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# The 2014 Sochi Olympics

*A Patchwork of Challenges*

**AUTHOR** Sergey Markedonov

*A Report of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program*

**CSIS** | CENTER FOR STRATEGIC &  
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FOREWORD

Andrew C. Kuchins

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# Foreword

This report is dedicated to the victims and families of the tragic terrorist acts in the Southern Russian cities of Pyatigorsk and Volgograd that resulted in 37 deaths and hundreds of casualties in late December 2013, just six weeks before the opening of the Sochi Winter Olympics. While the identities of the perpetrators of these heinous acts and their motives remain murky, they fit a pattern of violence and terrorism that has afflicted the Northern Caucasus for years and present a direct threat to the safety and security of the Sochi Olympics. After fighting two wars in Chechnya from the mid-1990s to the middle of the last decade, more recently the Russian government has been waging a low-level counterinsurgency battle more widely in the North Caucasian republics, which are in very close proximity to the venue for the Winter Games. Never before has an Olympic Games been located so close to a conflict zone. The challenges for maintaining the security of the games are immense—and not just for Sochi but throughout Russia, where terrorists may choose a series of targets over time to terrorize the entire country and thus disrupt the Games.

President Vladimir Putin of Russia has placed a very large wager in attempting to hold a successful Winter Olympic Games in Sochi this year, which could affect his leadership and authority. Initially his rise to political power was boosted in 1999–2000 by the perception among the Russian populace that he dealt firmly and successfully with separatists and terrorists in the onset of the Second Chechen War. While Chechnya has been stabilized, for now, in the past five years or so violence has spread throughout the Northern Caucasus, calling into question how successful Russian counterterrorist and regional development policies have been. The CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program has documented these developments in a series of reports.<sup>1</sup> Recognizing the special challenges that the Sochi Games presented, the Program commissioned in the spring of 2013 then Visiting Scholar Sergey

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1. See Sergey Markedonov, *The Rise of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups in Russia's Volga Region* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2013); Jeffrey Mankoff, *The Big Caucasus: Between Fragmentation and Integration* (Washington, DC: CSIS, March 2012); Gordon M. Hahn, *Getting the Caucasus Emirate Right* (Washington, DC: CSIS, August 2011); Andrew C. Kuchins, Matthew Malarkey, and Sergey Markedonov, *The North Caucasus: Russia's Volatile Frontier* (Washington, DC: CSIS, March 2011); Sergey Markedonov, *Radical Islam in the North Caucasus: Evolving Threats, Challenges, and Prospects* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2010); Sarah E. Mendelson, Matthew Malarkey, and Luch Moore, *Violence in the North Caucasus: 2009, A Bloody Year* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2010); Sarah E. Mendelson, Matthew Malarkey, and Luch Moore, *Violence in the North Caucasus: Summer 2009* (Washington, DC: CSIS, August 2009); Sarah E. Mendelson, *Violence in the North Caucasus: Winter/Spring 2009* (Washington DC: CSIS, May 2009); Sarah E. Mendelson, *Violence in the North Caucasus: Fall/Winter 2008* (Washington, DC: CSIS, February 2009); Sarah E. Mendelson, *Violence in the North Caucasus: Trends Since 2004* (Washington, DC: CSIS, November 2008); and Theodore P. Gerber and Sarah E. Mendelson, *Cauldron of Terrorism or Bowl of Kasha?: What Survey Data Say About the North Caucasus* (Washington DC: CSIS, July 2006).

Markedonov, a leading international authority on security challenges in the volatile Caucasus region, to research and write a report on the topic of the Games.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for their generous support, which funded the residency of Sergey Markedonov in Washington for several years as well as the production of this report. On a more personal note, I hope that the Sochi Games will be regarded as one of the most successful Olympic efforts of all time and that all of the challenges raised in this report are successfully met.

Andrew C. Kuchins  
Director and Senior Fellow, Russia and Eurasia  
Program, CSIS  
January 10, 2014



# Introduction

On February 7, 2014, the 22nd Winter Olympic Games will open in the Russian Black Sea resort of Sochi. Because these games will be the first Olympics hosted by Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, they will be more than a mere athletic competition—they possess a singular symbolic character, important to Russia and particularly to Russian president Vladimir Putin. On the eve of the 119th session of the International Olympic Committee in Guatemala on July 4, 2007, at which the decision on the host city for the 2014 games would be made, Putin was the main Russian lobbyist for the Sochi project.

Putin considers the event to be a demonstration of the Russia's post-Soviet potential and its growing role on the international stage, as well as visible proof of his success in overcoming the political chaos that followed the dissolution of the USSR. The Sochi Winter Olympics have also been interpreted by some as an integral part of Putin's return to the presidency—an attempt to secure domestic support and prestige. According to the Russian leader, if Russia “failed to restore the territorial integrity of the country and stop the confrontation in the Caucasus in the form in which it was five to seven years ago, and was unsuccessful in resolving a variety of social and economic issues,” it would not be possible to hold an Olympic Games on Russian territory.<sup>1</sup>

The choice of host city for these Olympics nevertheless creates a number of challenges for Russia. Sochi is a popular resort that has long held the informal status of the “summer capital” of Russia; its beaches and parks are favored vacationing spots for the country's political elite. The Sochi area is one of the few places in the Russian Federation where snow is a rarity even in winter, so it is paradoxical that it was chosen as the venue for the premier global winter sports competition. The Sochi Games will be the first Winter Games in the history of the Olympics to be held in a subtropical climate.

According to Vladimir Putin's official estimates, the cost for holding the “white Olympics” will 214 billion rubles (US\$6.5 billion). 100 billion rubles (about \$3.3 billion) will come from the state budget, while 114 billion rubles (about \$3.45 billion) will come from private investments.<sup>2</sup> However, an alternative estimate in June 2013 was approximately \$50

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1. “Desyat' podvigov Vladimira Putina” [Ten feats of Vladimir Putin], October 7, 2012, <http://top.rbc.ru/politics/07/10/2012/673050.shtml>.

2. “Prezident Rossii: Interviyu Pervomy Kanalu I Agentstvu Associated Press” [President of Russia: Interview with the First Channel and Associated Press Agency], September, 4, 2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/19143>. It seems this figure concerns the value of Olympic objects, not the whole preparation process, because Vladimir Putin specially stressed that Russia expended extra money for the infrastructure of the South of Russia and Sochi first and foremost.

## Map 1. The Northern Caucasus



Source: [http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-hQXXGM65FKs/URF\\_hSel2rI/AAAAAAAAAFwg/nG8yUybIw5s/s1600/800px-North\\_Caucasus\\_regions\\_map.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-hQXXGM65FKs/URF_hSel2rI/AAAAAAAAAFwg/nG8yUybIw5s/s1600/800px-North_Caucasus_regions_map.jpg).

billion. This figure would be the highest ever—in terms not only of the history of the Winter Games in modern times, but also in terms of the cost overruns compared to the initial budget (which stood at \$12 billion).<sup>3</sup>

Climate and costs aside, holding the Games in Sochi presents a number of more difficult challenges. The Sochi area is the focal point of several thorny issues with geopolitical and security implications, and there will also be many difficulties related to the environment, transportation, housing, and public services.

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3. “Dorogoye udovol’sstvie: skol’ko stoit Olimpiada v Sochi” [The expensive pleasure: How much does the Sochi Olympics cost?], June 17, 2013, <http://www.ski.ru/az/blogs/post/dorogoe-udovolstvie-skolko-stoit-olimpiada-v-sochi>. The figure of \$12 billion was announced by Putin at the International Olympic Committee session in Guatemala (2007).

# Olympic Capital in a Turbulent Environment: Security Challenges

In 1972 the Summer Olympics in Munich were shattered by the murder of eleven Israeli athletes by Black September, a Palestinian group. The Games were used as an arena through which to draw attention to the conflict in the Middle East and the national demands of the Palestinians. Since that time, the organization and planning of each Olympics has incorporated serious security preparations.

Compared with other cities that have recently hosted the Olympic Games, such as Beijing, London, and Vancouver, Sochi is much more vulnerable from a security perspective. It lies approximately 100 kilometers from Karachay-Cherkessia and less than 200 kilometers from Kabardino-Balkaria, where political violence claimed 156 lives last year.

The Greater Sochi (Bol'shoy Sochi) area (which includes other resort areas, such as Loo, Lazarevskoye, and Adler) borders, across the river Psou, the partially recognized Republic of Abkhazia.<sup>4</sup> The Russian Federation views this as an interstate border with Abkhazia, but Georgia and the vast majority of UN member states, who do not recognize Abkhazia's independence, consider it part of the border between Russia and Georgia.<sup>5</sup>

In recent years the number of terrorist acts across the North Caucasus has been reduced. The most impressive example is Ingushetia, where in 2011 the number of victims of acts of terrorism and sabotage dropped to 108 killed and wounded, compared with 326 in 2010. Even in Dagestan, which has had the highest rate since 2005, there was a 15 percent decrease from 2011 to 2012. The North Caucasus remains the most unstable and unpredictable area of the Russian Federation. In 2012, 700 people were reported killed and 525 injured as the result of political violence.<sup>6</sup> In the first quarter of 2013, 124 people were

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4. The length of the municipality of the Greater Sochi area is 105 kilometers. However, the land route across it is about 140 kilometers, following the highways that have been built along the Black Sea coastline.

5. A number of countries (the United States, Lithuania, and Romania), as well as some international organizations (NATO, the European Parliament, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly), consider Abkhazia to be a territory occupied by Russia. In Georgia, a special law on this issue called the law "on occupied territories" was adopted.

6. "V hode vooruzhennogo konflikta na Severnom Kavkaze v 2012 godu pogiblo b bylo raneno 1225 chelovek" [1,225 people killed and injured in 2012 as a result of armed conflict in the Caucasus], January 21, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/218940>.

killed and 75 injured; in the second quarter, 118 were killed and 178 injured; and in the third quarter, 133 were killed and 90 injured.<sup>7</sup> However, the North Caucasus brings instability outside the region itself. In late 2013, a series of terrorist attacks took place in Volgograd in southern Russia. A suicide bombing of a city bus (October 21) killed 8 people and injured 37. An explosion at the railway station (December 29) killed 18 people and injured 45. And an explosion on a city trolley (December 30) killed 16 people and injured 25.

The social and economic malaise of the North Caucasus has exacerbated the threat of terrorism and extremism. The North Caucasus Federal District (an administrative entity encompassing Stavropol Krai and the Republics of Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, and Karachay-Cherkessia) is plagued by chronic unemployment. Its overall unemployment rate of 14.6 percent in 2012 was the highest of any Federal District in Russia. According to the Russian Ministry of Labor, unemployment in Chechnya was close to 32 percent in 2012, although it had declined slightly from previous estimates. Unemployment was even higher in Ingushetia, at 48.6 percent.<sup>8</sup> This data refers only to those who have officially registered as unemployed; according to unofficial reports, 70 to 80 percent of all young people (defined as people under 30) in the North Caucasus have no permanent employment. This is the result of the ongoing economic crisis in the region and the low levels of education and training.

Salaries are also much lower in the North Caucasus Federal District—less than half of the national average in Dagestan.<sup>9</sup> The only exception is in Chechnya, where the average salary has exceeded the region-wide rate every year since 2007. This is almost certainly due to the massive amount of money that has been pumped into the formerly restive republic by the federal government in an effort to revive the economy in the wake of two Chechen wars.

The economic development indicators of the North Caucasus are the lowest in Russia, except in the cases of a select few agricultural products and industries. The former giants of heavy industry have either closed (including Tyrnyauz Mining in Kabardino-Balkaria) or are struggling to survive and facing drastically reduced production levels (such as Electro-zinc in North Ossetia or the Dagdizel' plant in Kaspiysk, Dagestan, which produces military industrial supplies). It is strikingly symbolic that in October 2010 the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB) and the forces of the Russian Interior Ministry carried out an operation to eliminate a group of militants entrenched in one of the Tyrnyauz's abandoned mines. Data on the oil industry in Chechnya is almost wholly unavailable

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7. "Zhertvami vooruzhennogo konflikta na Severnom Kavkaze v tret'em kvartale 2013 goda stali 223 cheloveka" [222 people became victims of the armed conflict in the North Caucasus during the third quarter of 2013], October 15, 2013, <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/231743/>.

8. "V 2012 godu v Chechne nabludalos' snizheniye urovnya bezrobotitsy" [In 2012 the unemployment rate in Chechnya decreased], January 11, 2013, <http://chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=12197>. Official unemployment in Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, and North Ossetia is much lower (12 percent, 7.7 percent, 3.4 percent, and 2.5 percent, respectively).

9. "V Dagestane srednyaya zarplata v dva raza men'she obscherosiskoi" [In Dagestan the average salary rate is in two times less than the All-Russian one], April 18, 2012, <http://kavkasia.net/Russia/2012/1334749501.php>.

or unknown, and critical transport infrastructure to the region is less well developed than in central Russia. At the same time, approximately 30 percent of the population is involved in the illegal shadow sector of the economy in the North Caucasus (alcohol production, smuggling, and poaching). Rates of participation in the shadow economy are especially high in North Ossetia (80 percent), Ingushetia (87 percent), and Dagestan (75 percent).<sup>10</sup>

These economic difficulties exacerbate an already volatile security environment. The Dagestan Vilayet (“front” or “organization”), also known as Jamaat Shariat, is one of the strongest militant groups in the North Caucasus and has been responsible for many high-profile terrorist acts, including a bombing during a military parade in 2002, the murder of a police official in Dagestan in 2005, and the death of the head of the Dagestan Interior Ministry in June 2009. It is considered to be a part of the Caucasus Emirate (CE), which is led by Doku Umarov, a self-styled jihadi of Chechen origin who leads a movement that has replaced the national separatist and Sufi-oriented Chechen Republic of Ichkeriya (ChRI) project with efforts to create an Islamic state across the North Caucasus.<sup>11</sup>

CE has worked to expand its activities and state-building efforts across Russia, utilizing concentrated Muslim populations in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and elsewhere as platforms for further expansion. Umarov has announced his readiness to “liberate” not just the nearby Krasnodar Krai but also the Astrakhan and Volga territories from the “occupation of the Russian kafirs [infidels].”<sup>12</sup> Doku Umarov has claimed responsibility for a number of significant terrorist acts outside the North Caucasus as well. These include the attack on the Domodedovo airport (2011, 36 killed), the explosions in the Moscow metro stations (2010, 39 killed), and the Nevsky Express railroad bombing (2009, 26 killed). Although Umarov portrays himself as the head of shadow state that follows his orders and statements to the letter, the CE is a network of different subgroups and therefore does not operate hierarchically. Subgroups often change their names (fronts, vilaiyats, or welayats) and leaders. In support of Islamist supra-ethnic ideas, the different groups of the CE tend to wage their own wars within existing inter-republican borders. The Caucasus Emirate tries to play the role of an umbrella structure uniting different cells through a common ideology based on jihadist principles.

In February 2012 Umarov proclaimed a moratorium on terrorist activity against civilians. Two years before he had argued in favor of such attacks. His about-face seems designed to take advantage of U.S. and European criticism of Russia’s authoritarian response

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10. All data concerning the socioeconomic developments of the North Caucasus are from Sergey Gasanov, “Sotsialno-ekonomicheskie determinanty prestupnosti na Severnom Kavkaze” [Socioeconomic determinants of crime in the North Caucasus], Institute for Social and Educational Management, Moscow, 2012, p. 34.

11. The Chechen Republic of Ichkeria was an unrecognized state that was de facto independent from Russia in 1991–1994 and in 1996–1999. During the period of antiseparatist campaigns in Chechnya, it transformed into a terrorist structure based on nationalist and separatist principles. Since the late 1990s it has experienced the growing influence of radical Islamist ideology and moved away from the original purpose of creating an ethnonational Chechen state beyond the framework of the Russian Federation.

12. For a more detailed discussion, see Sergey Markedonov, *The Rise of Radical and Nonofficial Islamic Groups in Russia’s Volga Region* (Washington, DC: CSIS, January 2013), [http://csis.org/files/publication/130122\\_Markedonov\\_RiseRadicalIslamicVolga\\_Web.pdf](http://csis.org/files/publication/130122_Markedonov_RiseRadicalIslamicVolga_Web.pdf).

and to play up his credentials as a “freedom fighter” akin to the rebels in Syria who received political and moral support from the West. Moreover, Umarov specifically announced that the CE had nothing to do with Boston bombing of April 15, 2013.<sup>13</sup>

However, the Boston attack raised the question of possible connections between the suspected terrorists (Tamerlan and Jokhar Tsarnaev), who were of Chechen-Avar origin, and the terrorist underground in the North Caucasus.<sup>14</sup> It is still unclear whether anyone associated with the Caucasus Emirate recruited Tamerlan Tsarnaev or assisted him and his younger brother in carrying out the attack. What is known, however, is that Tamerlan traveled to the North Caucasus during a seven-month period beginning in January 2012 and was considering or seeking membership in the jihadists’ ranks. It is also certain that jihadist ideas influenced the Tsarnaevs via the Internet, as well as through personal and family ties.<sup>15</sup>

Despite Umarov’s 2012 “moratorium” on attacks against civilians, terrorist acts continued, though they decreased in number in comparison with 2010 and 2011. A total of 22 civilians, including Boris Zherukov, Rector of the Agricultural Institute, and Kazbek Gekkiyev, a journalist (both were from Kabardino-Balkaria), were killed in the last three months of 2012.<sup>16</sup> Umarov never publicly criticized these attacks or their organizers.

In recent years the Caucasus Emirate has attempted to establish a presence in Abkhazia to be closer to the site of the upcoming Olympics. The assassination of the Russian diplomat Dmitry Vishernev in Sukhumi in September 2013 could be traced to the CE, the Russian Investigative Committee stated. Prime suspect Yusup Lakayev, an ethnic Chechen, was already on the list of persons who pose a threat to the Sochi Winter Olympics.<sup>17</sup>

Radical Islam has not taken deep roots in Abkhazia. According to opinion polls, only 16 percent of the population considers themselves to be Muslims. Most of the Abkhaz Muslims have nothing to do with terrorism or religious extremism.<sup>18</sup> However, in May 2011 Russian border guards in Abkhazia found three caches of terrorist equipment, including explosives, weapons, and food (one of the caches was in the ruined fortress Abaata in the city of Gagra). In February 2012 a similar cache was found in the Gulripsh area (in the eastern

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13. “Boeviki Severnogo Kavkaza zayavili, chto ne prichastny k teraktam v Bostone” [The North Caucasus militants stated they had nothing to do with Boston bombing], April 22, 2013, <http://korrespondent.net/world/1550703-boeviki-severnogo-kavkaza-zayavili-chto-ne-prichastny-k-teraktu-v-bostone>.

14. Even before the Boston tragedy, Umarov and the CE were designated as terrorist figures/organizations by the U.S. government. See “Designation of Caucasus Emirates Leader Doku Umarov,” press statement, U. S. Department of State, June 23, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2010/06/143579.htm>.

15. “Dagestanskii sled Tamerlana Tsarnayeva” [The Dagestan trace of Tamerlan Tsarnaev], April 22, 2013, [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y31Vn1\\_76g4](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y31Vn1_76g4).

16. “Formal’nyi lider global’nogo Jihada” [The formal leader of the global Jihad], July 8, 2013, <http://www.caucasustimes.com/article.asp?id=21158>.

17. “Ubiystvo Dmitriya Visherneva zakazalo severokavkazkoye podpol’ye” [The assassination of Dmitry Vishernev was ordered by the North Caucasus underground], September 20, 2013, <http://www.informpskov.ru/news/125155.html>.

18. “Musulmanskaya obschina Abkazii v ozhidanii novogo Muftiya” [The Abkhaz Muslim community expecting new Mufti], July 25, 2011, <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-72402.html>.

part of Abkhazia). On May 4–5, 2012, the FSB, with the support of the State Security Service of Abkhazia, arrested members of the Caucasus Emirate on suspicion of involvement in the preparation of terrorist attacks in Sochi, and two weeks later six caches of terrorist supplies were uncovered. All of these planned attacks were unsuccessful due to extremely limited public support in the unrecognized republic. According to an Abkhazian official in the presidential administration, the Abkhazian population includes individual adherents of radical Islam, but there are no influential groups that share the views of jihadists like CE.<sup>19</sup> Only 20 people identified themselves as members of the Jamaat Abkhazia (one of the CE's cells) and the structure was liquidated in 2011–2012. In Abkhazia today there are few supporters of official and state-sponsored Islam, and the most common visitors to the mosque in Sukhumi/Sukhum (the capital city of Abkhazia) are seasonal workers from Central Asian republics engaged in restoration projects. Nevertheless, a number of terrorist incidents have occurred in recent years, including the murder of representatives of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Abkhazia in 2007, when Imam Khamzat Gitsba was killed, and in 2010 when Emik Chakmach-ogly, a representative of the Muslim Spiritual board in the Gagra District and a member of the Abkhaz Public Chamber, was assassinated.<sup>20</sup>

In July 2013 Doku Umarov in a video statement called upon his supporters from the North Caucasus and the Volga-Ural region to disrupt the upcoming Sochi Olympics. He publicly renounced his previous moratorium on attacks against civilians and called for the start of a new phase in the “sacred fight” for the liberation of the Caucasus region and of Muslims across Russia. However, his call to destabilize Sochi and the Olympics does not appear to be a clear propaganda move, even taking into account the unprecedented security measures put into place by the Russian authorities to secure the Games. The appeals of the CE are primarily aimed toward, not established extremists, but the frustrated populace in the North Caucasus who are facing a lack of integration, social and economic difficulties, and bureaucratic pressures. For this specific audience to become influenced by radical ideas and acquire the knowledge necessary to carry out a terrorist attack, all they need is access to a personal computer, the Internet, and social media networks. For a budding terrorist, this path is much less dangerous than trips to Afghan, Pakistani, or local training camps. This less direct, and less easily detectable, path to radical extremism makes the upcoming Olympics, in close proximity to the turbulent North Caucasus, vulnerable in terms of security.

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19. Interview by the author, July 2012.

20. Tamila Shakhbanova, “Abkhazia v setyuah boevikov and spetsluzhb” [Abkhazia in the networks of militants and special services], May 12, 2012, <http://kavkaz.ge/2012/05/12/abxaziya-v-setyax-specsluzhb-i-boevikov>.

# The Russian Security Response

Facing major security risks and potential threats, the Russian government is putting in place serious security measures in the lead-up to the Games. Any act of terrorism in Sochi or near the Olympics Games sites would undermine the political credibility of Russian president Vladimir Putin, jeopardize the symbolic affirmation of the Russian foreign policy goal to restore the country's international influence, and raise difficult questions about Moscow's ability to control the North Caucasus. Any security breakdown at the games in Sochi, or a repeat of a scenario like that in Munich in 1972 or the bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics, would be a blow to Russia's reputation. To prevent such an outcome, the Kremlin has put into place unprecedented security measures.

As of June 2013, \$2.5 billion have been allocated for security at the Olympic venues and the areas surrounding Sochi.<sup>21</sup> The Russian Interior Ministry plans to create a so-called security cordon that will include more than 100 kilometers of coastline in the Greater Sochi area (the total area is defined by the Magri settlement in the West to the peak of Kardyvach Uzlovoy on the East and the Kashin Mount in the North to the Imereti Basin in the South) at an inland depth of approximately 40 kilometers. The ski competitions will be held in an open area in Krasnaya Polyana, 39 kilometers from the center of Sochi.

In December 2007, the federal law "On the Organization and Realization of the Olympic and Paralympic Games" was adopted. It declared the period from July 5, 2007, through December 31, 2015, the "period of the organization of the Games." Article 10 of the law specifically concerns security measures. It specifies restrictions and limitations on entry to the territory of the Games, on visitors' length of stay, and all modes of transport, including private or state-owned vehicles, seafaring craft, and aircraft. This law also proposes a suspension of all manufacturing activities that come under suspicion (especially the manufacture of chemical, biological, and radioactive products) and restrictions on the sale of drugs and toxic substances (such as arsenic and snake and bee venoms), traditional alcohol, and methyl, ethyl, technical, and edible alcohols unsuitable for the production of alcoholic beverages.

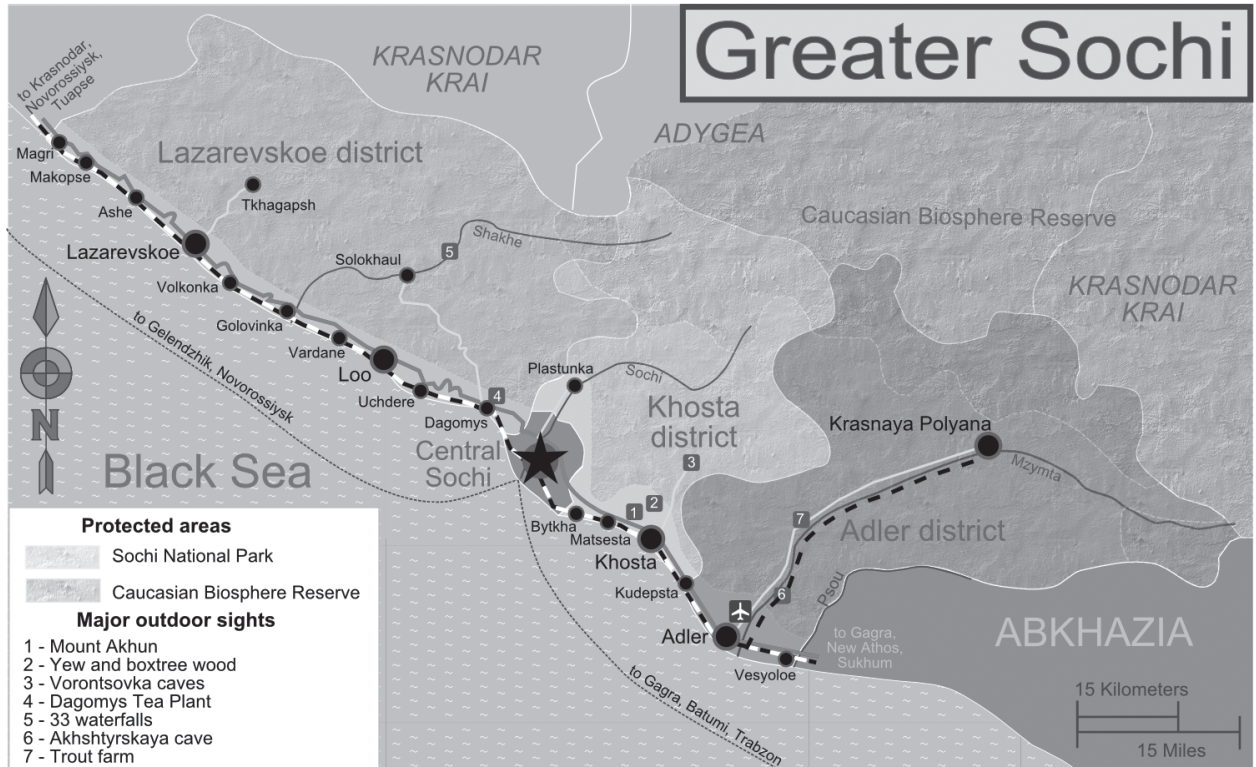
This legislation also gives the government wide-ranging authority to create supervised and prohibited zones, strengthen security measures, and restrict access around the Games. It is possible that additional security measures will be implemented on the river Psou (the de facto border of Russia with Abkhazia) on the eve of the Games. Abkhazians fear that the

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21. The full text of the law is available at <http://www.rg.ru/2007/12/05/sochi-dok.html>.



## Map 2. Greater Sochi



Source: [http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/6/60/Greater\\_Sochi\\_map.png](http://wikitravel.org/upload/shared/6/60/Greater_Sochi_map.png).

complete or partial closure of the border could potentially harm local small and medium-size businesses. In the Greater Sochi area, the 2013–2014 school year started in late August, rather than on September 1 per usual, in order to save “the Olympic time” for the winter break.

During the Olympics, flights will be restricted over the Greater Sochi area and over more than half of the Krasnodar Krai (approximately 104 square kilometers), as well as over the Stavropol Krai and the Karachay-Cherkessia Republic. In comparison with the London Games, during which these “Olympic limits” were in place for only one month, the flight restrictions in Sochi will be in effect for more than three months (from January 7, 2014—one month before the opening ceremony—through April 16, 2014). All flights not covered by the “Olympic schedule” will need to be specially approved by the head of the operative staff for the security of the Games.<sup>22</sup>

To provide extra security, the organizers plan to make use of a wide arsenal of technical tools. The Russian Interior Ministry will spend 320 million rubles (approximately US\$10.3 million) to purchase high-speed boats, all-terrain vehicles, diving posts, and observation equipment to protect seaports. Thermal imaging capabilities that can record the motions of large and small vessels, including even rubber boats, have been installed in

22. Alexandra Ermakova, “V Sochi-2014 ogranichat prodazhu spirta I polity” [In Sochi 2014 alcohol sales and flights will be restricted], August 3, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/532065>.

the seaport at Sochi. In addition, the Interior Ministry intends to use special water cannons (at a cost of 24 million rubles or \$770,000) to deal with combat swimmers. Surveillance cameras have been installed as part of the construction of all the Olympic facilities, and the skies are being patrolled by unmanned craft.<sup>23</sup> Public order will be maintained by 70,000 police officers on duty throughout the city.

In addition to the Interior Ministry, the FSB, the Ministry of Defense (including the Russian Black Sea Fleet and its military bases on the territory of Abkhazia), and the Ministry on Emergency Situations will be engaged in ensuring the security of the games. In the words of Yuri Deshevych, director of the Oversight Department of the Russian Ministry of Emergency Situations, “A special group is being set up for the Olympics and the Paralympics. It will include about 1,500 rescue workers and firefighters and around 100 vehicles, including four helicopters and five ships. This work will be provided by 16 fire and rescue centers, of which 12 are already in operation, with four more to be built. All units are equipped with the latest technology. For example, the 35th Fire Division will be armed with rapid-response ATVs, plus a unique fire engine with 10 tons of water and 2 tons of foam.”<sup>24</sup> Experts who were involved in the security arrangements during the APEC summit in Vladivostok and the Universiade in Kazan have been invited as trainers and instructors for the Sochi Olympic project.

Despite the controversies between Moscow and the United States, the United Kingdom, and their European partners, Russian special services are cooperating with their colleagues from the West. Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister David Cameron of Britain agreed on such cooperation in May 2013 during their official visits to London and Moscow (2012 and 2013).<sup>25</sup> U.S. president Barack Obama and Putin said in a June 2013 joint statement that their shared interest is to oppose terrorist threats and to ensure the security of the Sochi Games.<sup>26</sup> On November 2013, Matthew Olsen, director of the U.S. National Counterterrorism Center, after his visit to Sochi said that U.S. and Russian intelligence agencies had seriously improved cooperation since the Boston Marathon bombing, including on the security preparations for the Games.<sup>27</sup>

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23. Roman Vetrov, “Olympiadu v Sochi zashityat stokilometrovym bar’erom” [Sochi Olympics will be protected by 100-km barrier], September 17, 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/535251>.

24. Timur Ganeev, “Sochi 2014: Police to boost security,” May 30, 2013, [http://rbth.ru/arts/sport/2013/05/30/security\\_at\\_sochi\\_2014\\_promises\\_no\\_repeat\\_of\\_boston\\_26553.html](http://rbth.ru/arts/sport/2013/05/30/security_at_sochi_2014_promises_no_repeat_of_boston_26553.html).

25. “V Sochi prinialu resheniye o vzaimodeystvii spetssluzhb Rossii i Velikobritanii” [Russia and Great Britain agreed on special services cooperation in Sochi], May 11, 2013, <http://vesti-sochi.tv/politika/16893-v-sochi-prinjali-reshenie-o-vzaimodeystvii-specsluzhb-rossii-i-velikobritanii>.

26. “Obama poobeschal pomoch obespechit bezopasnost Olympiady v Sochi” [Obama promised to ensure security of the Sochi Olympics], June 18, 2013, <http://lenta.ru/news/2013/06/18/summit>.

27. Timothy M. Phelps, “Officials say terrorist threat on U.S. soil is declining,” November 14, 2013, <http://www.latimes.com/world/worldnow/la-fg-wn-us-terrorist-threat-declines-20131114,0,2603061.story#axzz2nBmhF2IP>.

# Ethno-Political Challenges: The “Circassian Question”

The choice of Sochi as the host city of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games has also brought to the forefront many issues related to the ethno-political situation in and around the North Caucasus, ranging from the conflicts in the South Caucasus (primarily the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict) to the “Circassian issue.”

Sochi lies at the center of a complex set of problems of historical memory, national identity, and ethnic mobilization. The Circassian issue has become increasingly prominent as the Sochi Games approach. The Circassian peoples, who once lived in concentrated populations in the Caucasus, now live in Circassian diaspora communities scattered across the globe. The various Circassian subgroups (many of which have retained their identity as it was defined in Soviet times) are the “titular ethnic groups” in the Russian North Caucasus republics of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia.

Who exactly is a Circassian? Unsurprisingly, the answer is contested. Using Soviet ethnographic criteria, the broader Circassian community includes the Shapsugs in the Krasnodar Krai (according to the 2010 census they number 3,882, but many experts estimate closer to 10,000); the Adyghe in Adygea (about 108,000); the Kabardins (about 520,000 in Russia, including roughly 490,000 in Kabardino-Balkaria, where they are around 57 percent of the population); the Cherkess (about 73,000 in Russia, including 46,500 in Karachay-Cherkessia); and the Abazins (almost 43,000 in Russia, including 37,000 in Karachay-Cherkessia). However, experts and politicians argue over the identity of the Abazins, as this ethnic group is very closely related to the Abkhazians in terms of language and culture.<sup>28</sup> The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) estimates that there are as many as 3.7 million “ethnic Circassians” in the diaspora outside the Circassian republics (meaning that only one in seven “ethnic Circassians” lives in their ethnic homeland). Of that population, about 2 million live in Turkey, 700,000 in the Russian Federation, 150,000 in the Middle East, and 50,000 in Europe and the United States.<sup>29</sup> If the common exonym for the Adyghe people—*Circassians*—is used to describe their numerous ethnic groups, then Russia hosts the second largest Circassian population after Turkey. However, unlike Turkey (where non-Turkic ethnic identity was banned for years and is now welcome

28. “O Rossii yazykom tsifr: Itogi perepisi naseleniya” [In the language of figures: The results of the Population Census], December 16, 2009, <http://www.perepis-2010.ru/faq/chapter-5.php>.

29. “Northern Caucasian People,” *Cradle of Civilization* (blog), March 19, 2013, <http://aratta.wordpress.com/2013/03/19/northwest-caucasian-people/>.

only at the cultural, rather than the political, level), there are three ethnic autonomous areas populated by Circassians in Russia. Most of these diaspora Circassians are descended from families expelled during and after the Russian conquest of the North Caucasus in the 1860s and 1870s.

Sochi holds a special historical significance in Circassian historical memory. The Majlis (the Circassian proto-Parliament) was founded in Sochi in 1861, as part of an attempt to unite the various Circassian tribes in order to establish their own state and prevent the Russian Empire from invading the Western Caucasus. On May 21, 1864, Russian troops crushed the last bastion of Circassian resistance at Kbaada (now Krasnaya Polyana, part of the Greater Sochi area) during the Caucasian War. Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolayevich, the fourth son of the Russian emperor Nicholas I, presided over a military parade of Russian troops through that territory, marking a great victory for the Russian army after years of bloody conflict. It also culminated in the expulsion of most of the Circassian people to Ottoman territories. The demographic losses suffered by the Circassians as a result of the war, and the diseases and forced expulsion that came with it, were immense. Some historians and activists have termed the expulsion of Circassians an act of genocide. The emotional resonance of choosing Sochi as the site of the upcoming Olympics has provoked public discussion on this issue among Circassian activists, historians, and policymakers.

The first wave of modern Circassian nationalism in Russia appeared in the early 1990s during the Yeltsin period. Within a few years it had gained a fair amount of currency in the popular imagination, and it became an important factor in the struggle for power in the North Caucasus. Circassian movements also showed their potential in the early 1990s, when they took the side of Abkhazians, a closely related ethnic group, in their war against Georgia. About 2,500 Circassian volunteers fought in Abkhazia over the fourteen months of armed conflict in 1992–1993. During the war (and later, in 2005–2007), a Kabardian, Sultan Sosnaliev, was the chief of staff and then minister of defense of Abkhazia. A Kabardian force led by Muayed Shorov assaulted and took the building of the Abkhazian Council of Ministers, the seat of a pro-Georgian administration. However, in those years the Circassian issue did not impact relations between the federal center and the regions. As Zeynel Abidin Besleney wrote, by the mid-1990s “former local bureaucratic elites, who by then had already adapted to post-Soviet conditions and firmly restored themselves to positions of power, absorbed these nationalist movements into the establishment.”<sup>30</sup> The local intelligentsia played a role in this process. However, the alliance of the nomenklatura, new business, and the intelligentsia failed to formulate a common Circassian agenda. The fact that Circassians faced very different circumstances in the various republics in the north-western part of the Caucasus proved a further impediment.

However, Moscow had overplayed its hand. When it attempted to merge Adygea and the Krasnodar Krai in 2005, the move provoked heated debates about the Circassian historical past. Some Circassian movements launched a campaign for the recognition of the

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30. Zeynel Abidin Besleney, “Circassian Nationalism and the Internet,” May 21, 2010, <http://www.opendemocracy.net/od-russia/zeynel-abidin-besleney/circassian-nationalism-and-internet>.

Circassian genocide of 1864—which Moscow basically ignored. In 2006, after a long delay, the State Duma responded that there were no Circassians among the peoples that suffered during the Nazi occupation, so there can be no talk of “genocide.” The Kremlin forgets to mention the important fact that in 1994 (130 years after end of the Caucasian War) President Boris Yeltsin apologized for the excessive force used by the Russian Empire.

Nevertheless, in the context of the upcoming Olympics, many representatives of the Circassian intelligentsia were outraged that, during a July 2007 presentation of the Sochi program in Guatemala, President Putin made no mention of the Circassians while listing the former inhabitants of Sochi (he did mention the Greeks, Colchis, and Cossacks). Moreover, for the Olympics in Vancouver, the Russian National Olympic Committee sent the Kuban Cossack Choir as the cultural representatives of Krasnodar Krai, despite the fact that the relationship between the Circassians and the Cossacks has been historically difficult.

In May 2011, Georgia officially recognized the “genocide of Circassians,” adding an international dimension to this problem.<sup>31</sup> Repatriation for the Circassian people has also become an important issue during the recent conflict in Syria, a country that is home to 30,000 to 120,000 Circassians who migrated there after 1864. Especially since the latter part of 2011, Syrian Circassians have been actively petitioning the Russian government for the right to return to their historical homeland.

The response given to the Circassian petitioners by Alexander Zhuravskiy, director of the Department of Interethnic Relations at the Russian Ministry of Regional Development, is quite telling in this regard. While he denied the right of Syrian Circassians to be repatriated because “they are descended from families of Circassian peoples of the North Caucasus that did not adopt the Russian citizenship and made a voluntary choice to leave the region after the end of hostilities in the Caucasus War (1817–1864),” he also stated that “the issue of inclusion of Syrian Circassians in the category of ‘compatriots abroad’ requires a comprehensive study with the participation of the Russian Foreign Ministry and the Federal Migration Service of Russia.”<sup>32</sup>

The demands issued by the Circassian movement are nonviolent and highly diversified, and they have not yet coalesced into a coherent ideological platform. Various organizations treat the “Circassian question” rather differently. Organizations in Karachay-Cherkessia pay special attention to underrepresentation in the republican government, whereas previously they have promoted autonomous status for the Circassians within Stavropol Krai (in the Soviet period Karachay-Cherkessia had been an autonomous entity of the Stavropol Krai, and it was granted the status of a separate republic of Russia in 1990–1991). In Kabardino-Balkaria, land and issues of self-governance are the focal points for

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31. For a more detailed discussion, see Sergey Markedonov, “History as a Weapon: The Circassian Issue Standing between Russia and Georgia,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 5 (September 2011), <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/History-as-a-Weapon-15335>.

32. Murat Gukhemukhov, “Otkaz v repatriatsii istoricheski obosnovali” [The refusal to repatriate was historically justified], January 19, 2013, [www.ekhhokavkaza.com/content/article/24877704.html](http://www.ekhhokavkaza.com/content/article/24877704.html).

Circassian groups, whereas in Adygeya (where the “titular” ethnic group is in the minority) issues concerning repatriation are often discussed.

Most of the Circassian organizations in Russia—including the Council of Elders of the Circassian people (Karachay-Cherkessia), the International Circassian Association, and “Adyghe Khase” in Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia—support holding the Olympic Games in Sochi. They have called for the use of Circassian components in the design, symbolism, and cultural program of the Games, however.

The representatives of governmental power structures in the “Circassian” subjects of the Russian Federation either ignore the Circassian problem or drastically underestimate its importance. The most striking example is the former head of Kabardino-Balkaria (2005-2013), Arsen Kanokov (an ethnic Kabardian, that is, Circassian), who has stated that the issue of alleged genocide of Circassians is “far-fetched” and “promoted by three or four persons.”<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, three organizations—the “Circassian Congresses” of Adygea, Kabardino-Balkaria, and Karachay-Cherkessia—have opposed holding the Sochi Games. They stress that the Olympics will overshadow the demographic and cultural catastrophe that took place in the nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> They insist that the “Circassian genocide” be recognized, that the descendants of those Circassian peoples who were expelled from the North Caucasus be allowed to return to their historic homelands, and that they be compensated for the crimes of the past. Activists from the aforementioned groups were engaged in the preparation of the Georgian parliament’s decision to recognize this alleged genocide. The move was supported by activists within the Circassian diaspora around the world, as well as several well-known American and European political scientists, historians, journalists, and analysts. These include Walter Richmond, Fatima Tlisova, Norman Stone, Paul Goble, Glenn Howard, and the Jamestown Foundation, all of whom took part in a series of conferences in Tbilisi in 2010–2011 on the “hidden genocide” of Circassians.

In this regard it is worth noting the criticism leveled by a number of Turkish Circassian activists against the “Georgiaphile” behavior of their North Caucasus and diaspora associates. Turkish journalist and Circassian activist Fehim Tastekin describes the reaction of the Circassian community in Kayseri (the largest center of the Circassian diaspora in Turkey) to the announcement of Georgia’s recognition of the “Circassian genocide.” Instead of “breaking the house down,” the announcement was met with “deep silence,” he wrote. The audience realized that Tbilisi has its own strategic priorities and is by no means seeking to support the Circassians. “According to the common belief [among Circassians in Turkey—S.M.], Georgia’s only aim is to isolate Abkhazia and South Ossetia, retake control of these two countries, now recognized by Russia, and continue plotting against Russia,”

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33. Naima Neflyasheva and Alexey Malashenko, “Cherkesskiy vopros i Olimpiada v Sochi” [The Circassian question and Sochi Olympics], March 3, 2011, <http://carnegie.ru/events/?fa=3244>.

34. Ibid.

Tastekin wrote. “In short, Georgia is opening itself to the North Caucasus with a policy aimed at provoking ‘anti-Russian’ sentiments with the help of the U.S., while the ‘independence’ demands of native peoples in many parts of the Caucasus are increasing. However, history tells us that this tactic is not sufficient for uniting the peoples in the region and for snatching the Caucasus from the jaws of Russia. Moreover, it is not convincing for Tbilisi to talk about the unity of the Caucasus without changing its offensive policies toward Abkhazia and South Ossetia.”<sup>35</sup> This skeptical position, widespread in the Circassian diaspora circles, suggests that there will not be much Circassian opposition to the Sochi Games. It has reduced the challenges for the Russian state preparations for the Games.

Despite the serious difficulties facing a repatriation policy, especially considering that Moscow views repatriation as a threat to the existing ethnic and ethno-political balance in the region, the Russian government and local authorities have made some successful steps in this direction. Russia has also had some past success with repatriation—including the migration and subsequent assimilation into the Republic of Adygea of Circassian families from Kosovo at the end of the 1990s. On July 24, 2010, then-president Dmitry Medvedev signed a new version of a law on “Compatriots Living Abroad” that expands the category of “compatriots” to encompass relatives and descendants of peoples who historically lived on territories of the Russian Federation. Still, one law is not enough. Russia requires a precise repatriation strategy incorporated into the country’s general migration policy. Such a program would need to ameliorate the risk of interethnic strife and land disputes in the event that significant numbers of diaspora Circassians are to be resettled in Russia. If Russia can manage to successfully resolve the issues surrounding Syrian Circassians, this could strengthen Russia’s position both in the Caucasus and in the Middle East.

Moreover, the Russian state needs to develop a relevant, qualitative explanation and interpretation model suitable for the evaluation of the events of the Caucasian War and the general history of the region. This need not be done only in the context of upcoming Olympics, though the Games could provide an impetus for this work. Russia is not the first country to face such a task. Almost every multiethnic state has or will have encountered this problem at least once in its history; some manage to deal with it better than others. Canadian First Peoples and Native Americans have long embraced their difficult past and integrated it into the national curriculum, museums, galleries, celebrations, and sports festivals. The most notable example of this was the impressive opening ceremony at the Vancouver Olympics in 2010.

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35. Fehim Tastekin, “Gürcistan tehlikeli sularda yüzüyor” [Georgia is swimming in dangerous waters], *Radikal*, May 26, 2011, [http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/fehim\\_tastekin/gurcistan\\_tehlikeli\\_sularda\\_yuzuyor-1050592](http://www.radikal.com.tr/yazarlar/fehim_tastekin/gurcistan_tehlikeli_sularda_yuzuyor-1050592).

# The Russia-Georgia-Abkhazia Security Triangle

The territory of Greater Sochi borders Abkhazia, a breakaway region of Georgia enjoying de facto independence but recognized only by Russia and a handful of other states.<sup>36</sup>

The upcoming Olympics will be a test for a Russia-Georgia bilateral relationship that has been burdened by a variety of tensions and hostilities in recent years. After the five-day war of August 2008, relations between the two countries have been paradoxical. On the one hand, diplomatic ties were severed, and the differing policies regarding the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia have made compromise a near impossibility. On the other hand, Russian business interests have remained in Georgia and have even expanded. Under prodding from the United States, the government in Tbilisi opened the door for Russia to join the WTO, while public demands for the normalization of Russo-Georgian relations were an important factor in the success of the “Georgian Dream” coalition led by billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili that came to power following Georgia’s October 2012 parliamentary elections.

However, the “Sochi factor” in the bilateral relationship first appeared before the August war. Since 2007, Georgians had raised the prospect of a boycott as a tool to put pressure on the Russian Federation. In an interview with *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* on October 24, 2007, former Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze promoted an Olympic boycott to “punish Russia” for its “annexation policy” in regards to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.<sup>37</sup>

After the August war, the idea of a boycott was consistently promoted at the official level. The Georgian authorities have called many times for a boycott of the Olympics, drawing comparisons between the Russia of the 2000s and the Soviet Union during its invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which led to the boycott of the 1980 Moscow Olympics by the United States and many NATO allies. Georgia has also sought to form alliances with the ethnonationalist movements from the Russian republics in the North Caucasus to increase the pressure on Moscow. This policy reached its peak in May 2011 when the Georgian

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36. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were also recognized by Nicaragua (2008), Venezuela (2009), Nauru (2009), and Tuvalu (2011). The oceanic state Vanuatu also recognized the independence of Abkhazia in 2011, but in 2013 it canceled it in favor of continued diplomatic and consular relations with Georgia.

37. Anatoliy Gordienko, “Shevardnadze trebuyet nakazat’ Moskvu” [Shevardnadze asks to punish Moscow], *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, October 24, 2007.



Parliament unanimously recognized the events of 1763–1864 in the western part of the Caucasus as “genocide by the Russian Empire against the Circassian people.” The parliament’s resolution said that the Russian Empire conducted a colonial policy against the Circassians for more than one hundred years, and defined the hostilities in the Caucasus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as a “Russian-Caucasian war.”<sup>38</sup>

It must be pointed out that the term *genocide* was already in use by some constituent entities of the Russian Federation to describe the fate of the Circassians. In particular, the term *genocide* was used by Kabardino-Balkaria in February 1992 and by Adygea in April 1996 (in an appeal by Adygea’s president and State Council to the Russian State Duma).

Georgia’s policy of mobilizing the North Caucasian groups against Moscow was not openly supported by its allies, most of whom preferred to be rather cautious. On February 16, 2011, the U.S. director of national intelligence, James Clapper, in a statement on the intelligence community’s worldwide threat assessment before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, stated that “Georgia’s public efforts to engage with various ethnic groups in the Russian North Caucasus have also contributed” to the existing tensions.<sup>39</sup>

The rise to power of the “Georgian Dream” coalition during the parliamentary elections of 2012 has led the new authorities in Tbilisi to propose normalization of relations with Moscow, and since Georgian Dream’s leader, Bidzina Ivanishvili, has become prime minister, Georgia’s National Olympic Committee has formally supported the country’s participation in the Sochi Olympics. Hopes for a “parade of recognitions” for the alleged genocide of the Circassians have not born fruit (an initiative to recognize the “Circassian genocide” was considered by the Estonian parliament but was not ultimately adopted). Yet the principal conflicts, such as the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and the absence of diplomatic relations, have caused the question of Georgia’s potential participation in the Olympics to remain one of the most topical questions on the Russo-Georgian agenda.

Today Abkhazia enjoys the status of an entity protected and supported by Moscow. However, concerns persist within both the Abkhaz elite and the broader public about the asymmetrical nature of the relationship with Russia. The Abkhaz leadership, and especially its opposition, fear the penetration of Russian big business into the republic and in the potential for property redistribution or oil exploration in the Black Sea. They also are concerned by the return of ethnic Georgian entrepreneurs who currently hold Russian passports. Moscow has consequently stated that the complaints of ethnic Georgians who have Russian citizenship for the loss of property in Abkhazia would not be considered by the special commission on the issue.

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38. See the full text of the Georgian Parliament’s resolution at <http://hekupsa.com/istoriya/dokumenty/218-rezolyutsiya-parlamenta-gruzii-o-priznanii-genotsida-cherkesov-rossijskoj-imperiej>.

39. James R. Clapper, director of national intelligence, “Statement for the Record on the Worldwide Threat Assessment of the U.S. Intelligence Community for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence,” February 16, 2011, [www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20110216\\_testimony\\_sfr.pdf](http://www.dni.gov/files/documents/Newsroom/Testimonies/20110216_testimony_sfr.pdf).

Russia considers Abkhazia a territory that should be engaged in the preparations for the Olympic Games. This provokes some fears among those Abkhaz who are concerned about losing ethnic preferences that were obtained during the 1992–1993 war with Georgia. Thus, the Abkhaz leadership is suspicious of the ongoing infrastructure development taking place with Russian assistance. Abkhaz president Alexander Ankvab went so far as to reject the “Cherkessk-Sukhumi” road development project on the basis of questionable “ecological concerns.”

# The Kuban Knot: The Challenge of Regional Nationalism

The Municipality of Sochi (“Greater Sochi”) is part of the Krasnodar Krai, or region, also known as the Kuban.<sup>40</sup> This region has the third-largest population among Russia’s federal units, after Moscow and the Moscow Region, with approximately 5.3 million people according to 2010 Census. It includes the Black Sea coast, which boasts major resort centers such as Sochi (with about 345,000 inhabitants) and Novorossiysk (189,000 inhabitants). Oil and gas pipelines from Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan terminate in Novorossiysk, and the Novorossiysk and Tuapse ports are the first and third busiest ports in Russia in terms of cargo turnover. And, of course, the Kuban is a region where the Russian elite regularly spend their vacations. These circumstances give the governor of the Krasnodar region a high informal status, which distinguishes him from many other regional leaders.

Meanwhile, since the dissolution of the USSR, Russian nationalism and the traditionalist values of communitarianism, collectivism, and distrust of progress have become the official ideology of this region, acquiring a more solid base there than in Russia as a whole.<sup>41</sup> The entire population of Meskhetian Turks was expelled from the Kuban region due to a consistent policy against them by the regional authorities. The Meshketian Turks had left Uzbekistan for a variety of Russian regions after ethnic violence in the Fergana Valley in 1989. While large numbers of them settled in and seriously altered the ethnic composition of Rostov Oblast’ and Stavropol Krai, they felt compelled to leave Krasnodar Krai for the United States because of the regional government’s extreme hostility to their presence. There was not ethnic cleansing, as in the cases of the North Caucasus or Balkans conflicts, but their departure did occur as a result of deliberate strategy of the regional elite.<sup>42</sup> This was the first ethnically motivated migration from Russia since 1991.

However, some visible transformations have taken place in the approaches of the Kuban authorities to ethno-political issues. Nikolai Kondratenko, who was Krai governor

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40. Krasnodar Krai is often referred to as Kuban, both officially and unofficially, although the term is not exclusive to the region. It also covers some territories of the republics of Adygea and Karachay-Cherkessia, and parts of Stavropol Krai. Historically those territories were parts of the Kuban Cossack Host (established in 1860 and abolished in 1920).

41. For a more detailed discussion, see Sergey Markedonov, “Kubanskii polygon” [The Kuban polygon], April 19, 2007, <http://polit.ru/article/2007/04/19/kuban>.

42. For a more detailed discussion of the Meskhetian Turks’ development in the Kuban and their emigration to the United States, see Tom Trier and Andrei Khanzhi, eds., *The Meskhetian Turks at a Crossroads: Integration, Repatriation or Resettlement?* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2007), pp. 197–237, 378–434.

from 1996 to 2000, waged an ideological campaign against “Zionist conspiracies,”<sup>43</sup> provoking both anti-Semitic and anti-Moscow sentiments, while the current head of the Krai, Alexander Tkachev, has promoted anti-Armenian, anti-Turkish, anti-Kurdish, and anti-migrant slogans. It is significant that during one of his speeches on migration he said that Krasnodar Krai has been “the Cossacks’ land,” and everyone should understand whose “rules of the game he or she must follow.”<sup>44</sup> In a February 2011 television interview, he told well-known Russian journalist Vladimir Pozner that in the early stages of his gubernatorial activities, he behaved very emotionally and made mistakes.<sup>45</sup>

The result of such “high emotions” has been a reputation for xenophobia, harming not only the domestic situation but also Russia’s relations with its neighbors. Tkachev’s anti-Armenian rhetoric repeatedly created difficulties in relations between Russia and its strategic ally Armenia (on whose territory the Russian military base in Gyumri is located). Moreover, despite his televised repentance, on August 2, 2012, Tkachev launched a new initiative to create in the Kuban a Cossack police force. At the meeting of the board of the regional Department of the Interior, Tkachev explained that the Cossack police should take part in preventing mass migration from the North Caucasus republics and a repetition of the Kosovo scenario, which would result in domination of the mostly Muslim ethnic group over the Christian one in Russia. The “migration filter” was defined as the most important task of such police units. “Here is the Kuban, here people have their own laws and they are quite tough guys,” Tkachev concluded.<sup>46</sup>

This rhetoric was not addressed to the various campaigns against foreigners or stateless persons, but aimed instead at fanning the hostility of one group of Russian citizens against another. Tkachev’s appeal to “tough guys” in Cossack uniforms places this strategically important region of Russia in opposition to the rest of the country, because it de facto proposes to establish a separate system of laws and rules. Interestingly, the nationalist rhetoric on the Cossack police initiative came after two incidents that had negatively affected Tkachev’s reputation as governor. The first was a November 2010 massacre in the village of Kushchevskaya. The investigation of the tragedy revealed the presence of a well-structured and organized criminal group that had wholly replaced the local authorities. It is impossible to imagine that people on the regional level were unaware of its existence. The second case was the flooding in Krymsk on July 7, 2012, which exposed gaps and failures in the local and regional authorities’ emergency response capabilities and procedures. Amid the fallout from these episodes of official negligence, Tkachev’s invocation of Cossack “tough guys” appears to have been partly a calculated ploy to win back public support. This problem will remain after the Games because of the active engagement of migrants in building the Sochi sport arenas.<sup>47</sup>

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43. Kondratenko used the specific term “creative resistance to Moscow” [sozidatelnoe soprotivlenie Moskve] in explaining his controversies with Boris Yeltsin and the Russian federal authorities.

44. “Alexandr Tkachev protiv nezakonnyh migrantov” [Alexander Tkachev against illegal migrants], September 22, 2003, <http://www.sova-center.ru/hate-speech/news/2003/09/d1012/>.

45. This conversation is available at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=keG4csM7NTg](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keG4csM7NTg).

46. The whole text of Tkachev’s speech is available at <http://www.yuga.ru/articles/society/6390.html>.

47. For details, see “Migranty” [Migrants], October 10, 2013, <http://www.blogsochi.ru/category/tegi/migranty>.

# Nonpolitical Challenges: Transportation, Environmental, and Social Issues

The upcoming Olympic Games in Sochi raise a number of problems that have no direct connection with politics or security. However, their importance should not be underestimated.

Alexey Malashenko rightly notes, “The Olympics could also have a negative impact on the environment of the Sochi region. Several of the facilities, including the alpine Olympic village, bobsled track, and biathlon facility, are being built on the territory of Sochi National Park. Most of the facilities are located in the Imereti Basin, which is home to the Kolkhid swamplands that are unique to Russia, and the combined road and railway built for the Olympics and stretching from Adler to Krasnaya Polyana has essentially devastated the Mzymta River’s ecosystem. Once destroyed, these landscapes cannot be restored.”<sup>48</sup>

The preparations for the Games have already caused significant damage to the population of turtles in the Caucasus and salmon in the Black Sea, next to which in the Kudepsta one of the largest power stations will be built, equipped with twenty gas-piston generators. Each generator is able to send about 151 tons of nitrogen oxides into the atmosphere each year, which is harmful to human health and the environment as a whole. Moreover, much of the infrastructure for the games is being built in seismically active and potentially dangerous areas.

The other sensitive issue for all Winter Games is snow. The Greater Sochi area itself is not the most plentiful area for snow in Russia, and it has a higher average temperature than Russia as a whole. The use of technology to create artificial snow will be extremely expensive and will add stress on the environment. Numerous complaints regarding the environmental component of the Olympic sites in Sochi have been expressed by such organizations as Greenpeace and the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).<sup>49</sup>

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48. Alexey Malashenko, “Controversy and Concern over the Sochi Olympics,” April 10, 2013, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/04/10/controversy-and-concern-over-sochi-olympics/fyyh#>.

49. “Olimpiada-2014 v gorode Sochi” [2014 Olympics in Sochi], n.d., <http://www.wwf.ru/about/positions/sochi2014>.

Since the announcement that Sochi would host the Olympics, the flow of tourists to the region has decreased dramatically due to a rise in the cost of land and housing. Today, prices of new homes on Sochi's Black Sea coastline are up \$15,000 per square meter, while the cost per square meter in an ordinary block of flats in the multi-apartment buildings is \$2,000. This cost is forecast to increase by 15 to 20 percent per year. Moreover, the Olympic project has become big business; small and medium-size businesses and entrepreneurs from the region have been mostly neglected during the preparations. As a result, last year approximately 150 mini-hotels in Sochi and nearby Adler held no tourists. This drop-off has dealt a serious blow to local businesses and become a potential source of social unrest.<sup>50</sup> Organizers expect the arrival of more than a million tourists for the Olympics, but it will be difficult to attract tourists after the Games end.

The quality of the construction work and infrastructure at Sochi also leaves much to be desired. Companies win tenders for the construction and repair of both Olympic and civilian infrastructure, yet they often transfer their rights to subcontractors who hire migrant workers from Central Asia. Unemployed highly skilled workers and people not fluent in Russian have been the two major sources of labor for the Sochi project. The presence of large numbers of migrant workers has also stoked xenophobic and nationalist sentiments.

The problem of ground transportation has still not been completely resolved. The trip from Sochi to Adler, a distance of about 20 kilometers, can take three or four hours each way because of traffic. In addition, almost all business, administrative, and financial institutions are concentrated at the center of the city, creating a downtown bottleneck with an acute shortage of parking spaces. The problem of diversification of municipal infrastructure is a real headache for the organizers of the Olympics. Bypass roads are still not fully complete, although there is a chance that things will improve before the Opening Ceremony.

Russian policy in the preparations for the 22nd Winter Olympic Games has achieved some successes in recent years. Moscow has been able to minimize the risk of a possible boycott from the Georgian side and retained the loyalty of the political and business circles in Western countries. Worldwide brands and companies, such as Coca-Cola, Procter & Gamble, McDonald's, VISA, Samsung, Dow Chemical, Omega, General Electric, and many others, have signed on as partners of the Sochi Olympics.

The issue of boycott nowadays is not on the table. However, it has been raised from time to time for a variety of different reasons. A boycott was debated in the U.S. Congress as a part of the broader discussion regarding the U.S. response to the Russo-Georgian war of August 2008. Similarly, the situation surrounding the Olympics in Sochi may be influenced by some other aspect of the U.S.-Russia relationship. The topic of a boycott cropped up again after the case of Edward Snowden, the former CIA and NSA agent who divulged classified information and sought asylum in Russia. In July 2013, Senator Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said

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50. Irina Mironova, "Pyat' glavnyh problem Sochi" [The five most important issues of Sochi], February 1, 2011, <http://www.sports.ru/biathlon/75769189.html>.

that the problem of a possible boycott should be put into the current agenda of U.S. foreign policy because of the Snowden case, Russia's behavior in Syria, and other subjects on which Washington and Moscow have important and deep-seated disagreements. However, the initiative was not supported by the U.S. Senate or the U.S. National Olympic Committee. Republican House Speaker John Boehner was critical of his colleagues' statements.<sup>51</sup> At the same time, some public, human rights, and LGBT activists have urged a boycott to punish the Russian leadership for its authoritarianism and widespread violations of civic and political freedoms. Well-known writer and comedian Stephen Fry, who has more than 6 million followers on Twitter, is an influential voice in this regard. He has publicly compared the situation to the decision to hold the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. Those initiatives have not been supported at any official level, with both U.S. president Barack Obama and British prime-minister David Cameron expressing support for their countries' participation, though still voicing criticism of the atmosphere of prejudice around minorities' rights in Russia.<sup>52</sup>

In parallel with the promotion of international support, the Russian special services have managed to minimize the threat of terrorist attacks. Experience with such athletic competitions as the Universiade in Kazan as well as the Track and Field Athletics World Championship in Moscow have been beneficial in this regard.

However, Moscow is still far from solving all the critical problems facing the Sochi Games. And although it has achieved some success on the international arena, Russia has set itself up for potentially serious social and economic problems in the future, ranging from the issues of ecology and tourism in the Greater Sochi area to transportation and budgetary issues. The Sochi Olympics is the most expensive Games in history, and it now looks unlikely that Russia will recoup the costs. The demands of the security environment are likely to strengthen the administrative, bureaucratic, police, and security structures. It is possible that after the Games have ended, those conditions will be used by law enforcement and security forces to gain advantages that strengthen their political influence. Once approved, the experience of restricting civil rights can be put forward as an effective means to resolve other internal problems. Be that as it may, holding a secure Olympics is the highest priority.

Putting on the first Winter Olympic Games in a subtropical climate will require more than high-quality public relations. Without proper attention to the complex ethno-political side of the Games, as well as related economic topics, the Kremlin will not reap the public relations benefits from Sochi that it desires. Russia's return to the major leagues of international politics will be dictated in part by its success or failure in addressing the complicated issues surrounding the Sochi Olympics, such as preventing terrorism, managing interactions with neighboring states—both recognized and de facto—and, of course, the interpretation of a complex past in pursuit of real unity for a heretofore divided country.

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51. Brayden Goyette, "Lindsey Graham: Boycott 2014 Olympics if Russia Gives Snowden Asylum," July 16, 2013, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/16/lindsey-graham-boycott-olympics-snowden\\_n\\_3607528.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/16/lindsey-graham-boycott-olympics-snowden_n_3607528.html).

52. Rowena Mason, "David Cameron Met Stephen Fry to Discuss Russian Gay Rights Row," August 18, 2013, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/18/david-cameron-stephen-fry-russia-gay-rights>.

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Markedonov graduated from Rostov-on-Don State University in 1995. He earned his doctoral degree in history at Rostov-on-Don State Pedagogical University in 1999. From 1996 to 1999, he was a lecturer in the History Department of Rostov-on-Don State Pedagogical University. From 1998 to 2001, he served as a senior fellow in the governor's press service in the Rostov regional administration. From 2001 to 2010, he worked as head of the Interethnic Relations Group and deputy director at the Institute for Political and Military Analysis in Moscow. From 2006 to 2010, he also held teaching positions at the Russian State University for the Humanities, the Moscow State University, and the Diplomatic Academy.







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