
Medov Removed as Ingushetia's Interior Minister

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45

November 27, 2008 01:31 AM

Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliev removed Musa Medov as Ingushetia's interior minister on November 24. Medov, along with Murat Zyazikov, who was removed as Ingushetia's president late last month (North Caucasus Weekly, October 30), were accused by the republic's opposition party of involvement in the August 31 murder of Magomed Yevloev, founder of the independent Ingushetiya.ru website (North Caucasus Weekly, September 5). Ingushetiya.ru's successor website, Ingushetia.org, reported on November 25 that Medov has been replaced by Colonel Ruslan Meiriev, a former employee of the police department in the Siberian town of Nizhnevartovsk. Newsru.com on November 25 quoted sources in the federal Interior Ministry as saying that Medov had been given a job in the ministry's apparatus in Moscow—which is in effect a promotion. The website reported that Meiriev had been introduced to the staff of Ingush President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and Deputy Russian Interior Minister Colonel-General Arkady Yedelev.

Newsru.com reported that Yevkurov had named Abubakar Geliskhanov as Ingushetia's new agricultural minister, Ruslan Amerkhanov as the republic's new construction minister and Lemka Izmailova as its new education minister. Yevkurov also appointed a third deputy prime minister in the republic—Magomet-Sali Aushev. The website reported that the new heads of Ingushetia's veterinarian department and roads department were also appointed and that the current chairman of the republic's forestry committee was reappointed to that post.

Ingushetia.org reported on November 20 that Ibragim Yevloev, the former head of the Ingush Interior Minister's bodyguard unit, had been flown to Moscow and was being kept in the federal Interior Ministry's Kometa (Comet) Hotel. The website reported that Yevloev has been accused of the unpremeditated murder of Ingushetiya.ru's founder, Magomed Yevloev, and the investigators in Ingushetia believe he fired the fatal shot to the website founder's head. Ingushetia.org noted that the former Interior Ministry chief bodyguard had signed an agreement not to leave the republic while Magomed Yevloev's death was being investigated and thus had violated the law by flying to Moscow.

On November 12, Ingushetia's Nazran district court ruled that Magomed Yevloev's incarceration by the police at the airport in the republic's capital of Magas shortly before he was killed in August 31 had been illegal. On November 18, the collegium of Ingushetia's Supreme Court ruled that a district had acted unlawfully by refusing to change the designation of Yevloev's killing from accidental death to murder.

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Human Rights Violations Remain Rife in Ingushetia

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45

November 27, 2008 01:33 AM

While some observers have praised Ingush President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and members of the republic's opposition have expressed a willingness to give the new leader a chance to make the changes he has promised (North Caucasus Weekly, November 21), a number of Ingush are reportedly starting to lose patience.

In an extensive report about Ingushetia published on November 23, the BBC's website quoted Magomed Mutsolgov, director of the Ingush human rights group Mashr, saying: "A lot of my human rights colleagues and politicians say it is now a civil war and I agree with that." Mutsolgov added: "In my opinion it is a war between the security forces and the local population. Many members of the security forces consider themselves above the law and the population outside the law."

Tanya Lokshina of Human Right Watch told the BBC that there have been three or four attacks a week in Ingushetia since July or August of last year. "There are a few hundred insurgents in total ... who are Jihadists fighting to establish a Caliphate in the (Caucasus) region," she added.

The BBC interviewed several residents of Ingushetia who were victims of violence themselves or who had relatives that had been harassed by the security forces. One of them, identified as Jamaldin Gardanov, showed the BBC's correspondent the spot outside Nazran where he says his brother was shot dead. "My brother and his cousin were passing a checkpoint set up after a policeman was killed on the main road," he said. "The car turned down here (into the dirt track) and the security forces opened fire with intent to kill. My brother died on the spot and his cousin ran off through the fields. The police then fired on the fields for two hours destroying everything. I'm 36-years-old and far from being a fighter, but young men of 18 and 19 want to avenge these killings. For some, it's a Jihad against Russia."

The BBC reported that Gardanov also showed photographs of a raid on his house by Russian soldiers at the beginning of November. "They claim we are all Wahhabis so we are being persecuted," he said, adding that he comes from a family of theologians and is deeply religious but strongly denies any links to radical Islam. "The security forces have created the threat of Wahhabism as a cover for what they are doing here." He also showed the BBC video clips stored on his mobile phone, including one which showed what he said was the body of another of his brothers after he was shot dead by security forces.

Another resident of Ingushetia interviewed by the BBC, identified as Tamerlan, had just been released after being detained for six days by security forces in the town of Maglobek. He had difficulty moving and showed deep bruises and cuts on his lower back, upper thighs and wrists. "They tortured me from six in the morning to six in the evening," he told the BBC. "They put a sack over my head and beat me so badly I lost consciousness. They put sharp implements under my nails. I thought I was going to die, it was sadistic. They also tied my hands and feet together and hung me up—so I started to suffocate."

Tamerlan told the BBC that the security forces were trying to get him to confess to being involved in a policeman's murder but had to release him because he knew nothing about it. He denied any connection with the rebels. "Maybe they detained me because I'm a Muslim and pray at the Mosque and my wife wears the Hijab," he said.

Opposition leader Maksharip Aushev said such brutal treatment of the local population is not only swelling the ranks of the rebel fighters, but also building support for Ingushetia's separation from Russia. "People are coming to me all the time, saying let's vote for independence," he said.

The head of the security committee of Ingushetia's parliament, Mukhtar Buzurtanov, told the BBC that President Yevkurov must bring security forces in the republic under control and stop their "illegal activities." Buzurtanov also accused the rebels of trying to destabilize Russia, alleging that they were part of a radical Islamic movement that had moved into Ingushetia after the wars in Chechnya. He said more than 50 soldiers had been killed so far this year.

Maksharip Aushev said he held out hope that Yevkurov could improve the situation, stressing that former president Zyazikov was "100 percent" to blame for the situation and noting that Yevkurov had invited opposition leaders to meet with him and said he plans to stop the human rights abuses and tackle corruption.

"At the moment we see no reason not to trust him," Aushev told the BBC. But the opposition will give Yevkurov "a maximum of three months," he added. "We will support him if things change, if not it will go back to the situation as it was before."

Meanwhile, Ingushetia.org on November 24 quoted Mashr head Magomed Mutsolgov as saying that he had been prevented from visiting a man who had been hospitalized after being tortured in the Malgobek district police headquarters. Mutsolgov said that the police on duty outside the hospital ward told him that they had received orders from Ingushetia's Interior Ministry to not allow him to see the victim, Magomed Tsokiev.

Kavkazky Uzel reported on November 21 that Magomed Tsokiev, his brother Timur, Tamerlan Tankiev—apparently the same Tamerlan interviewed by the BBC—and Ibragim Aushev said they were detained in Malgobek on November 13 by police,

whom—they claimed—planted ammunition in Tsokievs' house. Tamerlan Tankiev told Kavkazky Uzel that they were thrown inside a van, beaten, kicked and struck with blunt objects and then taken to premises that were apparently the Malgobek police headquarters and thrown in separate rooms. "There, we were subject to most severe tortures," he told the website. "They put a bag made from dense material over my head; and I could breathe with difficulty. Several dozen masked guys were beating me in turn. They demanded from us four to confess to the murder of a policeman that we had not ever heard about and to tell them where we had hidden a sub-machine gun." Tankiev said they "were continuously tortured from about 6:30 a.m. until 5:00 p.m."

The victims also told Kavkazky Uzel that unknown persons had shelled the Tsokievs' house and burnt down Tamerlan Tankiev's house on November 19. According to the website, Ingush President Yunus-Bek Evkurov met with relatives of the four detainees on November 14 and promised he would not allow the republic's security agencies to mistreat people held in detention.

On November 22, Kavkazky Uzel quoted relatives of Ruslan Terkakiev, a resident of Ingushetia who was detained by the republic's Federal Security Service (FSB) branch on November 18, as saying he had been tortured while in detention and that a criminal case against him had been fabricated. He was accused of participation in "an illegal armed formation" and the "illegal purchase, storage and bearing of firearms, ammunition and self-made explosives."

Meanwhile, Kavkazky Uzel reported on November 24 that a bomb had been discovered underneath a car in the center of Nazran and defused. Interfax reported that an OMON police sergeant from the Russian region of Kemerovo was shot to death on November 23 outside a food store in the Ingush village of Ordzhonikidsevskaya, apparently by a sniper. The Associated Press reported that on November 22, gunmen fired at the local police headquarters in Nazran and raided an outdoor cafe in the city, killing a cafe worker. Russian news agencies reported that the police headquarters building in Nazran was attacked with grenades and automatic weapons and that the attack lasted several minutes, but that no police were injured. Interfax quoted a source as saying that one of the shells, which hit the police headquarters, caused a fire but it was quickly put out.

Sulim Yamadaev Says a Chechen Unit Has Been Sent to Moscow to Kill Him

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45
November 27, 2008 01:35 AM

On November 24 the Russian newspaper Gazeta quoted Magomed Khambiev, the former defense minister of the separatist Chechen Republic of Ichkeria (ChRI) and current deputy in Chechnya's pro-Moscow parliament, as saying that three pending criminal cases against former Vostok battalion commander Sulim Yamadaev will be transferred to military investigators. Citing sources in Chechnya's law-enforcement bodies, Khambiev said the criminal cases have been given to the Federal Investigative Committee and would later be handed over to military investigative bodies.

According to Gazeta, the three cases involve the 1998 murder of Usman Batsaev, a resident of the village of Dzhalka in Chechnya's Gudermes district; the death of an unidentified man whose body was discovered in 2003; and the disappearance of a resident in Chechnya with the last name Musliev in 2002. All three cases were launched by investigators in Chechnya's Gudermes district.

Khambiev told Gazeta that the cases being transferred to military investigators would not help Yamadaev, whose battalion operated under the Russian armed forces' Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU). "The military wants to save him, but nothing will come of this," Khambiev said. "Such people [as Yamadaev] were needed during the times of trouble, but now the situation has changed. The Yamadaevs have thousands of enemies, including me." Khambiev promised to ensure that Yamadaev's case is heard in a civilian court, arguing that is the proper venue because his victims were civilians and he has already been discharged from the military.

During a meeting in Grozny on November 22, the Chechen President, Ramzan Kadyrov, said that Sulim Yamadaev is guilty of the deaths of "many people," including Yusup and Yunus Arsamakov—brothers of Moscow Industrial Bank President Abubakar Arsamakov, and the well-known Chechen singer Milana Balayeva and her mother.

During a meeting with Khalid Vaikhanov, the Chechen deputy prime minister with responsibility for the republic's security bodies, on November 21, Kadyrov complained that the federal Interior Ministry has not taken the steps necessary to find and detain Sulim Yamadaev. Kadyrov said that he was certain that the federal law-enforcement bodies know the whereabouts of Yamadaev who, according to the Chechen leader, is hiding somewhere in Moscow. Kadyrov claimed Yamadaev has threatened former Vostok battalion members including Ruslan Baimuradov who, according to Kadyrov, has testified against Yamadaev in connection with the murder of the Arsamakov brothers.

On November 23 Gazeta quoted Vladimir Pribylovsky, head of the Panorama think-tank, as saying that he thought the conflict between Kadyrov and the Yamadaev brothers was far from over. Pribylovsky also stated that "Although Sulim Yamadaev still has protectors in Moscow, they are military men, generals, who sympathize with Yamadaev. However, generals do not have big political resources at the moment and therefore cannot completely shield their protégé from persecution," Pribylovsky said.

Meanwhile, Sulim Yamadaev told Novaya Gazeta in an interview published on November 21 that most of the former Vostok battalion members have gone over to Kadyrov and that he does not blame them for doing so since it was done under pressure. He also said that he did not blame those former battalion members who are making accusations against him because they would be killed if they refused. At the same time, he said that he could count on "50 or so" former battalion members "even now." Yamadaev, of course, again denied the charges that have been leveled against him.

Yamadaev said that a 12-man "spetsnaz group" has been dispatched from Chechnya to Moscow, ostensibly to arrest him, but that the unit's real mission "is not to take me alive." He said that the Chechen authorities want to eliminate him the way they eliminated Movladi Baisarov, head of the FSB's Gorets spetsnaz group who was shot to death in Moscow in November 2006 (Chechnya Weekly, November 22, 2006). Yamadaev also stated that Baisarov was shot and killed by Adam Delikhmanov, a close Kadyrov associate who is now a United Russia deputy from Chechnya.

Interestingly, Yamadaev said Kadyrov "had nothing to do" with the murder of his brother, Ruslan Yamadaev, who was shot to death in Moscow in September (North Caucasus Weekly, September 26). Yamadaev said he knows who killed his brother and "will settle things with them in accordance with the law."

Briefs

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45

November 27, 2008 01:38 AM

Chechen Rebel Attacks Kill Four Policemen and a Civilian

Chechnya's Interior Ministry reported that three policemen and a civilian were killed and four other policemen and four local residents were wounded late on November 22 when rebels detonated a radio-controlled landmine in the village of Sadovyi near the Chechen capital Grozny. The Associated Press reported that another police officer was killed on November 22 by rebels who ambushed his vehicle near the southern Chechen village of Gekhi.

Dagestani Militants Kill Two Policemen

Police in Dagestan reported on November 24 that two riot police officers were killed and three wounded in a clash with militants in the republic. The Associated Press quoted Mark Tolchinsky, a police spokesman, as saying that the gun battle erupted in the village of Kaka-Shura on November 23 after a group of unidentified militants opened fire on a police patrol. Agence France-Presse reported that the incident took place in the town of Karabudakhent, which is located about 15 kilometers from Kaka-Shura. In a separate incident the same day, police said seven people were wounded by gunfire in Dagestan's capital, Makhachkala, after a group of young men started a fight in a local cafeteria (see Mairbek Vatchagaev's article in this issue).

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Dagestan's Sharia Jamaat Expands and Reorganizes

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45

November 27, 2008 01:39 AM

By: Mairbek Vatchagaev

It is possible even with a cursory glance at militant activities in the North Caucasus to see clearly that their main zones of action remain—for the second year in a row— Dagestan and Ingushetia. While Ingushetia's Sharia Jamaat (led by Emir Magas) is well ahead in terms of its level of activities, Dagestan's Sharia Jamaat (led by Emir Rasul) is in first place in terms of geographical expansion and its number of members.

The Dagestani Jamaat was established as a combat unit of the North Caucasian resistance movement by Emir Rabbani (aka Rappani Khalilov, an ethnic Lak, who was killed on September 17, 2007; see kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1197346.html). Emir Rabbani was a close confidant of both Shamil Basaev and Emir Khattab, and he was able to create a ramified jamaat structure across the entire republic.

Under the leadership of Emir Abdul-Mejid (aka Ilgar [Eldar] Malachiev, an ethnic Lezgin who was killed on September 7, 2008, during a joint operation by the Russian Federal Security Service and Azerbaijani special service; see www.gazeta.ru/news/lastnews/2008/09/08/n_1267571.shtml) the actions of the jamaat did not decrease and, on the contrary, expanded into the territory of Azerbaijan. It is even possible to conjecture about the emergence of an Azerbaijani Jamaat that is independent from the Dagestani Jamaat Shariat, even though it was created under the influence of Emir Abdul-Mejid. Thus, Emir Abdul-Mejid should be credited for drawing Azeris into the North Caucasian resistance movement. This is a particularly interesting development considering that the Azeris are mainly Shiite and their involvement under the banner of Salafi ideology will have a definite impact by stirring opposition not only to the authorities but also to the Shiite religious movement in general.

The authorities in Dagestan have reasons to be upset with militant activities in the republic, because even the official figures they cite are sometimes rather puzzling. For instance, Dagestani Interior Minister Adilgirei Magomedtagirov said on November 20 that his ministry has "registered 1,370 Wahhabis" (www.riadagestan.ru/news/2008/11/20/74046). It is not clear whether the figure refers only to exposed adherents of the Salafi movement, or accounts for the number of secret sympathizers that support those engaged in armed struggle against the authorities on the basis of common extremist ideology. At the same time, the total number of militants has been estimated as ranging between 49 and 95 members that belong to seven "criminal groups"—an apparent reference to regional jamaats (based in Makhachkala, Buinaksk, Khasavyurt and other parts of Dagestan).

At a plenary session of the conference "Problems of Counteracting National and Political Extremism of Current Importance" on November 20, Magomedtagirov suggested two methods for stopping the spread of Salafist ideology—capital punishment or life imprisonment (<http://www.rg.ru/2008/11/21/reg-jugrossii/rasstrel-anons.html>). At the same time, the president of the Republic of Dagestan, as always, is trying to attribute everything to the pernicious influence of foreign countries that are acting with the purpose of "weakening positions of Russia on the world arena and cardinaly changing its political course" (<http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=225245&cid=17>).

All of this should be understood in the context of an increasing number in Dagestan's intelligentsia who are beginning to orient themselves toward radical Islam. In their understanding, traditional Sufism has been discredited because it has become the main support base for the authorities. All high-ranking officials of the Republic of Dagestan have long become murids (disciples) of the Sufi Sheikh Said-Efendi Chirkeisky (of the Shazili Tariqat, or Sufi order), who has become, in essence, the cult Sheikh for the entire former party elite of Dagestan.

While the government is unable to deal with the magnitude of militant activity, the authorities are trying to resolve the problems through prohibitions. Stores selling Islamic religious items are closed, the use of Arabic language is severely limited and the practice of Wahhabism is prohibited by law. Such measures as nine-month-long anti-terrorist operations in the Gunib District only swell the ranks of people dissatisfied with the authorities. Sufism is increasingly becoming a policy instrument of the authorities—a fact successfully exploited by Salafi adherents in their criticism of Sufism.

While the republican Interior Minister was advocating executing Salafi sympathizers, the militants were striking blows against the republican siloviki. This was the case despite the fact that during an operation aimed at disarming militants in Makhachkala, four jamaat members were killed, including Magomed Salikhov, who was previously twice acquitted by a jury for his alleged participation in blowing up a residential building in Buinaksk in 1999. According to the official version offered by the authorities, the other slain jamaat members included Vadim Butdaev, who was described as "the head of the Makhachkala-based sabotage-terrorist group" Sharia Jamaat (<http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/newstext/news/id/1233447.html>).

These insurgent losses, however, did not decrease the intensity of hatred towards the representatives of law enforcement. For instance, on November 18, an employee of the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Dagestan, Sultan Sultanmagomedov was wounded as a result of a car bomb (www.lenta.ru/news/2008/11/18/blast). On November 19, Major Shamkhal Abdulmutalibov, an officer with the police department of the settlement of Shamkhal, was killed while on duty near the capital of republic, Makhachkala (www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/11/19/n_1297859.shtml). The following day, a police checkpoint set up in the Buinaksk District came under fire. A company commander with the Patrol-Sentry Police Service for the city of Buinaksk was killed in the attack (www.gazeta.ru/news/lenta/2008/11/20/n_1298292.shtml). On November 21, another assault took place in the heart of the city of Khasavyurt when a Russian military official from Omsk Oblast came

under attack.

On November 22, militants attacked a group of foresters near the village of Verkhnee Kazanishche in the Buinaksk District, killing two and wounding three. This is not the first attack on foresters, who often become victims of militants because they find ammunition caches or accidentally stumble into resistance fighters, who fear they may reveal their location to the authorities (<http://gzt.ru/incident/2008/11/23/223015.html>). Otherwise it is difficult to explain why two out of the six foresters were shot dead (www.kavkazweb.net/news/news.cgi?action=view&nid=01&yy=2008&mm=11&dd=23&message_id=12273984952316GkrmNY8RITVAYVrKbi). Also on November 22, Interfax reported that another assassination attempt took place when an employee of the Izberbash city police department's criminal investigation unit came under attack.

Against this backdrop of actions by militants, a news report relayed by the Turkish website Alkavkaz.com on November 22 went unnoticed. The report contained a statement by Emir Muhannad (aka Abu Anas, who is top aide to the military emir of the Caucasus mujahideen) about the appointment of a new Emir of Dagestan. According to the statement, Emir Rasul has been appointed to replace the slain Emir Abdul-Mejid in a vote taken during a special meeting.

Thus far little is known about the new Emir. What is strange is that this news was first reported by a Turkish news agency that is close to the military leadership of the Caucasian Emirate, while the main website of the Dagestani Jamaat (www.jamaatshariat.com) and the chief mouthpiece of the radicals, Kavkaz Center (<http://kavkaz.tv/russ>), have posted no comments about this announcement. The only Chechen publication that issued this piece of news was the little known Chechen Times (<http://www.chechentimes.net/content/view/2559/68>) and it mainly provided a translation of the original news report from the Turkish news agency.

The new Emir of the Dagestani Sharia Jamaat (Emir Rasul) will first have to resolve the task of preserving everything that was achieved by his predecessors because it is unlikely there will be any new strategic objectives for the jamaat leadership. The expansion of jamaat membership is well underway and there is little to worry about. It is another matter that, unlike the Chechen Jamaat, which functions in the forested and mountainous parts of Chechnya, the Dagestani Jamaat is concentrated mainly in the metropolitan areas. This is the chief difference between the two jamaats, which coordinate their actions under the unified command of Dokku Umarov.

Circassian Congress Calls for Unification of Circassian Republics in North Caucasus

Publication: North Caucasus Weekly Volume: 9 Issue: 45

November 27, 2008 01:41 AM

By: [Fatima Tilisova](#)

An extraordinary congress of Circassian people took place on Sunday, November 23, in Cherkessk, the capital of the North Caucasus republic of Karachaevo-Cherkessia. The congress date had been announced and rescheduled several times. Several days before the event, the leader of the republic's Circassians, Mukhamed Cherkesov, was summoned by the Russian president's administration for consultations and negotiations. Cherkesov declined to comment on the substance of his Kremlin meetings, stating it would be premature to do so (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-south/kar-cher/1087817.html>).

Cherkesov also told the news media about the meetings he had shortly before the congress with the administration of Karachaevo-Cherkessia's president and one of the republic's law-enforcement agencies. Cherkesov reported that after the discussion of a draft resolution to be adopted by the congress, he was told about the specific issues that could not be included in the text of the resolution and informed that failure to cooperate would result in criminal prosecution.

According to Cherkesov, an issue that had to be kept away from discussion at the congress and could not be included in the text of the resolution had to do with the proposed merger of Circassian lands to form a single Russian Federation subject. Yet, despite the warnings, it was a proposal to reunify Circassia that became the key outcome of the Circassian congress (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-south/kar-cher/1087949.html>).

The essence of the reunification project is the administrative merger of three republics and one region of the North Caucasus where Circassians are the dominant ethnic majority. Moving eastward, these include the Shapsug district of Sochi, Adygeya, Karachaevo-Cherkessia and Kabardino-Balkaria. In the latter two republics, which the Circassians share with the Turkic-speaking Karachais and Balkars, the project envisages the separation of Karachai and Balkaria from Cherkessia and their merger into a single republic.

Notably, it was the first time that this proposal, branded "Greater Circassia" during the Soviet period and usually linked to extremist and separatist movements, was openly discussed by the Circassian community in Russia (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/fd-south/kar-cher/1087196.html>).

Evidently, the older generation of the Circassian leaders planned to limit the agenda of the congress to a discussion of the problems of Circassians in Karachaevo-Cherkessia. The republic's Kremlin-appointed president, Boris Ebzeyev, has frustrated Circassians by denying them the prime minister position, which is traditionally reserved for an ethnic Circassian.

The general content of the congress' keynote address, which was delivered by former Communist party functionary Umar Temirov, was limited to internal issues faced by Circassians in Karachaevo-Cherkessia.

However, these attempts to limit the agenda of the congress were thwarted by the younger attendees. Approximately 1,500 young Circassians from a number of republics came to the congress uninvited and with no approvals granted by their elders. An independent youth forum they organized was held prior to the congress commencement.

The young attendees entered the congress hall decked out in national garb and carrying Circassian banners. Following the ancestral tradition of blowing the horn to call people to assembly in times of great danger, the youth Khasa, or council, opened the congress with the call of the horn.

After Umar Temirov's address, the floor went to Ruslan Keshev, the leader of the Circassian Congress youth movement from Nalchik. Keshev read out a resolution of the Circassian Youth Congress that called for forming a united republic of Circassia. "The proposal put forward by Circassian youth does not contradict the Russian constitution; on the contrary, it follows the strategy of regional consolidation launched by the administration of former President Putin and continued by the current president Medvedev," Keshev said. He added that "it is not acceptable to reduce the challenges faced by our people to a handful of ministerial portfolios, and we won't allow it. If Moscow does not respond, then it should be aware that we, the Circassians, can no longer put up with such a situation for our people in Russia" (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/1088089.html>).

The youth leader's address received a standing ovation.

It is difficult to predict the Kremlin's reaction to the burgeoning nationalistic sentiment of the Circassian community. Two opposite scenarios come to mind.

The first option is a traditional one. It can be expected that a wave of anti-Circassian sentiment stoked by Russia will rise up inside the republics that Circassians share with other ethnic groups. It is quite possible that the Karachai, Balkars, and Cossacks will announce their opposition to the project of unifying Circassia. In the best-case scenario, this will end with only threatening rhetoric from the different parties; in the worst-case scenario, Moscow will have to deal with a second Ingushetia. If, on this occasion, Moscow has no interest in seeing an outbreak of local inter-ethnic strife, one might see a

repeat of 1993–1994, when the Circassians, Karachais, Balkars and Cossacks reached an agreement and announced the establishment of three independent republics: the Circassian, Karachai-Balkar and Cossack republics. The Kremlin then rejected the program, but the parties' potential for negotiation has not been exhausted.

The second option that the Kremlin may consider is the actual establishment of a Circassian republic as its stronghold in the North Caucasus. The factors weighing in favor of this solution are several high-priority issues faced by the Russian government, including the upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi; the Georgia, NATO and the Black Sea issues; the Caucasus Emirate and the growing separatist trends in Dagestan and Ingushetia; and the relationships with Turkey and other Middle Eastern countries, where Circassian communities have an influence on foreign policy.

Several objective signs point to the possibility that Moscow may be inclined to consider potential concessions to the Circassians in exchange for their loyalty and support from their political elites. Diaspora sources report that the Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has had several meetings with members of the Circassian communities in Turkey, Jordan and a number of other countries. While the substance of these meetings has not been made public, soon after the meeting, an ethnic Circassian, Jambulat Khatuov, was appointed mayor of the Olympic host city Sochi. This appointment is an extraordinary step, given that the migration policy of Krasnodar Krai, which includes Sochi, has until now been aimed at limiting the presence of Circassians in the Black Sea cities as much as possible. Perhaps Moscow is hopeful that Khatuov's appointment will generate investment by Circassians in Olympic construction in Sochi, which is currently being boycotted by Turkey's construction industry because Circassians view the area as a site of the 19th century genocide.

Russian news media occasionally report that there is a group inside the Kremlin working in conjunction with leaders of Circassian communities abroad on a Circassia unification project. In particular, the Political News Agency (PNA) has written about this (see www.apn.ru/column/comments20886.htm).

If one believes that Moscow, faced with a weakening influence in the Caucasus, really wants to make the Circassians a reliable ally, not a dangerous enemy, then the idea of Circassian unification does not seem so unrealistic. At the same time, the proposal has obvious risks, for instance, the issue of control. How long will a new republic that has access to the Black Sea, kinship links with Abkhazia, a five-million strong overseas community, and an area bigger than Switzerland want to stay within Russia? It is possible that Moscow might even consider the option of a federation treaty with Circassia, which would give the Circassians relative independence while remaining loyal to Moscow? There is certainly a precedent—Chechnya and its pro-Kremlin leader Ramzan Kadyrov.