

Channel One "Uncovers" a Turkish-U.S. Plot in the Caucasus

Russian state television's Channel One on the evening of April 22 broadcast a putative documentary film made by Kremlin correspondent Anton Vernitsky called "Plan 'Kavkaz'" (The Caucasus Plan). The film purports to show how Turkey, the United States and Great Britain attempted at the start of the 1990s to divide Russia into small parts not controlled by the federal center. The film featured Berkan Merrikh Yashar, born Abubakar—a Turkish-born ethnic Chechen who claims to be a journalist who once worked for Radio Liberty in Munich and a politician with close connections to the Turkish leadership.



"At the age of 17 Abubakar was recruited by the CIA," the film states. "That was how the then still-ordinary Chechen youth in 1967 received his pseudonym, which became his second name—Berkan Yashar. For nearly two decades Abubakar was systematically prepared for active measures in Chechnya." According to the film, Yashar himself was convinced his actions could break up the Soviet Union and bring freedom to his people. In the film, Yashar describes meeting Shamil Basaev in Turkey in 1991 after the future separatist field commander and two compatriots hijacked a Russian passenger jet and diverted it to Ankara. He also describes a scheme for illegally transferring uncut Russian diamonds abroad through Grozny airport, a quarter of the proceeds of which allegedly went to Chechen leader Dzhokhar Dudaev. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reported on April 23 that the film says Yashar also assisted in weapons-smuggling operations, and—with the help of Americans—flooded the market with counterfeit dollars.

RFE/RL reported that, according to the documentary, Yashar "signed a contract with the U.S. State Department" in the 1960s and briefly worked as an announcer at Radio Free Europe's Munich headquarters, broadcasting so-called "propaganda in the Chechen language." The radio station reported that neither of those claims could be independently verified.

The film describes Yashar as a "grey cardinal" who was at the center of all significant operations to finance separatist rebels in the North Caucasus. Newsru.com reported on April 22 that one of the most "sensational" parts of the film is its claim that rebels took money that they made during Chechnya's wars and invested it in developing diamond and gold mines in Africa that continue to bring them profits today.

Yashar states in the film that at the start of the 1990s he prepared a political platform for separating Chechnya from Russia and that there were several sources financing this project. He claims, among other things, that passports for the unrecognized Chechen Republic of Ichkeria were printed in France while "many tons" of Ichkerian banknotes, which resembled U.S. currency, were printed in Germany. Yashar says that Western special services did not really care about the independence of the peoples of Caucasus but were acting only in the interest of their "personal profit." He also claims that Western special services tried to convince Muslim muftis in Russia—not only in Chechnya, but also in Tatarstan and Bashkortostan—to break away from Russia because of religious differences. He also refers to the self-exiled Russian tycoon and his former partner, the late Badri Patarkastishvili, stating that they were involved in questionable deals in the Caucasus.

Vernitsky claims in the documentary that "the Caucasus Plan" is still being carried out.

RFE/RL on April 23 quoted Medet Onlu, who represents the Chechen separatists in Turkey, as telling its North Caucasus Service that Yashar was an active supporter of the republic's independence struggle in its early period but has since "established close, friendly ties with the Russians."

Back in 1999, shortly before the State Duma elections held in December of that year, Anton Vernitsky produced segments for Channel One—then known as ORT—purporting to show that the liberal Yabloko party was backed by Russia's gay community and that Yabloko's leader, Grigory Yavlinsky, had gone to plastic surgeons for a facelift. The Izbrannoe.ru website noted on April 22 that President Vladimir Putin conferred the "For Services to the Fatherland" Degree III order on Vernitsky in 2006 "for a major contribution to the development of television and radio broadcasting."

Newsru.com on April 23 quoted RFE/RL correspondent Andrei Babitsky as saying of "Plan 'Kavkaz'" that while some

of its details are "completely plausible," it tries to use such details to prove "the absolutely mythical idea of the participation of certain special services and various countries in the dismemberment of Russia." Babitsky said the documentary puts forward "a conspiracy theory rather typical of the Putin era" and, to do so, "uses a sledge-hammer that beats the viewer on the back of the head simply in order to say that America is blowing up Russia."

Newsru.com reported on April 24 that the documentary "Plan 'Kavkaz'" also alleged that one of Turkey's largest construction companies, ENKA, financed the Chechen rebels in the 1990s. According to the website, the film featured parts of an interview with Sultan Kekhursaev, a current resident of Istanbul who described himself as a former "brigadier general of the army of Dzhokhar Dudaev." Kekhursaev claimed that large Turkish companies working in Russia, including ENKA, financed the Chechen rebels' seizure of Grozny in 1996 and provided the rebels with medical supplies and "anti-aircraft means."

ENKA issued a statement on April 23 categorically denying the claims made about the company in the documentary. Turkey's embassy in Moscow issued a statement on April 24 calling the claims made about Turkey in the documentary "baseless."

Vernitsky's documentary follows comments made by Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Nikolai Patrushev earlier this month accusing unnamed foreign non-governmental organizations of helping international terrorists recruit members in Russia. Patrushev, who chairs that National Anti-Terrorist Committee, told a meeting of the committee on April 8 that in the Southern Federal District, which includes the North Caucasus, "the bandits and their accomplices are making efforts to indoctrinate youth and replenish their ranks" and that "emissaries of foreign terrorist and religious-extremist organizations" are trying to recruit members in other parts of Russia. "Individual foreign non-governmental organizations are providing them with a considerable degree of support," Patrushev said.

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Sulim Yamadaev Denounces Kadyrov

Responding to Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov's accusations that he and his brothers have been involved in a number of crimes and human rights violations, the commander of the GRU's (Russian military intelligence) Vostok battalion, Sulim Yamadaev, said in an interview broadcast by Ekho Moskvyy radio on April 19 that the Chechen authorities are hiding the truth about what is going on in the republic, including murders. "Practically every day they are murdering in Chechnya," he said. "Ramzan [Kadyrov] simply obviously lies on television. Now all of the media are frightened of him. Sooner or later, everything will be revealed: ... they won't put up with it for long at the top."



Yamadaev added: "I am not under the president of the Chechen Republic; I am under the commander in chief, and at the moment that is Putin. I am a military man; if I am given an order, I will follow it, without any problems."

The Vostok commander also claimed that the amnestied rebel fighters who are currently serving in the Chechen Interior Ministry forces would return to the rebel side at the first opportunity. "Seventy-five percent of those amnestied who are working in the police force are devils [shaitany]; that is not a secret to anyone," Yamadaev said, adding: "You think there is order here? What kind of order is here? All of the amnestied devils are walking around armed; they have identity cards. They no longer have to run and hide. They can take away, seize anyone. I don't trust them and will never trust them" (see Andrei Smirnov's article below).

Meanwhile, Chechnya's human rights ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhazhiev, charged on April 20 that members of the Vostok battalion might have been involved in an incident that reportedly took place that day when someone fired on the car in which the representative of the Chechen human rights ombudsman in the Vedeno district, Khasambek ZubairaeV, was riding. The gunfire reportedly killed ZubairaeV's two nieces, aged 5 and 8, and wounded his brother and sister.

"I don't rule out that servicemen of the GRU's Vostok battalion were involved, since ZubairaeV has actively supported the president of the Chechen Republic, Ramzan Kadyrov, and being a person with a religious education, made calls in the mosques to oppose the illegal actions of servicemen," Nukhazhiev told RIA Novosti. He said that the attack was a provocation aimed at disrupting the processes begun by the republic's president to rebuild the region. "In the Vedeno district recently, restoration processes have begun," he said. "And the so-called representatives of the 'party of war' cannot resign themselves to that."

No details about the shooting incident or who may have been responsible for it were provided by law-enforcement or other relevant government agencies.

Tensions have remained high between the Sulim Yamadaev, his brothers and members of the Vostok battalion, on the one hand, and Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and security forces loyal to him, on the other, since an April 14 road collision between an armed Vostok unit and members of Kadyrov's special guard reportedly led to a shootout. According to some reports, 18 soldiers and civilians were killed in that shootout (Chechnya Weekly, April 17).

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Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Visits North Caucasus

The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights Thomas Hammarberg visited the North Caucasus the past week to assess the situation first hand.

Itar-Tass on April 23 quoted Hammarberg as telling journalists following a visit to Chechnya's mountainous Shatoi district that that Chechnya's reconstruction "is real and not for show," adding that he had often read in the mass media that the Shatoi district had been badly hit during military operations in Chechnya and that

thousands of inhabitants had been forced to abandon their homes. Itar-Tass quoted the acting head of the Shatoi district administration, Ruslan Shovkhalov, as telling Hammarberg that thanks to the republic's program for the development of mountain regions, the district is being regenerated completely. The news agency also quoted district residents as expressing "their gratitude to (Chechen President) Ramzan Kadyrov for the special attention to the population's needs, especially in the restoration of the district hospital and the foundation of a rehabilitation center for children."



According to Itar-Tass, Hammarberg also met with the Shatoi district's police chief, Major Magomed Shakhtamirov, and asked him about the problem of abductions in the district. Shakhtamirov told Hammarberg that seven instances of kidnapping had been reported in the district since 2000, the most high-profile being the abduction of the two brothers of the well-known Chechen banker, Abubakar Arsamakov. It is worth noting that Sulim Yamadaev's Vostok battalion was implicated in the disappearance of the Arsamakov brothers (Chechnya Weekly, April 17). Shakhtamirov said that 328 crimes had been reported in the district in the past year. "That is substantially less than in previous years," Shakhtamirov told Hammarberg, adding that criminal proceedings had been initiated in 57 of those cases, 48 of which had been solved. "The rest of the crimes were related to illegal armed groups," Shakhtamirov said.

Russian news agencies on April 23 quoted Hammarberg as saying that missing people and the identification of bodies remain the two biggest human rights problems in Chechnya. "There is a need to create a database that would unite the information from families with the results of exhumations, as well as genetic dates about the relatives of those missing," Hammarberg said.

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov, for his part, said that much still has to be done but that the republic needs help from the Russian president. "The president needs to assist in the creation of a commission on identifying bodies and help us in the search for those still missing," said Kadyrov. "We've done all we can here in Chechnya, now is the time for the federal authorities to act." RussiaToday reported on April 23 that in a visit to one of Grozny's pre-trial prisons, people incarcerated there said they had been beaten up and tortured into confessing to crimes, and that Hammarberg said he wanted this issue to be "clarified."

Hammarberg also traveled to Ingushetia and met with its president, Murat Zyazikov, in Magas, the republican capital. According to Itar-Tass, Hammarberg thanked Zyazikov on behalf of the international community for assistance to the Chechen people during the "armed events" in Chechnya. The news agency reported that Zyazikov brought up the problem of displaced persons who had been compelled to flee the neighboring region of North Ossetia and found refuge in Ingushetia. Hammarberg promised to study the problem and find out what can be done to improve their lives.

It should be noted that on April 15, just a few days before Hammarberg started his visit to the North Caucasus, Dick Marty, the rapporteur on the situation in the North Caucasus for the Legal Affairs and Human Rights Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), issued an introductory memorandum on the situation in the North Caucasus. As Human Rights Watch noted in

an April 15 press release, Marty's memorandum highlighted ongoing human rights violations by security forces, including enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial executions, and noted impunity for these violations of international law. The memorandum, entitled "Legal remedies for human rights violations in the North Caucasus," characterized the human rights situation in the North Caucasus as "by far the most alarming" in all 47 Council of Europe member states.

The Human Rights Watch press release, which also cited officials from Amnesty International, was headlined: "Council of Europe Failing on Russia." It quoted both groups as saying that "all parts of the Council of Europe, including the Parliamentary Assembly, should be engaged in preventing further human rights abuses in the North Caucasus including by ensuring that Russia brings to justice those responsible for serious human rights abuses." The press released added: "Robust monitoring and public reporting on the North Caucasus by the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights will help ensure this."

Meanwhile, Aleksandr Cherkasov of the Memorial human rights group told Moskovsky Komsomolets in an interview published on April 24 that an analysis of the situation in Chechnya and neighboring republics over the last several months shows that life in Chechnya is "better and safer" now. While problems certainly remain in Chechnya, "they are problems of post-war restoration rather than of anything else," he said. According to Cherkasov, reports of attacks and clashes between rebels and security forces indicate that the overall number of such attacks and clashes in Ingushetia is slightly below the same figure for Chechnya. He noted, however, that Ingushetia's population is only a third of Chechnya's.

Cherkasov said that the number of abductions in Chechnya in recent years "went down slowly at first" and then dropped more significantly in early 2007. Today, people disappear more frequently in Ingushetia than in Chechnya, he said.

Asked how many people disappeared without a trace in the second Chechen war, which began in 1999, Cherkasov said Memorial estimates the number at between 3,000 and 5,000. Memorial's Violence Chronicles listed nearly 2,000 episodes and after the chronicles were published, the group received information on "more than 1,000 new episodes," he said. "The problem is, there is a bona fide system of organized impunity in the Caucasus," said Cherkasov. "Whenever a person disappears and the blame rests with Russian security structures, this system makes investigation of any such episode a sheer impossibility."

Another big problem in Chechnya, said Cherkasov, is "inertia" caused by fear. "It is necessary to try and bring the guilty to justice," he said. "It is necessary to try and find all the people who disappeared. At the very least, all their names should be published."

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Attacks Reported in Chechnya, Ingushetia and Dagestan

Gunmen in Chechnya opened fire on a Federal Security Service (FSB) Mi-8 helicopter on March 23, RIA Novosti quoted a law-enforcement source as saying. The source told the news agency that the aircraft was damaged and had to make an emergency landing, but that no casualties had been reported. He said that an investigation and search for the gunmen was underway. The Chechen Interior Ministry, however, said it had received no information about the incident. On April 21, a soldier was injured in a roadside bomb explosion that targeted a military convoy in Grozny, RIA Novosti reported on April 22. "An explosion went off on the Petropavlovkoye highway in Grozny on Monday [April 21], when a military convoy of eight trucks was moving by," the news agency quoted a local Interior Ministry official as saying. "One serviceman was wounded." The official said the soldier was being treated in the hospital.



RIA Novosti reported on April 21 that a serviceman had been killed and another wounded in a shootout with "members of a criminal group" in southern Chechnya the previous day. "A police reconnaissance group clashed with a gang of about 10 people in a forest at around 3:30 p.m. Moscow time on Sunday [April 20]," a regional security official told the news agency. "A deputy commander was killed and a serviceman sustained a severe injury." After the "gang members" evaded arrest, they were pursued to the Shali district where another shootout occurred 45 minutes later, RIA Novosti reported. A dug-out shelter used by the gang was discovered and destroyed in a nearby forest. In a separate incident, a group of unknown offenders set fire to the administration building in Chechnya's Achkhoi-Martan district late on April 20. RIA Novosti reported on April 19 that unknown gunmen fired on a group of servicemen in the Achkhoi-Martan district village of Bamut but that no one was hurt in the attack.

Russian news agencies reported on April 23 that two Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) employees were severely wounded when their car was fired on by unknown gunmen near the village of Surkhahi in Ingushetia's Nazran district. Both the wounded employees were taken to hospital and were said to be in grave condition. The attackers fled the scene, and their car was found abandoned in a nearby forest. Itar-Tass, citing Ingushetia's Interior Ministry, reported on April 22 that unidentified attackers fired automatic rifles and grenade launchers at a police post on the Kavkaz federal highway in Nazran's Nasyr-Kortovsky municipal district. The report said the attack had caused casualties but did not provide details. A small explosive device went off at the front gate of the home of head of the Nazran city administration, Beili Ozdaev, on April 18, but no one was hurt in the incident.

Interfax reported on April 19 that unidentified gunmen fired on a group of Interior Ministry Internal Troops along the administrative border between Ingushetia and North Ossetia, wounding one serviceman.

In Dagestan, a police officer was injured on April 22 after an unknown assailant threw a hand grenade at a traffic police post in Makhachkala, the republic's capital. A column of vehicles belonging to a mobile federal Interior Ministry unit came under fire from automatic weapons in Dagestan's Khasavyurt district on April 21, Interfax reported. One vehicle was damaged but no one injured in the attack. A police source told the news agency that the attackers fired from abandoned garden plots.

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Who in Moscow Protects the Yamadaev Brothers?

By Andrei Smirnov

On April 19, the federal authorities made the first concrete decision on the conflict between the Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and the Yamadaev brothers—Sulim Yamadaev, who heads the Russian army's Vostok (East) battalion; Ruslan Yamadaev, a former deputy in Russia's State Duma; and Badrudin Yamadaev, who is also a Vostok battalion member (Chechnya Weekly, April 17).



The Gazeta newspaper reported that a meeting had taken place on April 19 at the Russian Defense Ministry in Moscow to discuss the fate of the Russian army's Vostok (East) battalion, headed by Sulim Yamadaev. General Aleksandr Baranov, Commander of the North Caucasus Military District, and General-Colonel Sergei Makarov, the Chief of the Staff of the District, attended the meeting, among others.

The Russian military commanders decided at the meeting to put off a final decision about the Vostok battalion until after May 7, the day that President-elect Dmitry Medvedev will be inaugurated.

"It was decided not to do anything rash and to wait until military investigators investigate all the tragic incidents that entailed people's deaths," a source in the North-Caucasian District told Gazeta (Gazeta, April 21).

It is no exaggeration to call this decision of the Defense Ministry a victory of the Yamadaev brothers over Ramzan Kadyrov, at least a temporary one.

After the gun battle in the Chechen city of Gudermes on April 14 between Kadyrov's forces and fighters of the Vostok battalion, Kadyrov initiated a massive propaganda campaign against his rivals. On April 16, Kadyrov and Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov called the Yamadaev brothers (Sulim and his younger brother Badrudin) "criminals." Then the republican human rights ombudsman, Nurdi Nukhazhiev, accused the Vostok commanders of numerous crimes and human rights violations. Some Chechen non-governmental organizations and human rights activists demanded that the Vostok be disbanded immediately (RIA Novosti, April 16).

On April 17, the Chechen parliament adopted a resolution calling on Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov either to dissolve Vostok or to replace its leaders, Sulim Yamadaev (Chechnya Weekly, April 17).

That same day, four Chechen deputies in the Russian parliament, Adam Demilkhanov, Magomed Vakhaev, Akhmed Zavgaev and Said Yakhikhazhiev, also demanded the dismissal of the battalion and suggested that Sergei Fridinsky, the Russian Military Prosecutor, be asked to appear before parliament to report on the investigation into Vostok's activities (Interfax, April 17).

On April 18, Demilkhanov, who is Kadyrov's closest political ally, accused the Yamadaev brothers of plotting with Boris Berezovsky, the Russian tycoon and political immigrant who now lives in London, to destroy Russia (Interfax, April 18). The Chechen Interior Minister told Interfax that same day that that an infantry company had withdrawn from the Vostok battalion. This was followed by a statement from Kadyrov in which he declared that 300 servicemen had already left the battalion (Interfax, April 18). Kadyrov-controlled Chechen television broadcast a report in which some former Vostok servicemen said they had been paid only 6,000 rubles (around \$255) a month despite the dangerous conditions of their service. Moreover, they said they had not been officially enlisted and thus had not enjoyed proper medical services and social protection. "We thought we were servicemen but we were not enlisted and did not have military service cards although we carried weapons and performed special missions," one of the young men said (Interfax, April 18).

This strong pressure from Kadyrov apparently failed to impress the Russian military. The Defense Ministry's press service told Kommersant that the ministry had not received any official request from the Chechen parliament or Chechen members of the Russian parliament to disband the Vostok battalion (Kommersant, April 21).

Moreover, on April 19, just after the meeting at the Defense Ministry on the Vostok issue, additional troops—elite Russian military intelligence (GRU) Special Forces—were sent to Gudermes to defend the main base of the Vostok battalion against any hostile actions by forces loyal to Kadyrov (Rosbalt, April 21).

On April 21, a Russian Defense Ministry source told Nezavisimaya Gazeta that “there was no flood of applications requesting to leave the battalion from members of the unit” (Nezavisimiya Gazeta, April 21).

The decision of the Russian generals not to disband the battalion inspired Sulim Yamadaev to start criticizing Ramzan Kadyrov in public. On April 19, Ekho Moskvyy radio station broadcast an interview with Yamadaev, in which he called Kadyrov “a coward” who “runs around with a huge motorcade escort but sends other people to fight.” Yamadaev said in the interview that Kadyrov lied about peace in Chechnya and that many of Ramzan’s men were in fact secret rebel sympathizers. Yamadaev promised to set up a TV station inside his base, which will be independent from Kadyrov and will tell Chechens “the truth.”

Sulim Yamadaev is now acting like a politician, not simply a military commander. Apparently, he is trying not only to preserve his battalion but also to damage Kadyrov’s political monopoly in Chechnya.

If this is the case, the support of the Russian military command will not be enough. According to Ivan Sukhov and Olga Allenova, well-known Russian journalists who write about the situation in the North Caucasus, rumors are circulating both in Moscow and in the Caucasus that President-elect Dmitry Medvedev wants to see a leader in Chechnya who will be loyal to him personally and has plans to get rid of Kadyrov as a man of the incumbent president, Vladimir Putin. On April 16, the newspaper Vremya Novostei published an article by Sukhov in which he said that “there is information that Kadyrov received a message from Moscow that he will soon get a new position in the federal government.” “It is clear,” wrote Sukhov, “that any position for Kadyrov outside of Chechnya will mean his political annihilation.” Allenova told Radio Liberty that the North Caucasus is full of rumors that many leaders of the North Caucasus republics will be replaced by new ones when Medvedev comes to power (Radio Liberty, April 23).

The fact that such rumors really are circulating was confirmed by Kadyrov himself.

“The enemies of Chechnya and Russia are spreading fabulous rumors that I will get another job, in Moscow,” he said. “I am not going anywhere: my task is to make Chechnya a prosperous land and I will accomplish it” (Grozny-Inform, April 17).

Kadyrov made this statement at the peak of the crisis in Gudermes, and the statement reveals the true reason for Kadyrov’s hostile attitude toward the Yamadaev brothers: he regards them as his main political rivals.

The decision of the Defense Minister to put the Vostok issue on hold until Medvedev’s inauguration is also symbolic because it demonstrates the political background of the conflict. If Medvedev indeed has plans to replace Ramzan Kadyrov in Chechnya with one of the Yamadaev brothers, it could mean that the new president of Russia will be a much more independent figure than some observers believe. On the other hand, to topple Kadyrov could be also a collective decision by the Kremlin, which no longer sees him as a person capable of winning the war against the insurgency that is again on the rise in Chechnya.

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This Odd Place Called Ingushetia

By Mairbek Vatchagaev

Events unfolding in the North Caucasus continue to be a matter of concern for human rights advocates but not in the least for the local governments acting as the Kremlin's representatives in their respective republics. To mention just a few, the months-long siege of the mountain settlement of Gimry and the ongoing military action against resistance fighters in Dagestan; the internal tensions between pro-Moscow clans in Chechnya; the increase, for the first time since 1996, in the level of activity of the Chechen resistance movement; the situation in Ingushetia, which has become the de facto epicenter of the entire North Caucasus resistance movement; and events in Kabardino-Balkaria, where one attack against the federal center follows another—all of these taken together, and many other developments, cannot have escaped the attention of analysts who are focused on the region.



All government leaders in Russia and the North Caucasus, without exception, continue to describe the situation in the region as “normal.” One has to wonder if the ongoing raids by separatist forces against federal agencies are now considered “normal.” In effect, the government is trying to convince its people that this indeed is “business as usual” and no improvements should be expected.

To cite one example, opinions offered during an April 15 talk show that was focused on Ingushetia and organized by the reputable Russian journalist Yelena Masyuk, and which brought together federal government representatives as well as human rights advocates at Moscow State University, reinforced that same point of view. Issa Kostoev, who represents Ingushetia in Russia's Federation Council, described Ingushetia as “a region like any other” and said that the crime level there “does not exceed what is seen elsewhere in Russia” (Kasparov.ru, April 16). Under other circumstances, statements of that sort would be treated as sensational—except when they come from those who speak on behalf of the government in the North Caucasus today. In those parts, it is a long-standing tradition to describe black as white and vice versa.

It appears that in the eyes of Federation Council member Issa Kostoev, incidents like the attack on policemen in Malgobek, which left one man dead and three other wounded (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, April 12), or the assassination of Deputy Chairman of the Supreme Court of Ingushetia Khassan Yandiev in broad daylight the following day (Ingushetiya.ru, April 13), or the widespread attacks on military bases such as the one in Karabulak that targeted OMON on the night of April 16, wounding nine servicemen of an Interior Ministry OMON mobile unit (Apr.ru, April 17), or the early morning gunfire aimed at the residence of Nazran mayor on April 18 (Kavkaz-uzel.ru, April 18), everything seems to be perfectly normal.

The current views espoused by Issa Kostoev, who won a hero's reputation during the Soviet period for leading the effort to catch the serial killer Andrei Chikatilo, may seem downright extravagant. It was Kostoev who called upon human rights advocacy organizations “to decline the services of The Jamestown Foundation,” thus giving away his lack of awareness that this foundation is not involved in grant-making or, indeed, any other activities in the region, except analysis based primarily on Russian mass media sources (Parlamentri.ru, November 27). It is therefore not surprising that Kostoev had to leave the talk show early when discussion turned to specific statistics of crime in Ingushetia and the government's response.

Human rights advocates have a very different view. For instance, Memorial Board member Aleksandr Cherkasov rebutted Kostoev's remarks by stating that “kidnappings perpetrated by members of the federal law enforcement agencies, and not the usually suspected rebel fighters, are quite common in Ingushetia. Over a hundred people have been kidnapped during the last few years” (Novy Region, April 15).

The re-emergence of Ingushetia's former president, Ruslan Aushev, who stepped down before the end of his term under pressure from Kremlin, came as a surprise to many. After several years of staying away from all public events focused on Ingushetia, he appeared on the talk show, which took place at Russia's premier university, and said that the real culprit behind the current developments is Russia's policy in the region, adding that unconditional trust and

support for the Moscow-based politicians in charge of Ingushetia is unwarranted. Aushev also noted that the policies should be mindful of the local conditions, including those in Ingushetia, where customs and traditions are not always conducive to every idea and plan conceived by politicians in Moscow (Gazeta, April 16).

Aushev's re-entry into public life should not be seen as accidental, and it is entirely possible that he will opt for a more active role on Ingushetia's political scene, thus giving the opposition an opportunity to be heard in Moscow and compensating for the sorely lacking political gravitas of politicians in Ingushetia today.

For the first time ever, Ruslan Aushev's remarks were highly critical of his successor President Murat Zyazikov. Aushev pointed out that all the talk of alleged construction of new plants and factories in Ingushetia was without foundation because Ingushetia's current climate does not envisage any private capital investment. Aushev has therefore refuted the main argument Murat Zyazikov never fails to bring up at his meetings with the Russian president—his claim that Ingushetia is undergoing rapid development under his leadership (Rosbalt, April 16). Moreover, Aushev suggested that the federal center should make Ingushetia a federal district, which would effectively end Zyazikov's political life (Ingushetiya.ru, April 15).

The re-emergence of a political heavyweight like Ruslan Aushev comes as an unexpected setback for the current government leaders who assumed that the first Ingush president had retired from the regional politics for good. It may have been widely understood that his choice to step down was made under duress; however, it is not yet altogether clear what changes have transpired to allow him to re-surface and pass judgment on the current government. It is equally unclear whether the Kremlin will use the same mechanisms to suppress him again, or whether Moscow will let him enter the political arena in his capacity as a regional leader with an undisputed reputation across the entire North Caucasus.

In the meantime, the unfortunate President Zyazikov keeps looking abroad to find the source of his troubles: during the past six months he hasn't been able to get over a seminar on Ingushetia organized by The Jamestown Foundation in the fall of 2007. He reiterated this point again during an interview with the Federation Council magazine, 100 Nations (100 Nations, #3[57], March 2008).

The gravity of human rights violations in Ingushetia was also noted by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which adopted a memorandum emphasizing that security forces in Chechnya and Ingushetia routinely violate human rights by kidnapping and torturing people. According to Novaya Gazeta, the memorandum describes the state of human rights in the region as "significantly more alarming" than anywhere else in the 47 member-states of the European Council (Novaya Gazeta, April 17).

The discussion of Ingushetia's conditions may be applied equally to the regional situation in general, as many factors present in Ingushetia are also encountered elsewhere—perhaps with a few variations or minor divergences. In essence, the issue at hand is that the entire North Caucasus region is a permanently active volcano that from time to time begins to erupt and destroy everything in its vicinity.

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