezhnye Chelny. They were saying among themselves that Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin attended the ceremonious opening of the Al-Tauba Mosque armed with a sword, two daggers, and a whip. M. Ibrahim, secretary of the Naberezhnye Chelny muhtasibat, who approached him and other guests with words of greeting, received several strokes of the whip from the displeased mufti. Sultan-khazrat from Bugulma said: ‘I came as an interpreter. Late on 10 August they told me that I, Idris Galiautdinov, and Nail Sakhbizianov had been asked to go and see the mufti. We greeted him and his guests. In response Tadjuddin gave Idris several strokes of his whip.’ Imam Kh. Mansur from Orenburg said that Allah should punish the mufti for swearing in the mosque.” Tadjuddin explained why he had used his whip in the following way: “Idris Galiautdinov was one of my favorite pupils. When he started destroying, before my eyes, the temple I had patronized like a child for several years, I delivered several symbolic strokes. Islam does not prohibit the use of force with respect to one’s pupils. I should say that during his work in the Mardjani mosque, Gabdullah Galiullin beat up a 70-year-old man, obviously not his pupil, who worked there.”¹⁴

One of the Tadjuddin’s supporters, the mufti of Tatarstan in 1997-2001, Farid Salman (Khaidarov), had the following to say about the way foreigners promoted the split: “An independent Spiritual Administration of the Muslims was an inalienable part of the nationalist and separatist ideology and was considered the first sign of Tatarstan’s future independence. This happened when people from Saudi Arabia stepped up their activity in Russia and Tatarstan. The Saudi Embassy was opened in Moscow in 1992 (Wahhabism is the dominant form of Islam in Saudi Arabia). These people had established contacts with Talgat Tadjuddin, yet as soon as they realized he was for Russia and against all forms of separatist and Wahhabi ideology, they cut off these contacts. In 1992, they started acting against him (and continue doing this now); they encouraged dissident Spiritual Administrations. In July 1992, they opened the first Saudi Wahhabi camp in Naberezhnye Chelny. Among other people it was attended by Fenisan and al-Muflerh, professors at the Muhammad ibn Saud University in Riyadh (the privileged Wahhabi university with restricted enrollment). These people are connected with Aradjikhi, a large Saudi banking group with branches all over the world, including in the U.S. The history of the split is intimately associated with Naberezhnye Chelny. I cannot understand how the Saudis managed to gather several scores of teenagers from Tatarstan, Bashkiria, and Siberia in their camp: I am pretty sure that there were no adverts in the media.

“This proves that Saudi Arabia is seriously interested in Tatarstan because the Tartars are the largest Muslim nation of the RF. I headed the international department of muhtasibat of Tatarstan; I know the Arabic language, therefore I was instructed to accompany the Saudi professors. A week later I was invited to cooperate with them and was promised mountains of gold since I was a cleric at SAMES and knew the specifics of Russian Islam. They invited me to cooperate specifically with them, yet being aware of their psychology and the state order I can say that this was not their personal initiative. In an unlimited monarchy, which is Saudi Arabia, where, according to international human rights organizations, human

¹² Interview Tadjuddin gave to Radik Batyrshin: “Tol’ko vera mozhet vozrodit v nas nadezhdu,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 September, 1992.

¹³ Interview Tadjuddin gave to Dmitry Mikhaylin: “Vsevyshnego podelit nel’zia,” *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

rights are consistently and flagrantly violated, no professors or foundations can show their own initiative without being instructed by the state. (It was in 1962-1963 that Negro slavery was abolished in this country; women received passports in December 2001; so far there is a ban on any parties and public organizations. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are two out of 231 states in the world where no elections were ever conducted.—*M.T.*) The Saudi special services are working in a very special field—the field of religious ideology.

“Therefore I interpreted this invitation not as their personal initiative, but as coming at least from their university. At the same time, the authorities of Tatarstan contacted the Saudi professors. Soon after that they were in a car crash and taken back in the king’s personal flying hospital. Two weeks later the split began in Bashkiria. I have perfectly reliable information that Fausia Bayramova met the Saudi professors. Her party, Ittifak, convened a so-called Muslim congress in Naberezhnye Chelny. She ran onto the stage and loudly stated: ‘We should elect Gabdullah-khazrat,’ after which Gabdullah Galiullin was elected ‘mufti of Tatarstan.’ On the same day, dissident Spiritual Administrations appeared in Bashkiria and the Volga area, which suggested that these developments were coordinated from a certain center. I have reason to believe that this center operated from Saudi Arabia.”

The 1992 events were influenced by what was going on in neighboring countries: on 24 June, the Muslims of the Kulob Region left the Kazyat of Tajikistan;¹⁵ and on 1 April, a congress of the Islamic Center of Chechnia, then headed by Magomed Alsabekov, announced that it “disbanded” the Spiritual Administration of Chechnia.¹⁶ On 9 July, a congress of the Spiritual Administration of Chechnia, then headed by Magomed-Bashir Arsanukaev, closed down the Islamic Center of Chechnia.¹⁷

The split was furthered by personal contradictions with Tadjuddin, as a result of which his opponents could be deprived of their high posts. At the beginning of 1992, Gabdullah Galiullin was dismissed from his post as imam of the Mardjani mosque, the most prestigious one in Kazan, and appointed imam of a smaller mosque. In June 1985, Tadjuddin managed to prevent Gusman Iskhakov (now mufti of Tatarstan), who had completed his first year at the Islam University of Tripoli (Libya), from continuing his education. Gusman-khazrat said later: “I learned about this in 1986 from Tadjuddin’s secretary, when in exile in the town of Oktiabrskiy. I was sent there in the hope that I would perish—people better than me had not survived.” In saying this he was implying that Tadjuddin feared him as a rival. In June 1992, Ashirov’s visa was discontinued after his two years of study at the Islamic University in Constantine (Algeria). Tadjuddin wanted him to come back to his native city of Tobolsk to “revive Islam” there. (Ashirov admitted that in August he “was on vacation and was not the SAMES official secretary.”) In August Tadjuddin removed Nigmatullin from his administrative post as Ufa muhtasib for misdemeanor in office. As a SAMES official, Nigmatullin occupied an apartment that belonged to SAMES, from which Tadjuddin wanted him evicted and sent back to his native village. After the 1990 congress Tadjuddin’s supporters tried to remove Mukaddas Bibarsov from his post as Saratov imam.

On 18 August, when Tadjuddin left for Turkey, public organizations of Bashkortostan and Nigmatullin’s group got together to adopt the following resolution: “The situation in the Spiritual Administration is strained because of the illness of its head, Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin. His illness is growing progressively worse; his amoral behavior (he is a drug user and a drunkard) has nothing in common with his post. In addition, he appropriates the Spiritual Administration’s financial means... The meeting has resolved:

1. To condemn the undignified and amoral behavior of Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin. To point out that he is not worthy of the post of mufti of the Spiritual Administration;
2. To inform the public through the media that the Republic of Bashkortostan has organized its own Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of the Republic of Bashkortostan (SAM RB);

¹⁵ See: “Raskol v musul’ manskoy obshchine Tadjhikistana,” RIA Novosti, 24 June, 1992.

¹⁶ See: “V Groznom sozdan Islamskiy tsestr,” ITAR-TASS, 1 April, 1992.

¹⁷ See: “9 iulia sostoialsia s’ezd muftiata Chechni,” *NEGA*, 9 July, 1992.

3. To ask the Health Ministry of the RB and Minister Turianov to issue a document about T. Tadjuddin's hospitalization in a mental hospital;
- ...
5. To send corresponding letters to the law enforcement bodies in order to prevent provocations of the mufti's supporters armed with small weapons and cold steel;
6. To instruct the public organizations of the Bashkirs and Tartars to draw up a joint policy with respect to the future of SAMES and the newly formed SAM RB;
7. To freeze SAMES's bank deposits;
8. To set up an organizing committee to convene a congress and a plenary meeting of the Muslims of the RB."

The hastily drawn-up original document abounds in spelling mistakes; the name of the main culprit was even misspelt. The meeting was chaired by Nigmatullin, yet the verbatim report was signed by two petty officials. According to Ashirov, on the same day the unsigned resolution was faxed to all SAMES mosques.

On 19 August, Nurmammed Nigmatullin and the Sterlitamak and Sibay muhtasibs, Rishat Rafikov and Agliam Gazizov, together with one or two other imams (including the imam of Askino), criticized the mufti on TV and announced that a constituent congress of the SAM RB would be convened: Nigmatullin complained that Mufti Tadjuddin had called him a "stupid Bashkir" (he was the only Bashkir among the 128 SAMES imams; in December 1988 there were three Bashkirs¹⁸). The Bashkirian Popular Urals Center and the Bashkirian Popular Party called on their supporters to take part in the congress.¹⁹

On 21 August, 1992, which was a Friday, Nigmatullin, Ashirov, Rafikov, Iskhakov, and Gazizov chaired the constituent congress of the SAM RB. "All those who organized the SAM RB were Tartars; Nigmatullin is a Bashkir who speaks the Tartar language; in the Ufa mosque he had to speak Tartar. I learned that Nigmatullin was a Bashkir only when the Bashkirs advised me not to run for the post of mufti. Let Nurmammed-khazrat be our imam. It was at that moment that I realized that there was tension between the Bashkirs and Tartars. We printed our Rules, distributed them everywhere, and registered religious communities with the district administrations," said Ashirov. According to Nigmatullin, the congress was attended by 300 people, who represented 120 out of 160 communities (according to Tadjuddin's supporters, there were 208 communities). They all unanimously approved the creation of the SAM RB and its Rules, and elected the leaders. Ashirov was elected first deputy; Rishat Rafikov was elected deputy, and Gazizov and Iskhakov²⁰ were elected members of the presidium (later, when Nafigulla-khazrat moved to Moscow, Iskhakov was elected first deputy; when he, in turn, departed for Kazan, Aiup Bibarsov, Mukaddas Bibarsov's brother, was elected first deputy). "I personally have been always against a separate spiritual administration, but the recent events in Naberezhnye Chelny and Ufa, as well as the mufti's illness accelerated the whole process," Nigmatullin admitted two weeks later.²¹

The congress adopted an Address to the Muslims of the RB signed by the "initiative group:" "We are addressing you due to the tragic situation in SAMES and due to another bout of its leader's mental illness, which has been returning at regular intervals for many years. The administration cannot function properly... Its money is being squandered on pompous congresses, jubilees, and forums of all kinds. Hundreds of thousands of dollars, which the mufti personally received for publishing religious books to be distributed free, and for restoring mosques and madrasahs, were never registered

¹⁸ See: R.A. Silant'ev, *Etnicheskiy aspekt raskola islamskogo soobshchestva Rossii* [<http://www.ica.ras.ru/lib/neotl/21012003162502.htm>].

¹⁹ See: *Vozrozhdenie kul'turnykh tsennostey Islama v natsional'nom dvizhenii i povsednevnom povedenii tatar* [<http://www.mtss.ru/?page=rebirth>].

²⁰ "Eto trebovanie vremeni i naroda. Interviu N. Nigmatullina i N. Ashirova," *Kyzyltan* (Ufa), September 1992.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

and were used by the mufti for his personal needs. As a result of the pompous events designed to boost the mufti's personal authority, SAMES ran into debt of over 50 million rubles to the local banks; the interest on it is more than SAMES earns. Its staff is obviously too big for its aims; there are too many well-paid "aides" and "security guards" who know nothing about Islamic morality; they are nothing more than servants of the notorious Sheikh-ul-Islam, and they are adding to the debt. They build sumptuous cottages, buy the latest cars for the mufti; they sell religious literature at inflated prices; they are abusing the resources and commercial potential of our republic; and they are increasing the mufti's personal wealth and that of his relatives, who occupy all key posts (on the auditing commission, in commercial and storage departments, etc.). They humiliate local talented people and religious leaders and do not give them adequate posts. For example, hajji Nurmuhammed Nigmatullin, one of the most respected imam-muhtasibs of the Muslims of Bashkortostan and imam-hatyb of the Ufa mosque, who is well known outside the republic, was rudely insulted at a Friday prayer meeting in front of the prayers and was ordered, in an impossibly insulting form, to go to Sibay or Temiasovo to lead the affairs of the Muslims of Bashkortostan from those far-away places."²²

On 22 August, the Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan gathered for a constituent congress of the SAM of the Republic of Tatarstan: "In fact, after the SAM RB congress we drove the same people in three buses to the SAM RT congress in Naberezhnye Chelny. We wanted to elect Gusman Iskhakov the Mufti of Tatarstan, there was a preliminary agreement about this. Gabdullah Galiullin, in turn, had reached an agreement with Tartar nationalists. Bayramova and other people from the Ittifak party said that they would attend the congress only if Gabdullah was elected leader. We could not convene our congress in Kazan because Talgat's position was very strong there. Iskhakov did not insist; he knew that the struggle would be fierce—he was not a fighter. He told me: my time will come. He was right," said Ashirov. He was nominated as mufti, but he removed his candidacy in favor of Galiullin, who was married to his sister.

On 24 August, Nigmatullin convened a press conference in the House of the Press, at which he informed the journalists: "Moscow and the Moscow Region, the Baltics, Siberia, and certain other regions will soon leave SAMES, while the Muslims of the Sverdlovsk and Cheliabinsk regions and Siberia want to join SAM RB, temporarily located at 52, Tukai St., Ufa." He then complained: "Bashkortostan and Tatarstan send few young men abroad to study at Islamic educational establishments." Tadjuddin, who had just arrived from Turkey, came to the House of the Press. He informed the journalists that the congress of dissenters was funded by the Ufa cooperative bank Vostok, which gave 120,000 rubles to SAM RB and rented a building in Ufa for it. It was a criminal group of young men who supported SAM RT: "They were the Kashapov brothers, heads of the local mafia. It was on their instructions that psychotropic substances were added to my food, after which I could barely control myself,"²³ said he referring to the Al-Tauba events.

On 26 August, an extended SAMES plenary meeting condemned "the separatists who violated their vow of allegiance and religious ethics," to quote Tadjuddin. It removed Nigmatullin and Ashirov from their posts as SAMES presidium members, together with nine of the 25 muhtasibs. The next day, Tartar public organizations Azatlyk, TOTs, and Idel-Ural convened a meeting at the Main Mosque of Ufa, at which Karim Iakushev, Chairman of the Bashkortostan TOTs, called on all Muslims to rally around Tadjuddin, who "recently has become the victim of a slander campaign." Talgat-khazrat admitted that SAMES had accumulated a debt of 50 million rubles and added that "the state, which caused a lot of damage to Islam during the Soviet era by destroying or nationalizing mosques and madrasahs," should write off the debt. The meeting supported him. "We have erected the Al-Tauba Mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny, which cost us over 5 million rubles. What came of this? The people who are now insisting that I am a sick man tried to destroy the mosque and even broke the very expensive stained glass window. Can they be called

²² "Obrashchenie k musul'manam Respubliki Bashkortostan," *Zamandash*, No. 26, 31 August, 1992.

²³ R. Aiupov, "Chto privelo k raskolu," *Vecherniaia Ufa*, 26 August, 1992; "Vsevyshnego podelit nel'zia," *Rossiiskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992; "Tol'ko vera mozhnet vozrodit v nas nadezhdu," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 September, 1992.

normal people?”²⁴ said the mufti. He said that Islam, Judaism, and Christianity had common roots and that the Old Mosque in Great Bulgar was decorated with Stars of David, while in Turkey Stars of David and crosses were used to decorate the Mosque of Sultan Ahmad and the Blue Mosque,²⁵ and nobody objected to them. He then added that even though the dissidents had never been to Turkey, they carried out a hajj to Saudi Arabia.

The plenary meeting adopted an address which said that the split “may seriously aggravate relations between sovereign Bashkortostan and the Muslim countries,”²⁶ that “out of 230 communities of Tatarstan only 12 imams attended the congress in Naberezhnye Chelny, the other communities being represented by common people.” The address said further that the decision to leave SAMES should go to the congresses of clerics; that documents existed confirming that Tadjuddin had not appropriated money, and that it was the leader of the dissidents, Gabdullah Galiullin, who was involved in embezzlement and who “stole a batch of disposable syringes from a mosque storehouse, which had come from Saudi Arabia as humanitarian aid.”²⁷ SAMES decided, therefore, to prosecute the journalists who had spread slander about Tadjuddin unless they publicly apologized.²⁸

In September, Tadjuddin offered the following information: 16 out of 250 (or 12 out of 220) imams²⁹ took part in the SAM RT congress. In both cases, six of them objected to setting up an independent SAM; the SAM RB congress was attended by 15 or 16 imams out of 200, “none of them elected by their communities according to the rules.”³⁰ Ashirov himself had to admit that the congress in Naberezhnye Chelny was neither large nor representative; he added, however, that most of the mosques of Bashkortostan were represented at the congress in Ufa. (The balance of forces in the republic remained the same throughout the last decade: by 1 January, 1995, according to A. Iunusova, who worked with the archives of both SAMs, SAM RB had 219 registered communities and the Central SAM 139 registered communities; by 1 January, 2002, 213 communities of SAM RB and 130 communities of the Central SAM had been re-registered.)

“We set up SAM RB and elected Nurmuhammed-khazrat our mufti; President of Bashkortostan Murtaza Rakhimov received us and then supported us for a long time. He gave Nigmatullin a large four-room apartment; SAM RB received an office building from him,” says Ashirov. By 1 September, 1992, the Rules of the new organization were registered with the Council for Religious Affairs at the republic’s Council of Ministers, not without help from the republic’s president.

On 2 September, Galiullin, Bibarsov, and four other imams convened a press conference, at which they made the following statement: “It was a mad person’s idea to display five glass signs of Judaism and crosses inside the crescent in the mosque in Naberezhnye Chelny; the cross is the symbol of Christianity that has been suppressing Islam since 1552.” They also told the journalists that they had asked the president and the premier of the Republic of Tatarstan to help them “restore historic justice by rebuilding the spiritual center of the Muslims in Kazan.” Tadjuddin’s supporters, in turn, said that Galiullin was a member of the Milli Mejlis and that his resignation from SAMES was due to the Milli Mejlis’ claims to power in Tatarstan.³¹ On the same day Tadjuddin’s supporters sent to all the newspapers of Tatarstan an address called “To Our Compatriots and All the Faithful,” which said that “the attempts to divide SAMES ac-

²⁴ “K edineniu ili razdeleniu, no ...bez nasilia,” *Izvestia Bashkortostana*, 28 August, 1992.

²⁵ Later he repeated this in his interview to Dmitry Mikhaylin: “Vsevyshnego podelit nel’zia,” *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992.

²⁶ “Organizatsia samostoiatel’nykh dukhovnykh upravleniy musul’man Bashkirii i Tatarstana ochen neodnoznachno vosprinimaetsia v respublike,” *NEGA*, 27 August, 1992.

²⁷ “Vsevyshnego podelit nel’zia,” *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992.

²⁸ See: “Razrastaetsia skandal vokrug raskola v Dukhovnom upravlenii musul’man evropeyskoy chasti SNG i Sibiri (DUMES) i sozdania Dukhovnogo upravlenia musul’man Tatarstana,” *NEGA*, 29 August, 1992.

²⁹ See: “V redaktsii mestnykh gazet postupilo obrashchenie uchastnikov vneochednogo rasshirennogo plenuma Dukhovnogo upravlenia musul’man evropeyskoy chasti SNG i Sibiri (DUMES), sostoiavshegosia v Ufe,” *NEGA*, 3 September, 1992.

³⁰ “Vsevyshnego podelit nel’zia,” *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992; “Tol’ko vera mozhet vozrodit v nas nadezhdu,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 22 September, 1992.

³¹ See: “2 sentiabria mufti Tatarstana Gabdullah-khazrat provel press-konferentsiu,” *NEGA*, 3 September, 1992.

ording to ethnic features completely failed.”³² On 4 September, the Orenburg muhtasibs, the Tartar and even the Bashkir communities spoke against the split in SAMES.³³

On 15 September, however, the Council for Religious Affairs in the Cabinet of Ministers of Tatarstan registered SAM RT. President Shaymiev supported the dissenters less obviously than his Bashkirian colleague; his advisors suggested moving the capital of Russian Islam to Kazan; they were prepared to support Tadjuddin if he agreed to the idea.

On 4 September, Tadjuddin and Galiullin met for personal talks, after which Gabdullah-khazrat announced that Talgat-khazrat recognized SAM RT and its mufti.³⁴ Tadjuddin did not renounce this statement until 8 September. He said that he met Galiullin “to put an end to the mutual accusations” in the media and that the sides had decided to cooperate “on the basis of the Koran and the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad to stop the wave of mistrust and rejection among the Muslims and followers of other religions.”³⁵

Results of the 1992 Split

The dissenters failed to conquer the Perm and Sverdlovsk regions (the muhtasibs were replaced, while the local communities sided with Tadjuddin). On 31 August, 1992, an inter-regional SAM of the Saratov, Volgograd, and Penza regions was set up in Saratov; it was headed by Mukaddas Bibarsov, who announced that his structure would join SAM RT. Later he registered an independent SAM of the Volga Area, which included only the Saratov Region. On 26 August, Rashid Almukhametov was appointed “imam-muhtasib of the Volgograd and Saratov regions” and established his control over the Volgograd Region; part of the Penza Region sided with Bibarsov, thanks to his father Abbas, who, six years later, transferred his United SAM of the Penza Region to the SAM of the European Part of Russia headed by Gainutdin. Galimzian Bikmullin, in turn, preserved his control over the Tiumen Region, minus its national districts.

At that time, Ashirov made the following statement: “Many people think that with SAMES removed from the scene we shall have no contacts with our brothers abroad. This is not true. Recently I met a Saudi delegation in the Tiumen Region which had established contacts with the local community bypassing SAMES. We are showered with invitations for our young men to study abroad—we can barely deal with them all. SAMES preferred to ignore them: only a few people from Bashkortostan are studying abroad, while hundreds of young men from Chechnia are enjoying this privilege. We shall no longer reject these invitations.”³⁶

On 30 September in Moscow during the Second International Islamic Forum, Galiullin, Nigmatullin, Bibarsov, Bikmullin, muhtasib of the Crimea, Said-Jalil Ibragimov, of the Baltics (Estonia), Ali Kharrasov, and of Byelorussia, Izmail Aleksandrovich, and imam of the Moscow Bayt-Allah community, Makhmud Velitov, and of the Kaliametdin Society from the city of Buguruslan, Ismagil Shangareev, set up a Coordinating Council of the heads of the regional SAMs. At a congress in Kazan on 21 October, it was transformed into the Supreme Coordinating Center of the SAM of Russia (SCC). They adopted the Rules and elected Galiullin its head. The leaders were obviously bluffing when they announced that the Muslims of Udmurtia, as well as of the Sverdlovsk, Cheliabinsk, Perm, and Kirov regions also supported them.³⁷ It should be said in all justice that by that time most of the Muslim communities of the two key

³² “Tatarstan: razmezhevanie musul'manskogo dukhovenstva stanovitsia vse ostree,” RIA Novosti, 2 September, 1992; “Vsevyshnego podelit nel'zia,” *Rossiyskaia gazeta*, 9 September, 1992.

³³ “Orenburgskie musul'mane protiv raskola,” RIA Novosti, 4 September, 1992.

³⁴ See: “Mufti DUMESa Tadjuddin priznal DUM (Dukhovnoe upravlenie musul'man) Tatarstana i Gabdullu-khazrata,” *Izvestia Tatarstana*, 8 September, 1992.

³⁵ “Sheikh-ul-islam i tatarskaia avtokefalia,” *Kommersant-Daily*, 9 October, 1992.

³⁶ “Eto trebovanie vremeni i naroda.” An interview by N. Nigmatullin and N. Ashirov.

³⁷ See: “Mufti ‘podryval osnovy islamskoy very’,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26 October, 1992.

regions (Tatarstan and Bashkortostan) already supported them. This was confirmed by the First SAM RT Congress, which took place on 22 October in Kazan. It was attended by 291 delegates from 166 communities out of the total 227 functioning in Tatarstan (this figure was probably even larger: by late 1991 there were 207 Muslim communities in the republic; as of 31 December, 1992, there were 333 registered communities³⁸). In their joint resolution, the congresses of the SAM RT and SCC demanded that the SAMES buildings in Ufa be transferred to them (throughout September they made several attempts to seize them by force), that all material and financial valuables be safeguarded so that the auditing commission of the SCC (!) could check them all, and that the state structures be asked to suspend all financial operations carried out by SAMES. In addition, after auditing all the material and financial valuable were to be transferred to the SCC (!). The dissidents promised that “the communities preferring to remain outside the SCC, but refusing to openly side with Tadjuddin, will receive part of SAMES’s property”³⁹ (!).

Ashirov later said: “We had the support of all the Muslim embassies. The ambassadors of Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait, Qatar, Libya, and Iran attended the SCC presentation. We had no contacts with the Turkish embassy: it was cooperating with those supported by the official authorities.”

Tadjuddin responded with the Sixth SAMES Special Congress, which took place on 9-10 November in Ufa. It was attended by 738 delegates sent by 522 communities (250 communities registered with SAMES did not attend, thus confirming their break with Tadjuddin) and by 102 guests from Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. President Yeltsin and Speaker of the Supreme Soviet Ruslan Khasbulatov sent their greetings to the congress. The delegates unanimously approved Tadjuddin’s activity and condemned the dissenters. Tadjuddin himself expressed the commonly shared feelings: “All people, the Muslims included, are sick and tired of the division of land, our country, and our state. We should all unite for the sake of our children, of the future generations. Stability rests on unity and consent.”⁴⁰ Nigmatullin attended the congress as a guest representing the SCC; he expressed the desire to make peace. At the SAM RB congress, which took place the day before, he asked to resign as mufti. The congress refused to do this⁴¹ (because Ashirov was next in line for the post, and he was unacceptable to the Bashkirian communities, which were in the majority in the spiritual administration). The SAMES Congress adopted an address to Yeltsin and Shaymiev, but decided not to address Rakhimov: Tadjuddin accused the Bashkortostan leaders of illegal registering the republic’s SAM; the public prosecutor’s office stated that it had been registered according to the old rules. On 30 December, SAM RB received new registration documents drawn up according to the correct rules.⁴²

In 1992, Ravil Gainutdin, who is currently Tadjuddin’s main opponent, was his staunch supporter and condemned the dissenters. His advisor, Farid Asadullin, said at that time: “The split was caused by ambitious young men without any systematic religious education trying to demonstrate their ability to set up and head a spiritual administration. In addition, they were urged by certain political forces in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. They should admit they were wrong and that they pushed their communities the wrong way. This is the best thing they can do.”⁴³ “At that time, Gainutdin was Talgat’s most active supporter. Talgat had a well-established structure; we had neither offices nor transportation means. With us, he risked losing the mosque and receiving nothing. He said to us: you are destroying the Spiritual Administration, yet you will not be able to create anything instead and will have to come back to Tadjuddin. You have nowhere to go... When we tried to convince him to join us, Gainutdin answered: if I were invited to head it, I might join you,” recalls Ashirov.

³⁸ See: R. Abdrakhmanov, E. Mavrina, *Respublika Tatarstan. Model etnologicheskogo monitoringa, indikator 27 “Religioznaya zhizn”* [http://federalmcart.ksu.ru/publications/abdrakh1.htm].

³⁹ V. Galimov, “Musul’mane umnozhaui sily deleniem,” *Izvestia Tatarstana*, 24 October, 1992.

⁴⁰ “Segodnia v Ufe zavershil svoiu rabotu Shestoy chrezvychayny kurultay-s’ezd musul’man evropeyskoy chasti SNG, Sibiri i stran Baltii,” *ORT, Novosti* (at 6 p.m.), 10 November, 1992.

⁴¹ “Uchastniki chrezvychaynogo vsemusul’manskogo s’ezda v Ufe priznali DUMES edinstvenno zakonnym religioznym organom v regione,” *NEGA*, 11 November, 1992.

⁴² See: “30 dekabria v Ufe Dukhovnomu upravleniu musul’man Respubliki Bashkortostan (DUM RB) vydany registratsionnye dokumenty,” *NEGA*, 30 December, 1992.

⁴³ “Religioznye ambitsii privodiak k raskolu musul’manstva,” *PostFactum*, 10 December, 1992.

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By early 1993 there were 1,028 Muslim communities in Russia (not including the Northern Caucasus).⁴⁴ About 550 of them sided with Tadjuddin; 450 supported his opponents. In the last ten years the number of the communities supervised by Tadjuddin has increased by one third; and the number of communities siding with his opponents (today united into the Council of Muftis of Russia under Ravil Gainutdin) has increased 3.5-fold.

⁴⁴ IEG "Panorama." Data base "Labirint." "Islam v Rossii. Evropeyskaia chast Rossii i Sibir."