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EVOLUTION OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN THE NORTHERN CAUCASUS: KABARDINO-BALKARIA

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Today extremism and terrorism are seen as the two worst threats in the south of Russia; terrorists who exploit Islamic fundamentalist ideology for their own aims add even more tension. Indeed, some of the Muslim communities were tempted to embrace a more extremist, “jihad-related version” of their faith. This all started in the Northern Caucasus in the first half of the 1990s, while in Chechnia, the sociopolitical crisis aggravated by fighting accelerated the process.

The first communities of radical Islamic fundamentalists were less concerned with the revival of “true Islam” as with the terrorist ideas that inspired them: terrorist “missionaries” came to the region on the crest of the wave raised by the collapse of the old social and economic system and protest feelings caused by rampant crime. In 1996-1999, people in Chechnia shed their last illusions about the Shari’a, the ruling principle of the so-called Chechen Republic of Ichkeria. However, by the beginning of the 1999 counterterrorist operation, “the genie had been let out of the bottle.” Indeed, by the mid-1990s experts had already registered religious intolerance and radicalism among the local Muslims throughout most Russian southern regions. These sentiments might have developed into a supra-ethnic ultra-radical ideology toward which destructive forces of all hues would gravitate. This movement, unacceptable in Russia, remained fairly limited, yet it attracted huge numbers of young people, which was potentially dangerous for Russian statehood.

The tragic events of 13 October, 2005 in Nalchik, the capital of Kabardino-Balkaria, demonstrated that the regional and federal authorities are equally concerned about the entanglement of contradictions. This is probably the most apt description of the so-called Wahhabi movement. Investigation of these events was one of the few examples of the willingness of the Center and the local authorities to be open, and showed that they were relying not only on the law, but also on civil society institutions. The facts that came to light during investigation and the pre-history of religious extremism in the republic supply enough information for an analysis of radical Islamism and its evolution in the Northern Caucasus divorced, to a certain extent, from the Chechen developments.

Islam in the western part of the Northern Caucasus is a very specific phenomenon: since the Middle Ages, the Muslims in contemporary Kabardino-Balkaria have been Hanafites. They belonged to the Hanafi madhab, one of the most flexible of the Islamic schools. It successfully adapted itself to the adat (common law) and secular power. During the years of Soviet rule, Islamic practices in Kabardino-Balkaria acquired much stronger traditions rooted in the folk culture of the two local peoples—the Kabardins and the Balkars. As distinct from the north-eastern part of the Caucasus, the clerics had much less influence there, while Soviet power undermined this influence even more. By 1927, when all primary Islamic schools had been closed in Kabardino-Balkaria, the autonomous republic was left with 224 mosques and 844 clerics (much fewer than in Chechnia). The local clergy enjoyed much less authority than in Chechnia and Ingushetia. Zakat, a Muslim tax, was a heavy burden on the rather poor households high in the mountains, yet a large part of it went to the clergy. This explains why Bolshevik support for the initiative launched by the most “progressive-minded” part of the local Muslims to transfer zakat to the needs of the poor undermined the clerics’ positions even more. Evidence of this can be found in the local archives.¹

In the 1990s, the wave of changes revived Islam: the number of mosques rapidly increased from 24 in 1992 in Kabardino-Balkaria to 68 in 1998.² By 2001, there were about 130 Muslim communities functioning in its territory. It should be said, however, that much fewer people in Kabardino-Balkaria diligently performed all the religious rites than, for example, in Daghestan and Chechnia. While remaining an important part of the local ethnic culture manifested in religious forms, Islam has not become the spiritual foundation of most of the local people and has no influence on their daily life. In those settlements where there are Muslims, there is normally either one or several mosques or buildings adapted for religious purposes. Only on rare occasions, though, do Friday services gather more than 100 people. As a rule, there are about a dozen regular (mostly elderly) mosque goers. For the number of mosques and the average number of parishioners, according to the 2005 figures, see the table on p. 146.

Only major holidays—Uraza-Bayram and Kurban-Bayram—and funerals attract large crowds. People come to honor the local traditions rather than to express their religious feelings. Fasting is not common, while diet bans are limited to pork; alcohol is frequently used. Even the funeral rites, normally a very conservative sphere, are acquiring new phenomena outside the Shari‘a and adat. Today the money spent on burial and funeral repasts illustrates the family’s social status, which forces the relatives to borrow heavily and spend years paying off their debts. So far the local clergy has failed to oppose this tradition: imams normally live alongside their parishioners, therefore their firm stand causes irritation and conflicts in families very much concerned with their social status. Finally, this opposition is fraught with a conflict with the local elders, the “guardians of traditions.” It should be noted that despite the huge amount of printed, visual, and audio matter brought into the republic, as well as the large sums of money international organizations are pouring into Kabardino-Balkaria, the abso-

¹ See: E.V. Kratov, “Islam v Severo-Kavkazskom krae (1924-1934),” *Gumanitarnaia mysl Iuga Rossii (Krasnodar)*, No. 1, 2005, pp. 113-114.

² See: *Tribuna Islama*, No. 9 (46), September 1998.

Table

Districts	Number of mosques	Of them closed	Parishioners
Nalchik	11	7	240
Baksan District	16		257
Town of Baksan	5		40
Zolskiy District	16	4	131
Prokhladnoe District	4		67
Terek District	3		31
Elbrus District	6		90
Urvan District	5		34
Chegem District	9	1	108
Cherek District	3		46
Lesken District	9		175
Total	87	12	1,219

lute majority of the local Muslims reject the extremist ideology. They were able to guess where the road charted by extremists is leading; not infrequently locals have driven extremist envoys away from their mosques.

At the same time, the problem of the Muslim umma affecting both the religious and sociopolitical situation has become clear. Rehabilitation of Islam, which restored some of its key social functions, provoked contradictions and even conflicts in the republic's public life. After receiving their education abroad, the first graduates came back to oppose what they described as unjustified domination of folk traditions and customs over the Shari'a. These polemics typical of nearly all the North Caucasian republics were aroused by the radical Islamism which struck root there and the radical manifestations of which were called Wahhabism in the press and expert reports.

The fundamentalists preferred the more rigid Hanbali madhab common in some of the Arab countries, where strict monotheism ruled out veneration of the saints and pilgrimages to their tombs and condemned superstitions and the local specifics of burial rites. In the 1990s, the Muslim community of Kabardino-Balkaria experienced considerable influence from the emissaries of all sorts of foreign organizations which never grudged money to promote their ideas. In 1993, an Islamic center was set up in Nalchik on the money of the SAR Foundation, which brought together young imams. Very soon they formed the core of the so-called Jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria. At the same time, the severe or even ascetic demands imposed on the local Muslims contrasted with the lavishness with which the fundamentalists poured money into religious propaganda, including dissemination of religious, mainly imported, publications, and charities, including financial support of the Muslims. Amid the social and political instability and the ideological diversity associated with it, these missionaries easily recruited supporters, especially among the younger generation. In Nalchik, for example, the city mosque was mainly attended by young men between 14 and 35. Students of higher and secondary educational establishments displayed a lot of interest in Islam, to the extent that some of them asked for special

prayer rooms. In 1998, Artur (Mussa) Mukozhev, imam-hatyb of the mosque in Volny Aul, a Nalchik suburb, was elected leader of the jamaat that conflicted with the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria (SAM KB).

These developments testified to the fact that the forces resolved to destabilize the Northern Caucasus had already entrenched themselves in the region; radical Islam was expected to play an important role in the process. While keeping away from the official Muslim structures, its representatives started weaving a network under the guise of educational efforts and established contacts with like-minded organizations in neighboring regions and abroad.

The hostilities in Chechnia accelerated social radicalization, in part through religion. Great numbers of forced migrants in Kabardino-Balkaria added to the already radical sentiments of many Muslims. For material or ideological considerations, some of the local people even fought in Chechnia together with the militants. It was at that time that the Taqfir doctrine, which branded as apostate any Muslim who refused to share the radical ideas, gained momentum in the Northern Caucasus.³ According to the member of an Islamist group, everything began with the sermons of a popular imam and religious publications. Gradually this preliminary education developed into practical training for a jihad. At this stage, the novices were expected to enlist like-minded people from among relatives and friends and to obey the "amir."⁴ This was a paid "job," yet many of the conscripts, especially the younger people, cherished collectivism and involvement in an "important cause" more than money. Radical ideology justified extremist or even criminal acts. The documents of radical extremists hiding in the Bechasyn Plateau in the Karachaevskiy District of the Chechen Republic bordering with Kabardino-Balkaria revealed that the jamaat members had been encouraged "to present criminal groups with ultimatums, protect businessmen involved in gray business activities to force them pay zakat and work on the way of Allah ... kidnap sons and daughters of those who live on the people's property while serving the unfaithful state,"⁵ etc.

An analysis of social and psychological features of those involved in the events of 13-14 October, 2005 in Nalchik based on the information submitted by the law enforcement bodies made it possible to create the collective portrait of a participant in the radical religious-political movement in the republic. Information about 166 people was studied; 84 of them were killed in action; 50 arrested, while 32 are wanted. Eighty-seven percent of them were aged between 20 and 30; 13 percent were over 30; nearly 65 percent had secondary education; 20 percent, higher education; about 15 percent, special secondary education. Most of them, 51.8 percent, had no families, while 48.2 percent were officially married. Ninety-three people, or 56 percent, had been held administratively accountable, 38 of them had been brought to account 10 times or more. Eleven people had been under administrative arrest; 17 had been brought to administrative account when drunk; 56, or 33.7 percent, had been suspected of crimes and brought to court; 7 of them were acquitted during investigation or trial. In relation to 21 people, their criminal cases had been dropped during investigation or trial; in 8 cases, because of amnesty. Seven people had been brought to court for drug trafficking, 11 for illegal arms trade; 9 had been involved in cases of extremist or terrorist activity. Eight people had served terms in correction facilities; 25 had received suspended sentences; 14 had been listed as wanted. Fourteen were registered with the republic's medical institutions; 10 of them used drugs or toxic substances. Property-wise, 11.1 percent had permanent and 12.3 percent temporary incomes; there is no official information about the incomes of 76.5 percent of them; 58.4 percent had cars; 10 people were registered with taxation structures as businessmen; 37 had bank accounts; nearly all of those who took part in the attack had a place to live.

³ See: L. Orazaeva, "Kabardino-Balkaria: nekotorye problemy v islame," *Kavkazskiy uzul*, May 2004.

⁴ See: *Severniiy Kavkaz*, 27 December, 2005.

⁵ *Izvestia*, 13 May, 2002.

How did the republican authorities and the political elite treat religious radicalization of the local youth? There are several key factors. First, the “newly baked” political elite made up of the old Soviet nomenklatura, businessmen, and leaders of national movements came to the fore at the same time as the new Muslim communities, therefore the process of establishing new power structures, privatization, and property redistribution, as well as the flourishing of ethnic structures had several obvious and concealed things in common with the Islamist movement. The republican leaders had to take into account that Islam was an important part of the local spiritual heritage and culture, therefore religious communities should be free to function in their own way, lest the entire umma became discontented. The law of Kabardino-Balkaria on Banning Extremist Religious Activities⁶ is a sure sign that the government is concerned about the religious extremist activities in the republic. At the same time, in the 1990s, when the political situation in the Northern Caucasus was aggravated by the Chechen crisis, it was hard to objectively assess all the processes taking place in the Muslim umma of Kabardino-Balkaria. With no consistent policies in the Northern Caucasus, the Center was unable to make relevant decisions; those that were made often contradicted state interests and played into the hands of businessmen or non-commercial organizations. This aggravated the conflict even more.

In August 1998, in the village of Hasania, units of the Kabardino-Balkaria Ministry of Internal Affairs destroyed an armed group of Wahhabis headed by a young man from this village, Anzor Atabiev, who had fought in Chechnia, and confiscated publications about the Islamic state.⁷ Soon after that the comrades-in-arms of the late Atabiev shelled the ministry’s building in Nalchik. The militia, which began a search for his “cronies,” was unjustifiably cruel toward the faithful. In 2001, unknown authors disseminated leaflets calling on the people to support the idea of an Islamic state and promised that once established this state would abolish municipal payments, and raise pensions and social allowances. In fact, this was a call to a coup d’état.

The number of crimes perpetrated for religious reasons continued rising, which forced the law enforcement bodies to turn to the SAM KB for advice. Together they identified the weak points of their efforts to oppose radicalism: underfunding of the traditional Islamic institutions; the low theological level of the imams, and their declining authority and influence among the faithful. They were mostly old people unable to keep abreast of the times because of their low educational and professional level (their theological training and knowledge of the Arabic were wanting). They knew next to nothing about the developments inside and outside the country and the parishioners, the young ones especially, no longer found them interesting as preachers and companions. No wonder M. Mukozhev who preached in one of the largest Nalchik mosques was hugely popular; he made no secret of his radical ideas, while the SAM KB had nobody to replace him with.

The Spiritual Administration is doing its best to bring new blood into the local corps of clerics; young imams are sent abroad to receive higher religious education. Thirteen young men have already graduated; most of them are working at the SAM KB and the Islamic institute attached to it. This institute has already trained two groups of young theologians able to head the parishes, bring life into their activities, and attract the youth. The SAM KB, however, has no money to pay them salaries, even though many of them are prepared to work for 4,000 rubles a month. The mosques are functioning on donations and on money from the republican budget (not more than 300,000-400,000 rubles a year). Early in 2005, the SAM KB started a fund called “Din” (Religion) controlled by the republican authorities, which, according to the SAM KB leaders, did not make this fund very popular: many of the well-to-do Muslims prepared to donate do not trust the local bureaucrats, whom they suspect of spending the money on things other than religion.

⁶ ITAR-TASS, 2 May, 2001.

⁷ [strana.ru], 13 June, 2002.

The radical Islamists, meanwhile, were showered with money from NGOs, charities, and business structures connected with other countries. They had enough money to distribute free publications and use cars to reach far-away places.⁸ It was back in March 1998, at the Third Congress of the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria, that the threat of religious extremism and sects, including the Wahhabi sects, was registered. There were attempts to make a scholarly analysis of the problem. Together with the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the RAS, the Institute of the Humanities of Kabardino-Balkaria organized ethnographic expeditions which analyzed the state of Islam in the republic and the level of religious feelings of its citizens. This brought to light a dangerous trend toward discriminating young Muslims under the pretext of fighting Wahhabism, evident at all levels—from the family to the law enforcement bodies. The academics pointed out the danger of young Muslims becoming convinced that freedom of conscience was possible only in an Islamic state.⁹ The final report compiled by the Institute of the Humanities for the government of Kabardino-Balkaria said, in particular, that the older generation of Balkars and Kabardins was involved mostly in the external side of religion, while true believers were found mostly among the young. The report pointed out that it was precisely young people who were discriminated against in families and public institutions under the pretext of the anti-Wahhabi struggle. This dramatically lowered the level of religious tolerance and may destabilize the situation, the authors concluded.¹⁰

According to the republican Ministry of Internal Affairs, there were over 200 strong supporters of Wahhabism in the republic who enlisted young people; many of the Wahhabis had fought in Chechnia on the side of the militants. In the summer of 2002, an extremist group known as Jamaat Iarmuk was formed in the Pankissi Gorge (Georgia) from people from Kabardino-Balkaria, mainly from the village of Kendelen,¹¹ who fought together with the detachment of warlord Ruslan Gelaev. The unit known as the Kabardino-Balkarian battalion fought under amir Muslim Ataev, who was respected by his countrymen and known as a talented organizer and exceptionally strong man. He gathered about 30 like-minded people, the majority of them with fighting experience gained in Chechnia in illegal armed groups; several had even been trained for subversive activities. By 2003, the situation in the republic began to improve bit by bit thanks to the law enforcement bodies, which scored victories over illegal armed groups in Chechnia and neighboring regions. In November 2002, Gelaev's unit suffered huge losses in a battle in Galashki village in Ingushetia. Ataev and his people returned to Kabardino-Balkaria, where he enlisted several dozen people thanks to his active propaganda campaign. According to the law enforcement bodies, he contacted Shamil Basaev, who attached great importance to creating illegal armed detachments and seats of instability outside Chechnia. On 9 August, 2004, the members of Jamaat Iarmuk attacked militiamen in a forest in the Chegem District: two were killed, four wounded. The bandits carried submachine-guns, grenade projectors, and machine-guns. It was about the same time that religious extremists tried to gain control over several mosques in Nalchik and high in the mountains. All the groups applied the same pattern: first short yet active mudslinging at the local religious leaders; then radicals started arriving in large numbers. When popular discontent reached the desired level, the radicals provoked "free" elections of new imams and called the procedure "free expression of popular will." The scheme worked in some parishes, while the mosques became meeting-places of extremists for a time.

In this context, the law enforcement bodies had to close down 12 mosques—7 of them in Nalchik, as well as in the Chegem District, in the town of Baksan and the village of Dugulubgey; two fighter camps were discovered close to it;¹² about 60 people were detained. The SAM KB leaders ap-

⁸ ITAR-TASS, 26 March, 2002.

⁹ IslamInfo [http://portal-credo.ru/site/?act=news&id=10976&cf=].

¹⁰ IA REGNUM, 17 June, 2003.

¹¹ Published on the site [portal-credo.ru], 14 December, 2004.

¹² See: *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 14 October, 2003.

proved this, yet the local faithful were displeased. To quench the barrage of criticism inspired by human rights organizations guided by information that human rights had been violated in the process, the Ministry of Internal Affairs informed the public that there were secret extremist groups (jamaats) in the republic using some of the mosques to hide arms.¹³

According to Iu. Ketov, Public Prosecutor of Kabardino-Balkaria, the problem of Islamic radicalism is especially pertinent in the Elbrus and Chegem districts, while in the town of Nartkala a “quiet” seizure of spiritual power by the Wahhabis had been prevented.¹⁴ Since that time the republic has been living in an uncompromising confrontation between radical Islamists and the law enforcement bodies. The militia registered about 400 as Wahhabis; according to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, 40 percent of them either had criminal records or were under surveillance as potential criminals.¹⁵ According to the law enforcement bodies, the republic is already covered by a network of so-called jamaats, precursors of the “Islamic statehood” institutions. Most of them belonged to the Shura (council) under which a Shari‘a court was functioning.¹⁶

Special security measures were taken on 22 April, 2004 at the Fourth Congress of the Muslims attended by clerics and heads of Muslim communities loyal to the SAM KB. The congress approved the only candidate for the post of mufti and decided that the Muslim community needed a single (centralized) leadership with the right to appoint the previously elected rais-imams, control their activities, and remove them from their posts.¹⁷ In this situation, the radicals abandoned their efforts to establish control over the legal communities, many of them stopped attending mosques and went underground. A meeting of the Islamist mejlis decided to prohibit the jamaat members from attending the main mosque in Nalchik because all the official imams were allegedly unfaithful.¹⁸

The media and human rights structures actively discussed the situation; it turned out that the prohibition had not brought the desired results. Leaders of some of the Muslim communities complained to the federal structures and human rights organizations about violations of the rights of the faithful. The republican leaders had to re-open most of the closed mosques, but now under the strict control of the SAM KB; previously elected imams were appointed. The human rights structures drew the attention of the Russian and foreign public to the instances of arbitrariness perpetrated by the power and law enforcement structures toward young Muslims; they allowed obvious terrorists to openly state their ideas by publishing their appeals in the press. In the winter of 2005, an Austrian newspaper wrote: “Shortly before his death Iarmuk leader Ataev allegedly said: ‘The gates of jihad remain wide open. They will be closed when our country, occupied by Russia conquerors, again belongs to our people.’”¹⁹

In October 2004, Nalchik was the scene of a large rally: people came to accuse the militia of the death of Rasul Tsakoev, a businessman well known among the Muslims.²⁰ The locally published book *Skvoz' prizmu islama* (Through the Prism of Islam) written by a certain Abd al-Hadi ibn Ali (the alias of 28-year-old Zaur Pshigotyzhev who lives in Nalchik) caused quite a stir. According to experts of the RF Public Prosecutor's Office, the book presents Islamic fundamentals in the most radical way, promotes religious intolerance, and absolutely rejects compromises with other religions; obedience to secular law was described as disobedience to Allah. The experts concluded that the book calls for the “establishment of worldwide rule of Allah, without excluding the use of force to achieve this.” Ex-

¹³ IA REGNUM, 6 August, 2002.

¹⁴ ITAR-TASS, 12 January, 2003.

¹⁵ Published on the site [portal-credo.ru], 14 December, 2004.

¹⁶ Interfax, 14 September, 2004.

¹⁷ [gazetayuga.ru], 29 April, 2004.

¹⁸ Interfax, 3 December, 2004.

¹⁹ *Die Presse* (Austria), 2 February, 2005.

²⁰ IA REGNUM, 11 November, 2004.

perts in theology from the Institute of the Humanities offered a similar opinion: "The author has proclaimed himself the only interpreter of the Islamic fundamentals and the Koran."²¹

In one of his interviews, M. Mukozhev, leader of the Jamaat of Kabardino-Balkaria, said: "The heads of the power structures are driving the Muslim community into a dead-end. Their actions suggest that they would like to unleash a war; they have outlawed from 400 to 500 people. As long as they continue using force against these people in defiance of the law, people will shed their faith in the hope of restoring their rights through legal means and might employ similar methods to defend themselves. By that time, the community will no longer be able to control the Muslims."²² An anonymous address in the name of the republic's Muslims was even more radical: "In the fall of 2003, a war against Islam and the Muslims began in the republic. Thousands of Muslims fell victim to physical violence, while their religious feelings were hurt. The hostile state that occupied our Motherland outlawed the faithful, therefore we relinquish our responsibility toward it and consider ourselves free from obeying the laws of this hostile state. The servants of this state are henchmen of occupation and violence over the Muslims, therefore their property and blood are no longer banned."²³ These people called militants guilty of grave crimes "mohajedin," told "heroic" stories about their fellow countrymen who fought in jihad, those who died were described as shakhids. In mosques, young imams delivered sermons with strong political overtones. At one of the Muslim meetings that discussed the attitude toward the presidential election in the Russian Federation, Anzor Astemirov said: "You should always bear in mind that those who support an infidel will find themselves in his party on Doomsday."²⁴ The attack on the Nalchik State Drug Control Office in December 2004, as well as the killing of M. Ataev and some of his cronies sent the tension up. The tragic events of 13 October, 2005 demonstrated the hazards of the politicization of Islam.

It seems that the accounts of certain episodes that took place in the region, their interpretations, and the conclusions derived from what religious and public figures did or said do not give an objective picture of the very complicated processes in the religious sphere. More often than not, the media supply biased or even erroneously interpreted information, while certain experts use them to draw far-reaching conclusions which confuse the public. Those state authorities, including law enforcement bodies and public and religious figures who have had a taste of religious radicalism, are convinced that this phenomenon should be assessed as the sum-total of various factors typical of Kabardino-Balkaria. All conclusions about the problems of the local Muslims should not stem from what Wahhabi or traditional imams have to say or from militia reports based on individual events and tinged by specific circumstances. All the conclusions should be based on the decisions approved by all the sides involved. President of Kabardino-Balkaria A. Kanokov resolved to continue a dialog to overcome the contradictions and resolve the key socioeconomic problems.

The people of Kabardino-Balkaria have the right to voice their opinion, which should be treated as a priority when dealing with major social issues, otherwise the media and human rights organizations will be suspected of a lack of objectivity. After the tragedy of 13 October, 2005, this is fraught with the loss of public confidence in these institutions.

Most of those involved in these events, killed in street fighting, or detained by the law enforcement bodies are local young men who grew up and were educated in Kabardino-Balkaria. They all wanted to follow the rules of Islam and pattern their lives accordingly: when law and order was restored, the relatives of the killed militants asked the authorities to let them bury the dead, contrary to RF law which bans this with respect to terrorists. In fact, many of the local people were caught

²¹ *Gazeta* newspaper, No. 36, 4 March, 2004.

²² IA REGNUM, 29 August, 2004.

²³ *Severnii Kavkaz*, 29 November, 2005.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

unawares by their relatives' involvement in terrorist activities; at the same time, they were irritated at the law enforcement structures. Some of the human rights organizations wishing to help the bereaved were drawn into a campaign of discrediting the republican leaders initiated by the forces behind the 13 October events.

Those responsible for the bloodshed in Nalchik continued exploiting Islam in their leaflets. Anonymous letters were distributed across the republic which said: "Under the current conditions of total terror against the Muslims, jihad has become 'fard-ul-ayn,' the prime duty of every Muslim."²⁵ Some of the media and some of the statements heard at human rights rallies did nothing to help investigate the events in a fair and dispassionate way—they were aimed at stirring up popular discontent and displeasure with the republican leaders. They never succeeded—the republican and federal authorities did their best to organize objective and open investigation of the events and of what the law enforcement bodies had done under the circumstances. This defused the arguments of those who were exploiting the feelings of the aggrieved people. The investigation brought to light, in particular, the unseemly role of Mukozhev and Astemirov, two radical Muslim ideologists. After sending the trusting young men to their deaths, they disappeared. This caused a wave of popular indignation which could easily be turned against all Muslims. The mothers of the dead militants say: "Astemirov said that our children remained loyal to their amir until their last second, while he himself betrayed them in an effort to save his life."²⁶

The republican leaders have done all they can not only to return the life of the Muslim communities to normal and prevent political groups, extremist groups in the first place, from using religion to their own ends, but also to convince the public that they will do everything to achieve this. Soon after his inauguration, President Kanokov suggested that representation of most of the Muslim communities in the SAM KB, not only of those that the ruling elite found acceptable, should be extended. Dmitry Kozak, plenipotentiary representative of the RF President in the Southern Federal Okrug, publicly warned against the danger of identifying Islamic communities with terrorist groups using Islamic rhetoric as a smokescreen. This satisfied the Muslim organizations across Russia. The events in Kabardino-Balkaria and the situation in Chechnia and Daghestan have shown that the confessional sphere should be freed from all political overtones; at the same time, the respected institutions of civil society should take into account the political position of believers.

²⁵ *Nasha versia*, 16 January, 2006.

²⁶ *Severniy Kavkaz*, 17 January, 2006.