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Dimitry Mikulski

Institute of Oriental Studies, Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow

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MUSLIMS AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONS IN RUSSIA

By Dimitry Mikulski

Dimitry Mikulski is a senior researcher in the Institute of Oriental Studies in the Russian Academy of Sciences, Moscow.

Islam is the second largest confession in the Russian Federation, which alongside with Orthodoxy, has deep and early roots. The Orthodox-Muslim synthesis has expressed itself in the traditional mutual influence of the Muslim and Christian nations of contemporary Russia. Many scholars consider it to be the basis of the peculiar, Eurasian character of Russia, showing itself during the main historic periods of this country--that is prerevolutionary, Soviet and PostSoviet.

In the territory of present-day Russia two main seats of Islam's proliferation took place. The first is the Northern Caucasus, where the Arab-Muslim expansion in the eighth century of the Christian Era used to have a military, economic, and cultural character. The same expansion was simultaneously going on in Transcaucasia (mainly in Azerbaijan) and in Central Asia.

The main zone of Islam's proliferation in the Northern Caucasus has been Daghestan, where this religion spread in the tenth century. On the basis of the traditions brought by the Arab Muslims and the local cultural heritage, an original culture appeared there, which is an interesting variant of the universal Muslim culture. One of the main features of the Daghestani Muslim cultural traditions has been a considerable role of the Arabic elements. It is enough to say, that in polyethnic Daghestan developed a local spiritual and lay literature in the Arabic language and Arabic was the tool of interethnic contacts before the beginning of the Collectivization, or up to the late 1920s.

It was specifically Daghestan, together with the Crimea and to a lesser extent Turkey, that became the source of the Islamic beliefs and religious practices for the other regions of the Northern Caucasus, in the zones inhabited by the Vaynakh and Adigh tribes and peoples. As late as the eve of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and even during the first years after the Daghestanians who were religiously more educated than their neighbors in the Northern Caucasus, often used to serve as *mullas* in the *auls* (villages) of Chechnya, Kabarda, Karachay, Balkiriya, and other areas.

The other seat of Islam's proliferation in Russia is the region of the Volga river. Specifically here in the tenth century, some time before Russia's adoption of Christianity, the voluntary adoption of Islam by the king of the Bulghar state took place, the Turkic-speaking inhabitants who were the ancestors of the present-day Kazan (or Volga) Tatars. A century and a half after the Mongolian conquest of the Bulgharian kingdom the Golden Horde, which was embracing a vast area of Eurasia, became a Muslim state. At that time, as well as at the period of the Bulghar kingdom, the Muslim missionaries and merchants (the two positions often combined at that time) spread the Muslim religion among the Bashkirs, who are the Tatars's closest neighbors, and also among the Turkic-speaking population of Siberia, the future Siberian Tatars. Beginning with the second half of the 18th century the Tatar *mullas* and merchants, under the protection of the Russian czarist government, penetrated to the Khazakhs and the Kirghiz and came in touch with the sedentary population of Central Asia. Through that they helped the process of the Islamization of the nomads and strengthened the positions of the Russian state in Central Asia. The importance of the influence of the culture of the Volga Tatars for the population of Central Asia, and especially the nomads, is witnessed, for instance, by the fact, that up to the mid-twenties of our century the teaching in Kirghizian schools was going on in the Tatar language, which is close to the Kirghizian one, but still different. This can be explained by the fact that the base of the school education in Kirghizia was laid by the Tatar *mullas*, who were serving as teachers.

The Muslim Volga area was included in the Russian state through the conquest, carried out under the czar Ivan the Terrible, under whose reign began the Russian peasant colonization of Siberia. First the tsarist government was trying to Christianize the Volga Muslims, but later, during the second half of the 18th century, and especially under Catharine the Great, the Russian government turned to the direct protection of the loyal Muslims. At that very time the system of the Muslim Spiritual Administrative Boards was introduced. This system still exists, but, of course with natural historic modifications. Under the Emperor Nicholas I special decrees were adopted, which envisaged severe punishments for violations of the rules and institutions of the Muslim religion.

The Northern Caucasus was conquered by the Russian State as a result of long-term and hard efforts, which began in the epoch of Ivan the Terrible and ended in the 1860s, when the bloody Caucasian War ended. But still the traditions of Caucasian separatism were showing themselves long afterwards--during the revolts of the mountaineers against the tsarist power, during the Civil and the Second World wars, as well as in the present-day crisis in Chechnya.

On the Eve of the Bolshevik revolution the Russian Muslim intellectuals were supporting the idea of the cultural autonomy for the Muslims. The Muslim deputies were active in the Russian Parliament (the State *Duma*). Muslim political parties emerged at that time and a large number of Muslim periodicals was published. During the Civil war some Muslims opposed the Bolsheviks, while others supported them in the hope of obtaining a specific status for the Muslim community within Russia. The Bolsheviks organized national autonomous areas, some of which were inhabited by the Muslim peoples, but beginning with the second half of the 1920s the Bolsheviks began severely prosecuting the Muslim institutions and spiritual leaders, as they did the other religious denominations in the Soviet Union.

Ethnically the following major peoples of Russia are traditionally Muslim: the Volga (Kazan) Tatars (7,000,000), the Bashkirs (1,500,000), the Chechenians (1,000,000), the Avarians, a people living in Dagestan (600,000), the Lezginians, also one of the Dagestani peoples (500,000), the Kabardinians (400,000), the Darginians (400,000), the Kumiks (300,000), the Ingushs (250,000), the Karachais (150,000), the Adigians (150,000), the Balkarians (90,000), the Cherkessians (50,000). Islam is also confessed by a part of the Ossetians, about 30,000 persons.

A considerable part of the representatives of these peoples inhabit their political-administrative areas, which are considered to be the parts of the Russian Federation. They are: the Republic of Adigeia, the Republic of Bashkortostan, the Republic of Dagestan, the Ingush Republic, the Karachaevo-Cherkessian Republic, the Republic of Northern Ossetia-Alania, the Republic of Tatarstan, the Chechnian Republic.

Linguistically the Tatars, the Bashkirs, the Kumiks, the Karachais, the Balkars, and some other smaller ethnic groups belong to the Turkic linguistic family. The Avarians, the Darginians, and the Lezginians belong to the North-Eastern group of the Caucasian linguistic family; the Chechenians and the Ingushs are united into a special Vainakh group of the Caucasian family of languages, and the Adigians, the Kabardinians and the Cherkessians to the Western (Adigo-Abkhazian) group of the Caucasian linguistic family.

The native Muslim peoples of Russia are still characterized by tribal and clannish divisions, which are more typical of the peoples of the Northern Caucasus, as well as the regional divisions, which are more typical of the Muslims of the Volga area. The traditional social stratification is preserved in part. In the Northern Caucasus the social structure is divided into the descendants of the princes and the nobility, the descendants of the free community members, and the descendants of the patriarchal slaves. In Dagestan, in addition, there is a strata of the hereditary *mullas* and the commentators of the customary law (the *Alims*). Among the Muslims of the Volga region there are the Sayyids, the descendants of the Prophet, the Ishans (the hereditary leaders of the Sufi communities), the hereditary *mullas* and also the descendants of the lay nobility, the Murzas. The descendants of the latter are the active members of the Russian Assembly of the Nobility and are preparing for the celebration in 1996 of the 200 anniversary of Catherine the Great's Decree, granting the Murzas the rights of the Russian nobility.

Sociological research, as well as ethnological observations witness that the descendants of the traditional privileged estates have comprised the bulk of the modern intellectuals of the Muslim peoples of Russia. However, a situation like this is characteristic of the Muslim world as a whole. The native Muslims of Russia belong to one of the two main branches of Islam, the Sunni. Besides that, especially in the Northern Caucasus, there is a substantial influence of the Sufi communities, which have acquired some specific local features. There are also deep Sufi traditions with the Muslims of the Volga area, but nowadays there is no evidence of any Sufi communities functioning among them.

Almost everywhere among the Muslims of Russia the cult of the so-called holy places is spreading, such as the tombs of outstanding Muslims and natural objects, which are considered to be miraculous. This cult is especially strong in the Caucasus. The cult of the holy places, as well as some other features of the religious and cultic life of the Muslims of Russia testify that the deep pre-Islamic traditions are still alive, being assimilated by genuine Islam in the course of the development of Islamic culture and history.

In Russia there also lives a considerable number of Muslims who are migrants from the other countries of the former Soviet Union. Their number has considerably increased after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. So, according to some sources, in the Russian Federation there lives some 2,500,000 Azerbaijanians. Recently also the number of the Tajiks has greatly increased, now settling mainly in the Pskov and Arkhangelsk regions of Russia, which are situated in the North-West of the country, along with migrants from some other Central Asian states. A considerable part of the native Muslims of Russia live beyond the boundaries of their historic territories, especially in the larger Russian cities. For instance, in Moscow there are vast groups of the Tatars, Bashkirians, Daghestanians, and Chechens. According to different estimates, the number of the Muslim community of Moscow reaches from a million to two million persons.

The traditional form of the administrative organization of the religious life of the Muslims of Russia is the system of the Muslim Spiritual Administrative Boards, which under the Soviet political regime were officially considered to be voluntary organizations, but in reality were working under severe governmental control. The system of the Muslim Boards of Russia, which has been working until the very collapse of the Soviet Union, emerged in the 1940s under Stalin. In the territory of Russia itself there existed the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the European Part of the USSR and Siberia and the Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the Northern Caucasus. After the collapse of the Soviet Union the process of the dissolution of the two Boards began based on national and territorial units. One of the main factors of this process, alongside with the growth of nationalism, was the emergence of the new Muslim elite, the relatively young *mullas* who oppose the former Soviet Muslim establishment.

At the same time a large strata of the Muslim intellectuals was involved in Muslim religious life, among them some of the well-known Islamicists, who ethnically belong to some of the Islamic peoples of the former Soviet Union. Specifically the Muslim lay intellectuals became the organizers of numerous Muslim cultural societies and national cultural organizations (the first are considered in this paper, while the latter not, as religion is not the cornerstone in their activities). The other sphere of the activities of the Muslim intellectuals are the Muslim political organizations, which have both a national character (mainly in the Northern Caucasus), as well as a general Muslim one. The first political organization of this kind was the Party of Islamic Rebirth (PIR), the activities of which however have actually come to an end at the beginning of the 1990s. Some of the observers, for instance, the well-known scholar A. Malashenko, think, that on the political scene of Russia the PIR has been to a certain extent replaced by the Union of the Muslims of Russia and the "Nur" Movement. But in these organizations the religious and even fundamentalistic features are to a large scale camouflaged by the tasks of a general cultural and democratic character. So it is not by chance that many of the founders of PIR are collaborating with the new Spiritual Muslim Boards, which mainly unite the Tatars and the Bashkirians.

In general there is ground to believe that in the near future the Muslim political organizations will have little chance of broadening their influence. The specifically religious organizations (Muslim Spiritual Boards and mosques belong to them) have greater opportunities for expanding their influence, and that is also the case with the Muslim cultural religious organizations, both those that are connected with the Boards and the independents. These organizations might prepare the soil for the future new wave of the political Islam in Russia.

The All-Russian Muslim Organizations

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the European Part of the UIS and Siberia (SBMES), with the center in Ufa, the leader of which is the Mufti, Talqat Tadjuddin. Presently the SBMES lost its importance to a considerable extent due to the emergence of a number of smaller territorial Boards of the Muslims of Russia. The Mufti is being criticized by the spiritual leaders and the ordinary Muslims. Nevertheless SBMES retains a certain importance, for instance during the crisis in Buddyenovsk, Talqat Tadjuddin officially condemned the terroristic action of Bassaev.

The Higher Coordinating Center of the Spiritual Boards of the Muslims of Russia (HCC). The President is the Mufti of Tatarstan, Ghabdulla Ghaliulla. The Chairman of the Executive Committee is the Mufti of Bashkortostan, Nafiqulla Ashirov. The Director is Muhammad Salahiddin. The HCC was created in September 1992 in Moscow. Its aim is to coordinate the activities of the Muslim religious organizations, opposing the SBMES.

The Party of Islamic Rebirth (PIR) was organized in June 1990 at the Founding Congress, in Astrakhan. As the *Amir* (the President) of the Party became Ahmadqadi Akhtaev, a Daghestani. The other outstanding figures of the Party were Waliahmed Sadur and Muhammad Salahiddin (both are Tatars), an Azerbaijanian, Haydar Diemal, and a Tadjik, Davlat Usmon. The documents of the Party pointed out the necessity of Islam's restoration among the

traditionally Muslim nations of the former Soviet Union in its original form. A system of the Party's regional structures was introduced in the Muslim regions. Recently the activities of the central apparatus of the Party has ceased functioning; until recently their regional structures existed in Chechnya. There is still an active the regional structure in Dagestan. Based on PIR there emerged in the different countries of the UIS a number of the religio-political organizations, the largest of which was the Party of Islamic Rebirth of Tadjikistan, which was playing a leading role in the civil war in that country in 1991-1993. The PIR published a newspaper, "*al-Wahdat*" [Unity].

The Union of the Muslims of Russia (Moscow). Secretary-General is Ahmed Khalitov. It emerged in Summer 1995 and has more than 50 branches throughout Russia. In its Program the Union characterizes itself as "an all-Russian political organization capable of generalizing and systematically defending the political, spiritual, economic and social interests of the Muslims." It supports the principle of Russian unity and calls for the return to "Pure Islam."

The All-Russian Muslim Voluntary Movement, "Nur" [Light]. The President is Khalit Yaqin. It was created in the Summer 1995 and has 40 branches throughout Russia and mainly propagates the defense of the human rights, the principle of the equality of all confessions, the right of all Muslims to obtain a Muslim education, and the guarantee of the observance of the Muslim traditions and rituals. The Movement is largely supported by the Muslim religious leaders.

The Islamic Cultural Center of Russia (Moscow). The Director is Abdul-Wahid Niyazov. It was created in 1991 and carries out broad activities in the field of the religious enlightenment and cultural propaganda.

The Popular Academy of Culture and All-Human Values. The President is an Uzbek businessman and social activist Tashpulat Tadjiddinov. A non-governmental organization that was active in the UIS and beyond, the Academy was supporting the respectful relations between the representatives of different confessions and nationalities. It has carried out a number of conferences and other cultural actions. Recently the Academy ceased its activities.

The Moscow Institute of Islamic Civilization. The Director is Dr. Said Kamilev. It was created in 1991 and primarily was attached to the Popular Academy. Nowadays it works independently. It has organized two scholarly conferences. At the Institute of Islamic Civilization there is the University of Islamic Culture, where Islamic history, the Arabic language, the Qur'an, and the foundations of the Muslim faith are taught.

The Regional Muslim Organizations of Russia

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the Central-European Region of Russia (the Muftiyyat of Moscow SBMCERR). The Mufti is Rawil Ghaynutdin, the Chief Imam Khatib of the Moscow City Mosque; he is largely supported by the Muslims of Russia and carries out vast international activities.

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Siberia (the Muftiyyat of Omsk, SBMS). The Mufti is Zulqarnay Shakirzyanov, the Imam Khatib of the Omsk City Mosque; there is an agreement of cooperation between the SBMCERR and the SBMS).

The Religious-Cultural Foundation "Medina" (Nizhni Novgorod). The Director is Faiz Gilmanov; the Center carries out the erection of a large Muslim cultural center near Nizhni Novgorod.

The Voluntary Muslim Center "Druzhba" ("Friendship"), Volgograd. The President is Faruzi Abdrashitova; the Center defends the religious rights of the Muslims, living in the Volgograd region.

In the different regions of Russia there are numerous local courses of the Arabic language, the study of the Qur'an and the Hadith. One of the leading Muslim educational institutions is the Medrese of the Moscow City Mosque (the Rector is a graduate of the Oriental Faculty of the State University of St.Petersburg, Marat Murtazin).

The Regional Muslim Periodicals in Russia

"Islam Minbare" ("The Tribune of Islam") is a newspaper of the SBMCERR; the Editor in Chief is Professor Talib Saidbaev; circulation is 3000 copies.

"**Yana Suz**" ("The New Word") is a newspaper supported by the Faculty of Journalism of the Moscow State University.

The Muslim Organizations of Tatarstan

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of the Republic of Tatarstan (SBMRT). The Mufti is Gabdulla Ghaliulla; it was created in August 1992; opposes the SBMCERR.

The Youth Cultural Center "Iman" ("The Faith") was created in 1990. The President is Winerulla Yaqub; a member of the Council is a journalist of distinction, Almazulla Sabir; at the Center there are courses of the study of the Arabic language, the Qur'an, the Hadith, the Sharia. The Center carries out broad publishing activities, propagates the idea of the return to the original Islam and the restoration of the religious basis of the Tatarian culture. The Center used to support close ties with the PIR.

The group "Saf Islam" ("The Moll of Islam").

The Islamic University (Kazan). The Arabic language, the Qur'an and the history of Islam are taught.

The Medrese of "Muhammadiyya"(Kazan) has once again begun its activities after an interval of 75 years in 1994; the Arabic language, the Qur'an, the Hadith, the history of Islam, the Sharia are taught. Teachers are prepared for *mektebs* (primary Muslim schools), *medreses*, and lay schools.

The Medrese at the Zakabannaya Mosque (Kazan). The Director is Ishaq Lutfullin.

There are numerous courses of the study of the Arabic language and the Qur'an at almost all the mosques in the towns and villages of Tatarstan.

The Muslim Organizations of Bashkortostan

The Spiritual Board of the Republic of Bashkortostan (SBRB). The President is the Mufti Nafiqulla Ashirov. The SBRB was created in August 1992 and it opposes the SBMES. There are 14 regional boards, the *mukhtasibats*, subordinated to the SBRB. The SBRB publishes a weekly newspaper "Islam and the Society" (in Russian, 10,000 copies).

The Union of the Young Muslims of Bashkortostan propagates the idea of the restoration of the Bashkirian culture on the basis of Islam.

The Muslim Organizations of Chuvashiya

The Union of the Muslims of Chuvashiya propagates Islam among the Chuvashis, a Turkic-language people living in the Volga Basin, which is predominantly Christian with a strong polytheistic background and actively publishes Muslim religious literature in the Chuvashian language.

The Muslim Organizations in Daghestan

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Daghestan (SBMD) was created in January 1990 at the Constituent Congress that took place in Makhachqala, the capital of Daghestan. Presently it is headed by an Avarian Magomed Dargishev, who was elected to this post at a congress which took place in 1994. The SBMD is supported only by the Avarians, partly the Darginians and the Chechens, living in Daghestan.

The Kumikian Spiritual Board (KSB) was organized after 1992. It is headed by the Mufti B. Issaev, who previously was the President of the SBMD. It is supported only by the Kumiks.

The Qaziyat (the town of Izerbash) organized after 1992 is supported only by the Darghenians.

The Islamic Democratic Party (IDP) was created in 1990 by a group of religious-minded Daghestinian intellectuals led by Abdurashid Saidov. It propagates the idea of building in Daghestan a lay democratic society that would be based on the principles of the Muslim Renaissance. From the religious point of view it is close to the

traditionalists and has good relations with the traditional Muslim religious leaders. In 1994 an Emergency Congress of the Party took place, which changed its name into the Islamic Party of Daghestan. The leader of the Party, instead of A. Saidov, became Surakat Asiyatilov.

Gammatul Muslimi (the Society of the Muslims). Officially it is not a political party but a religious society. It was created in 1989-1990 in a large Darghenian village of Gubden (the Lenin district of Daghestan) and used to influence a part of the zone inhabited by the Darghenians. In Gubden the Society insisted upon opening of a number of new mosques and tried to introduce a separate education for girls and boys. Presently the activities of the Society have ceased.

In Daghestan there are active no less than 20 secondary Muslim educational institutions; in the town of Khasavyurt there is a Muslim High School, organized by one of the founders of the IRP, B. Kebedov. At the SBMD there are courses where the *imams* are taught. The courses of the Arabic language and the basic principles of the Muslim religion are linked to many mosques. The higher Muslim educational institutions of Daghestan are the Islamic Institute (Makhachqala) and the Islamic University (Kizilyurt). In Daghestan there is a number of Muslim periodicals such as "The Islamic News" (in Russian, Chief Editor, Maqsud Ghadiiev), "The Light of Islam," the monthly supplement to the "Islamic News" (in Russian), "The Path of Islam" (in Russian, Chief Editor is Adallo Ali Muhammed; circulation is 10,000 copies) the organ of the Islamic Party of Daghestan (the former IDP); is printed monthly.

The Muslim Organizations of the Chechenian Republic

The Muftiyyat of the Chechenian Republic. (The Mufti is Muhammad-Husain Alsabekov). This body was officially recognized by the Dudaev regime.

The Muftiyyat of the Chechenian Republic. The Mufti is Muhammad-Bashir Arsanukaev). This body was opposing the Dudaev regime.

The Islamic Path is an Islamic political party, organized in 1990 and officially self-dissolved in 1991.

Mekh-Khel of the Chechenian Republic (the Council of Elders) is the voluntary organization of the clan chieftains created at the days of the so-called Chechenian revolution of 1991; it was trying to play the role of an arbiter in interclan and interethnic disputes, several times it was proposing to adopt Islam as a state religion in Chechnya.

The Council of the Descendants of the Prophet Muhammad is a voluntary organization, uniting the Chechens, who consider themselves the descendants of the founder of the Islamic religion; in Summer 1995 they condemned the terroristic action in Buddyenovsk.

There were in Chechnya some Islamic educational institutions:

The Islamic Institute (The rector is Mayrbek-hadil Nusukhanov). It was organized in 1991 to prepare qualified mosque *imams*; groups of its students were sent to foreign Islamic centers (in Saudi Arabia, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Turkey, Pakistan); there were faculties of the study of the Qur'an and Qur'anic commentaries (*tafsirs*), of the Arabic language, of the Muslim philosophy. The only religious periodical that used to be published in Chechnya was a magazine called "*Islaman zanarsh*" ("The Dawn of Islam"); the circulation is about 3,000 copies.

The Muslim Organizations of Ingushetia

The Muftiyyat of the Republic of Ingushetia. The Mufti is Sheikh Muhammed Alboghatchiev; it was organized in 1992.

The Muslim Organizations of Northern Ossetia

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims or Northern Ossetia-Alania was organized in 1990. The Mufti is Dzankhot-haji Hekilaev. In February the congress of the Muslims of North Ossetia was held in Vladikavkaz, the capital of the republic.

The Muslim Organizations of Kabardino-Balkaria

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Kabardino-Balkaria was organized in 1989; the Mufti is Shafiq Pshikhachev.

The Muslim Organizations of Karatchaev-Cherkesia

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Karatchaev-Cherkesia was founded in 1990; the Mufti is Ismail Berdiev.

The Spiritual Board of the Muslims of Karatchai was created in 1991; the Mufti is Ahmed Bidji-ulu. This body is opposing the local government.

The Muslim Organizations of Adigea

Because of the fact that Adigea was Islamized only recently, and due to the governmental pressure upon religion under the Soviet regime, there are no specific Muslim organizations in the republic. The Muslim religious leaders are extremely few. The only mosque was erected in one of the largest local villages.

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