

A CURE FOR FEAR: WHAT KIND OF POLICY CAN EASE THE CONFLICT IN THE NORTH CAUCASUS OF RUSSIA

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1. Causes of violence

The North Caucasus is considered the most volatile, difficult, and conflict sensitive Federal District (region) in modern Russia. This fact triggers protest and provokes resentment among many Russians living in other regions of the country. The slogan “Stop feeding the Caucasus!” is gaining ground across the country. There is a popular belief that the region is depressed, archaic, and violent. Is that really so?

Studies of the North Caucasus of Russia over the last few years have helped make serious adjustments towards better understanding of the District and its population. Many stereotyped perceptions of the region have turned out to be myths. Let’s debunk the principal ones.

1. *The North Caucasus of Russia is not considered an explicitly depressed Federal District.* The region consists of local districts which differ in their development, including remote highlands whose economy totally depends on regular government subsidies. No effective market-driven economy is likely to develop here (with some exceptions though). A few local districts show active development of commercial farming as part of both formal and informal economies whose products can be found as far as Khabarovsk.

The Federal District included tourist resort areas, above all, ski resorts which have been thriving until recently. There are few fully operational modern industrial enterprises in the region. Furthermore, germs of a postindustrial economy can be found here as well.

2. *The population in the North-Caucasian region is not totally poor.* Examining the regional household spending structure, one may notice large amounts of spending on education and employment of children, weddings and dowry, private home construction. Spending volumes amounts to hundreds of thousands, and even as much as millions of rubles. In many communities, if a son gets married, his parents are to provide him with a house while parents-in-law with furnishings. Moreover, until recently families in the Caucasus have used to have many children. Not every family would marry off its daughter to a man whose family owns just one *Kamaz* motor truck, as two or more ones is a more acceptable option. There are several principle sources of income, namely informal personal subsidiary plots, employment at agricultural enterprises located in Russia's southern regions, retail sales sector, construction sites in large cities, oil and gas fields in Siberia. However, the Federal District is not homogeneous in terms of development potential. For instance, local districts may differ largely, even enormously, in income generated from personal subsidiary plots.

3. *The Federal District is neither depressed nor archaic.* The District has been undergoing intensive structural changes, namely migration of highlanders to lowlands, urbanization, etc. If statistics fail to cover these facts, your eyes are deceiving you. Globalization has a strong impact on consumer standards and living strategies in the Federal District. The foregoing leads to dilution of traditional society's relations at places where they have been retained until recently, and weakening of such at those areas where such process began a few decades ago. A market-driven economy has succeeded much more over the Soviet planning system which was based on fairly traditional principles such as collectivism, hierarchy, strictly fixed social roles, predetermined career path.

All those we spoke to unanimously bewailed that simple, comprehensible, and well-defined patriarchal relations filed as a history.

"You understand ...the mindset of our Dagestani parents who always used to care about their children's education, wellbeing. And adult children used to live with and take care of their parents here unlike other regions of Russia. These concepts have begun to vanish. In most cases, parents no longer care about what their children do and where they are. We used to feel pride when children obeyed their parents. Even at the age of 30-40 they never showed disobedience to or stood up to their parents. It was some kind of, you know, method of containment, upbringing, it was right as a matter of fact, it was good when they obeyed. Parents did everything for the best of their children. This is vanishing now".

According to the above quote, it is legitimization of intergenerational conflict that has had most serious effects on degeneration of the traditional society, determining largely the current situation in the Federal District.

4. *The population in the North Caucasus is not socially passive.* There are different types of social movements operating in the Federal District, namely national and human rights organizations. Moreover, religious associations emerge here and there. Dagestan still has independent mass media. Social activities in different forms such as public rallies, demonstrations, publications in press are considered an efficient method of communicating people's interests and needs to the prevailing authorities. One may say that civil society, in its very peculiar form

though, in Russia's Caucasus has advanced much further vs. most of the other Russia's territories (regions).

Although the presented picture bears no strong resemblance to a typical Russia's region (at times for the better and other times for the worse), the difference is not as much significant as a set of very common myths and stereotypes. What if a distinct tension in the Caucasus is a myth too? No, it isn't. Indeed, the North-Caucasian community is distinguished by high level of conflictability, prevalence of strong-arm methods in dealing with conflicts, active confrontation between different social forces, which often have devastating consequences. Let's examine the causes.

First, demographic trends in the Federal District differ largely, or at least until recently, from other Russia's regions. Their identifying feature is uncompleted demographic transition, when the death rate declines against inadequate decrease in the birth rate. Population growth, especially with its high density, is a breeding ground for conflicts¹. Lack of conditions for active economic growth leads to stronger competition for status and resources limited by the achieved development level. Explosive growth is inevitably accompanied by structural changes which rend people off their historical roots, traditional social environment, and convert them into a 'flammable substance' which is easy to manipulate and able to provoke social unrest. The North Caucasus of Russia has a paradox combination of two processes, namely lack of brisk growth and intensive structural changes. The scantiness of resources and statuses against the backdrop of large-scale migration flows which in some regions even further enhance competition between those who have claims to resources and means of social mobility.

Second, collapse of the institutional environment in the Federal District had a much larger scale as compared to other Russia's regions. In fact, concurrent dilution of traditional society's regulators and collapse of the Soviet-type regulation framework without subsequent development of post-Soviet legal framework created a peculiar institutional vacuum which was filled fragmentarily and at random. Some elements of regulation derived from the criminal world and shadow economy, others replicated traditional institutions' features, and were introduced through an upsurge in national movements in the 1990s.

Finally, the stake was placed on traditions, especially religious ones², strong-arm methods to uphold interests³, and the use of self-organization elements and civil society.

¹ For instance, researches of traditional societies take notice of the fact that baby booms often lead to social cataclysms amid poor flexibility of social and political institutions, because growing population fail to find adequate resources to be able to satisfy their needs. However, it is resource deficiency itself that becomes a population-size regulator under the circumstances: death rate goes up in response to deterioration in living conditions; growth in violence leads to population loss as a result of wars and rebellions; birth rate goes down as well, and the initial equilibrium is regained, thereby triggering a new cycle (see: *Goldstone J. A. Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World*. Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 1991).

² "You say they gather in mosques nowadays. These are old traditions, when people used to make decisions in a social way. It was some kind of local self-government, as a matter of fact. They resorted to this way when there was lack of power. There were mosques, they settled all there. And people instinctively went to mosques... Mosques emerge when there is no or ineffective power in place. Is there any other place to get together but a mosque?". "If the state fails to perform its functions, ...as though people were abandoned somewhere in a desert... Then do something. Do something if you can. If you can't, people will do it for you. There is no support at all, no law, no order, people are left on their own."

³ "If you want to stay alive here, you have to fight for being alive, make yourself visible, go to rallies, block a motor or railroad, do something. By doing so, you will be noticed, and they would say "don't disturb them for a year", this is the way it works".

Furthermore, interacting with each other, different institutional frameworks fail to produce seamless ‘symbiosis’. Instead, they have been engaged in a strong competition with each other. This phenomenon is named ‘competition of jurisdictions’⁴. And the foregoing facilitates escalation of conflicts, because instead of relying upon historical and cultural background the parties thereto may use different sets of rules and regulations which perfectly fit their current interests.

“It was the partycrats who allotted [the land], but under the Islamic laws one may not set his foot on a land which belongs to other Muslim(s) without a respective [permission] of the latter. When... attempts were made to move the inhabitants of Tsumadin and Tsuntin Districts to other areas, ...they refused to move. ... A meeting of the elders was convoked. “We are not going to Chechnya, it’s a sin, Allah will punish us for this, we don’t own the land”, this is what they said. At that time the elders followed this rule. This is not the case now”. “Here, the religious factor ... plays an instrumental part, it is only used when appropriate”.

Third, it was the urban environment – the key driver of modernization trends – that was degraded most after the Soviet system collapsed in the North Caucasus of Russia. Soviet modernization had a major impact on urban communities which were characterized by mixed ethnic composition; social networks which were developed on a new plane; a greater, than in rural areas, role of education and skills for career growth. The following key trends determine changes in the urban environment in the post-Soviet period:

- Intensive deindustrialization;
- Disruption of the urban nucleus; heavy outflow of ethnic Russians from Caucasian cities, as well as well-educated native population in the 1990s, substituted with so-called ‘new Caucasians’, some of which most often having a criminal background;
- Mass access to higher education for rural population in cities, who in most cases become permanent residents there;
- rural labor migrants inflow to urban areas and municipalities;
- well-off rural population buy real estate in cities as a way to preserve their savings and for conspicuous consumption, as well as setting a base for subsequent migration;
- intensive suburbanization and formation of urban agglomerations, especially in the regions with limited transport accessibility of a large city.

Consequently, there are two antagonistic tendencies confronting each other with variable success in the development of urban environment: ‘rural areas digest urban areas’ and ‘urban areas digest rural areas’. Under the circumstances, revival of the urban culture is slow and inconsistent. Initially small size of many cities; degradation in the post-Soviet period of activities which require highly-skilled labor force; outflow of representatives of the well-educated urban elite have led to the fact that modernization trends which tend to develop within the urban environment, namely individualism, competition for taking an office, diversity of social relations, career opportunities based on skills, competence, and talents, have become even less apparent in the North Caucasus vs. other regions of the country.

⁴ The situation referring to ‘competition of jurisdictions’ with regard to the Republic of Dagestan was analyzed by, e.g., Rasul Kadiyev (see: Аналитическая справка юриста о правовой ситуации в Дагестане // Фронтир. 2010. Март. С. 34 – 41 [Legal analytical opinion on legal situation in Dagestan. // Frontir. March 2010. pp. 34 – 41]). In general, ethnographers often use other terminology to describe such a situation – legal pluralism, or polyjuridism – explaining that this phenomenon has long been present in the Caucasus, at least after the Russian Empire conquered it. Nevertheless, in this very case, the term ‘competition of jurisdictions’ provides a better description of the nature of relationship between different legal frameworks.

However, mass access to higher education for young Caucasians creates overestimated hopes which in many respects are doomed to failure. Limited demand for highly-skilled labor force preserves the possibility to maximize the use of personal relations for the purpose of employment. At the same time, it is not always that the quality of higher education in North-Caucasian higher educational institutions meets employers' requirements. Young people often have to either go back to their native village where education is useless, or migrate outside their native republic, thereby getting themselves out of touch with the habitual social environment, or stay in town and do a job which doesn't measure up to their qualification.

Finally, fourth (luckily), local elites' parasitism is secured by external nature of the rent they receive in the form of federal budget subsidies. In general, limited access to attractive markets, monopolization of rent income by very small elite groups are the features typical of not only North-Caucasian regions⁵ in Russia. The North Caucasus is most vivid and notable illustration of these processes which constitute an additional factor of escalation of conflicts. On the one hand, federal subsidies make such elites independent from economic activity, promotion of investments, purchasing power in the Federal District. It appears that the world these elites live in doesn't touch the world of ordinary people, irrespective of traditional ties of blood which representatives of the two worlds may have. On the other hand, injustice of differentiation in ownership is perceived more keenly under the circumstances, because wealth is considered as illicitly earned in any case.

There is another essential conflict-sensitive factor in the Federal District which researchers call the 'vicious circle' or 'spiral of violence', when violence create violence as a conflict develops. Persistence of these processes is related to the following two principal factors. The first one is described in detail and given an in-depth analysis in the academic literature. "People don't become killers overnight. It requires emotional brutalization driven by fear for themselves, revenge for 'us', and dehumanization of their enemies who cease to be treated as humans"⁶. However, when such factors come into force on both sides of a conflict, they are to a large extent of self-sustained nature. Each act of violence leads to new victims, new martyrs, new reasons for hatred and revenge, thereby strengthening motivation towards acceleration of violence by those involved in the conflict and drawing new participants into the act.

⁵ Д. Норт, Д. Уоллис и Б. Вайнгаст в работе «Насилие и социальные порядки. Концептуальные рамки для интерпретации письменной истории человечества» (М.: Изд-во Института Гайдара, 2011) [Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, Barry R. Weingast. *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History* (M. Gaidar Institute Publishing House, 2011)] substantiate the necessity of such an organization of states, which they (the authors) qualify as natural states, when a state has no monopoly on violence, whose potential is shared among different elite groups. From their point of view, the only way to prevent active expressions of violence in such a situation is provide these elite groups with an incentive in the form of access to a rent which is of monopolistic nature. The rent is created by constraining economic and political competition, this is why this social order is characterized as limited-access order. Natural states have to pay their price for preventing violence. According to the authors, a natural state model is characterized by slowly growing economies sensitive to shocks, and a political order which is based on general public's common assent. Furthermore, relationships, which are organized through a variety of personal relations, prevail; not everyone is equal under the laws; and there is no protection of ownership within the framework of the model . However, the price to pay is considered inevitable. At the same time, the example of North Caucasus shows that actual situation is much more complicated, and in many cases, monopolistic appropriation of the rent encourages rather than prevents upsurges of violence.

⁶ Дерлугьян Г. Адепт Бурдьё на Кавказе: Эскизы к биографии в миросистемной перспективе. М.: Территория будущего, 2010. С. 39 - 40. [*Derlugyan G. Bourdieu adherent in the Caucasus: Sketches to a biography in the world system perspective*. M. Territoriya Buduschego, 2010, pp. 39 – 40]

“Who is to blame: Wahhabis, Wahhabis. Where did those Wahhabis come from? ...Here they kill people, destroy, they put cars on fire, dead bodies are sold here. ...This conflict started twenty years ago. ...There is a war going on right now. If young people: today my father may be killed, somebody’s else father may be killed, the same thing over and over, and people think of revenge, what to do. They would need arms. Where? Where to go? To the woods”. “People in the woods are driven to despair, because of what has been done – the permissible and the forbidden – with their honor and dignity. ...They have realized that those who did it to them represent this country, they will fight against this country and destroy everything it has. In other words, they don’t even realize what consequences it might lead to”.

Confrontation escalates alongside tightening forms of its manifestation, because a long-term conflict creates the so-called ‘culture of violence’ phenomenon. Acts of violence have increasingly been legitimized and becoming less selective. Furthermore, when a great deal of material and human resources have been engaged in a conflict, termination of such would somehow devalue the costs incurred by and victims of those involved. Preserved conflict allows a specific meaning to be assigned to what has been done as part of the conflict, thereby keeping the ball rolling in the future.

However, persistence of violence is based on more tangible grounds. A system of interests develops around the conflict, which is intended to receive a conflict-driven rent. The rent may be tangible or intangible (symbolic), payable to both small groups of the elite in power and counterelites. The use of conflict as asset⁷ may have different forms, including:

- ensuring consolidation of government authorities and the society to counteract the other party of conflict, thereby facilitating monopolization of power by a certain elite group;
- enhancing the role and significance of entities (defense and law enforcement agencies, regional government authorities, etc.) which are in charge of counteracting the other party of conflict, and increasing the volume of resources allocated to support the foregoing entities;
- making illegal profit from supplying weapons, human and other resources in support of a violent conflict;
- making illegal profit from disorganizing the monitoring and regulatory system in the regions involved in the conflict;
- it is possible to resolve issues and ensure protection of interests of certain powerful elite groups in the name of counteracting the other party of conflict⁸;
- it is possible to use the resources belonged to the other party to a conflict in order to resolve issues and ensure protection of interests of certain powerful elite groups (ironically, such cases are not rare too);
- it is possible that those in power may shift their failures – which have nothing to do with the conflict – to the other party to the conflict⁹.

⁷ Denis Sokolov was the first to seriously address the issue of using conflicts as asset in the North Caucasus. See: *Соколов Д. Кавказ: Конфликт как актив // Ведомости. 2009. 15 дек. [Sokolov D. The Caucasus as an asset // Vedomosti. December 15, 2009]*

⁸ It is not a secret for the population of the North Caucasian republics that the conflict has been commercialized and the parties thereto are making money on it.

“To be honest, no special services operate here, they are businessmen”. “They [Wahhabis] have no religion as such at all. Indeed, religion is a disguise, you understand. Most of these fools, guys, they do contract killing. Nothing but money, there isn't even the smell of faith here”.

⁹ In Dagestan, we were told with a biting irony that “a monument of the unknown Wahhabi should be set up to write everything off to him”.

The longer the conflict lasts, the more relevant, with all other conditions being equal, become interests related to the conflict-driven rent, and the harder is the way to overcome prevailing persistent violence.

2. Federal Policy in the North Caucasus of Russia

It wouldn't be true to say that the federal authorities didn't express concern about the current situation. The establishment of the North Caucasus Federal District (NCFD), adoption and initial implementation of the Strategy for Socio-economic Development of the NCFD until 2025, measures aimed at developing the tourist cluster within the framework of *OJSC Northern Caucasus Resorts* demonstrate federal government's efforts to get the situation back to normal in the Federal District. The strategic course is based on the following logics:

- the issues in the District are determined by depressive local economy, failure to ensure employment for the local population;
- therefore, the principal remedy is create jobs (according to the optimal option set forth in the NCFD Strategy, namely at least 400,000 jobs until 2025);
- employers are reluctant to invest amid poor investment environment and substantial exposure to risks;
- the remedy is provide massive government support, when the state assumes most of investors' risks to encourage the latter to take part in the development of the North-Caucasian economy.

We already made a thorough analysis of such risks in the paper titled *The North Caucasus: Modernization Challenge*¹⁰. Let's dwell briefly upon the subject matter once again, since the issue is very important.

There is no clear evidence that job creation is the cure-all which can drastically improve the situation. Indeed, unemployment constitutes a serious problem in some regions and may result in manifestation of extremism. However, these, above all, are remote, economically undeveloped areas. No investments will be made in there, and the Strategy provides no solution of their problems. The situation in other areas seems to be even more complicated.

"The extremism-related unemployment issue does exist in a way, but it doesn't in general. ...People have grown out of a habit of working. The garden is empty, nothing is there, it is aging; the ground, look, the last time they tilled the ground was years ago, and we are still talking about unemployment. ...Simply, we don't want to work".

Overall, this is not the case of unemployment. Most likely, physically demanding jobs are regarded as unattractive in modern society, especially for young people having access to higher education.

First of all, these young people are facing the issue of having no chances to find a job that suits their ambition based on the level of education and competence, lack of vertical means of social mobility¹¹. For instance, not all of those who graduate

¹⁰ See: *Стародубровская И.В., Зубаревич Н.В., Соколов Д.В., Интигринова Т.П., Миронова Н.И., Магомедов Х.Г.* Северный Кавказ: модернизационный вызов. М.: Дело, 2011. [*Starodubovskaya I. V., Zubarevich N. V., Sokolov D. V., Intigrinova T. P., Mironova N. I., Magomedov Kh. G.*, "The North Caucasus: Challenge of Modernization", М., Delo, 2011]

¹¹ This situation is reflected in what we were told: "as if there was ice above you and there is no way to break it" (неопубликованные полевые материалы Т. Интигриновой и Н. Мироновой, г. Избербаш, 2011 [unpublished field materials written by T. Intigrinova and N. Mironova, the town of Izberbash, 2011]); "a feeling as if all doors were closed".

from higher educational institutions wish to be employed at industrial enterprises. According to a student survey which was conducted in Makhachkala and Nalchik¹², a bit less than 20% of respondents have no such a life strategy at all, whereas about 30% (about 40% in Makhachkala) of respondents consider it possible, having no labor conditions requirements at all or having just minimum requirements (such as no physical labor). At the same time, more than 40% (about 50% in Nalchik) of respondents are ready to accept such a job as long as it meets their financial and qualification requirements, with an emphasis on financial terms in Makhachkala and professional skills in Nalchik.

Therefore, creation of new jobs itself may not resolve the problems which are typical of the North Caucasus as long as career development mechanisms keep depending on personal relations rather than soft skills and competence. The Strategy is not intended to deal with this 'sacred cow'. Furthermore, it is obvious that investors who do want to implement their projects with success, will have to incorporate themselves into the existing institutional environment and play by the rules set in the Federal District. Appearance of more prestige life strategies as part of new investment projects which allow one to prove oneself and whose availability will still be regulated by traditional clannish and corruption-driven mechanisms may further alienate a major part of young people, launch major protest and new conflicts.

In general, creation of jobs requiring highly qualified personnel, where knowledge and skills are key requirements for being engaged in economic activity, can be an option to cope with clannish principles of career advancement. However, the lack of culture and experience in this kind of activity would inevitably run into a shortage of such personnel. Engagement of workers from other districts is very likely to be the single way in resolving the issue. However, this creates the issue of 'local population' vs. 'aliens', extra competition for jobs, therefore leading to extra conflicts. The 'mountain skiing cluster' will inevitably encounter this contradiction if respective resorts designed as part of the cluster are constructed¹³.

At the same time, appearance of investors with claims to resources, including the land, may lead to new problems and contradictions. There is big difference between formal and informal institutions of land ownership and land utilization in the North Caucasus. In most cases, legally vacant parcels of land have long been divided among the inhabitants of a certain territory either according to what their forefathers owned (nearly a restitution), or per capita, or per household. Legal arrangements for land ownership haven't gained ground until recently, because the power of tradition and local community ensures as good, most often a better, protection of ownership as Russia's legislation does. Entrance of an external player would instantly change the situation. Collision of jurisdictions has entered its acute phase, sharpening the existing contradictions and creating new ones. The initial year of implementation of the NCFD Strategy shows clearly that these risks are by far not of speculative nature.

¹² The survey was conducted by researchers T. Intigrinova and N. Mironova from the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration. The author thanks his colleagues for the presented materials.

¹³ A series of world-class ski resorts are planned to be established as part of the NCFD, namely in Matlas, Dagestan, in Elbrus-Bezengi, Kabardino-Balkaria, in Arkhyz, Karachay-Cherkessia, and in Mamison, North Ossetia-Alania. In addition, there are plans to build up new resorts in Dzherkhansk and Sunzhesk Districts in the Republic of Ingushetia. Stagewise creation of more than 330,000 jobs is planned. Reportedly, construction is underway only in Arkhyz, Karachay-Cherkessia.

It is the Nogai District of Dagestan that is facing most difficult situation, where a sugar mill and refinery construction project was expected to be implemented.

The conflict potential was brewing in the district even before the decision on construction was made. Basically, this was related to the land issue.

The Nogai District constitutes a territory where the best part of the land (more than 60%) is classified as free-range animal husbandry land, meaning that it is utilized by those who moved in from highlands (the Dargwa people, or the Dargins, and the Avar people, or the Avars) rather than the native population. Furthermore, former highlanders utilize most of the local pasture ground other than free-range animal husbandry land. In fact, the Nogai people utilize a small part of district's land. It is the best part of this land (about 100,000 ha) that was expected to be utilized as part of the sugar mill and refinery construction project which the native population considered a threat from a number of angles.

First, as noted above, the lack of formal title to the parcels of land allocated for the project didn't mean they are not secured to the local population. Therefore, appearance of an investor was regarded as an attempt to take away what is left of district's land at the disposal of the Nogai people. All the more so, because of the prevailing opinion in the district that the sugar beet can't be cultivated due to weather conditions typical of the area.

Second, the construction project was regarded as a way to support further migration of highlanders to the district. Such conclusions were based on the assumption that the project provides for the creation of 15,000 new jobs. However, it is generally agreed that district's population can't provide so many workers. Moreover, there is no workers qualified for sugar beet growing among the local population, because it is not traditional economic activity for them. The need to engage extra labor force to the district was articulated by republic's government authorities as well. The flame was fueled by the fact that the project was initiated by the owner of a company located in the Khasavyurt District (in Dagestan) which is populated by the Avars.

Local people's protests achieved the objective – the sugar mill and refinery construction project was moved to the neighboring Tarumovsk District. However, the remaining delicate equilibrium was disturbed in the district, the population was mobilized politically, and the conflict started its own life apart from the investment project which was the trigger. Late in May 2011, a Nogai Population Congress¹⁴ was held in the town of Terekli-Mekteb, the heart of Nogai District of Dagestan. The Congress covered the sugar mill issue as well as more general political issues, namely the need to unite all the Nogai population within a single territorial unit, introduce direct elections of the head of the district, etc.

The decision to change the location of the construction project didn't work in terms of easing the tension in the Nogai District, where the confrontation between the population and the district administrative authorities has been accelerating, a list of political requirements (now the opposition is railing against party list voting in the election of district representative body) growing in size. According to mass media, "the district itself has been turning into a mature conflict zone"¹⁵.

¹⁴ Dagestan, Chechnya, Karachay-Cherkessia and the Stavropol Territory, as well as the Astrakhan Region, are the principal areas which are densely inhabited by the Nogai people. There are Nogai national districts, in Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia.

¹⁵ Сухов И. Ногайский мятеж. В самом большом районе Дагестана требуют беспартийных выборов // Московские новости. 2011. 5 сентября [Sukhov I. The Nogai insurgency. The major district in Dagestan

No less serious risks are related to the appearance of a huge extra resource in the form of public support of investment projects in the Federal District whose elite are after a major rent income and culture of violence has deep roots. Stakes are therefore climbing. Displacement and discrediting of potential competitors to play this card in addressing political issues have appeared on the agenda. The analysis made by the authors of *The North Caucasus: Modernization Challenge* showed that the first victims of such a struggle can be those centers of ‘modernization from below’ which were established independently without government major support and survived in such an adverse institutional environment, but now can be regarded as competitors of new major public projects. Such a victim, a well-known ski resort at the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus, was found. A terrorist attack took place in the Republic of Kabardino Balkariya on February 18, 2011. Three tourists were killed and two were wounded¹⁶. A counter-terrorism operation (CTO) was introduced in the republic on February 20 of the same year. The tourist inflow to the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus totally stopped after the introduction of CTO¹⁷. The situation constituted a serious threat for owners of hotels and other facilities within the local tourist infrastructure, most of which had to repay their bank loans issued for business development. Employees as well as small-sized businesses, in particular manufacturers and distributors of promotional products, found themselves on the edge of hunger. Unknown entities started to buy parcels of land at fire-sale prices. The CTO regime continued for more than eight months and wasn’t cancelled until November 5, 2011 in the Elbrus District and partially in the Baksan District.

As a result, tourist development prospects suffered most in the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus and, maybe, across the entire North Caucasus. It is too early to measure the size of potential losses. Only short-term outcomes are known. The resort was occupied as little as 15% in the mid-December. The number of tourists in the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus halved in the ‘peak season’ (New Year holidays) vs. the preceding year. Economic losses have been growing, because of incurring expenses, local entrepreneurs don’t want to run a risk even through inflation-related increase of prices. Obviously, it takes time and substantial costs to recover the image of the resort.

Whatever the terrorist attack against tourists would be – an episode of competition between elite groups for domination within the ‘mountain skiing cluster’, an attempt of extremists to upset the development plans in the North Caucasus, or an element of the turf war in the Republic of Kabardino Balkariya¹⁸ –

demands nonparty elections // Moscow News. September 5, 2011].
mn.ru/blog_caucasus/20110905/304671811.html.

¹⁶ As matter of fact, the shooting of tourists on February 18 was only the beginning of a series of terrorist attacks in the district which are aimed at undermining the tourist business in the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus. The pylon of “Azau-Stary Krugozor” cable tramway was destroyed in the following night, a bomb car was discovered in the Cheget Valley.

¹⁷ We happened to visit the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus when the CTO was conducted. The picture was terrible on the outside: packs of hungry dogs, billboard remnants waving in the wind, and there was no a single person there.

¹⁸ Experts have made different hypotheses. For instance, Director of *Medium Orient* Information Agency Islam Tekushev assumes that terrorist attacks were initiated by those who seek to unseat President of Kabardino-Balkaria Arsen Kanokov: “Nobody knows when clans and local criminals represented by the Kabardino-Balkarian terrorist underworld began to work hard to destabilize the situation in order to achieve the common goal of unseating Kanokov. ...Those who ordered this were quite aware of that shooting tourists in a federal-grade ski resort visited by tourists from other Russia’s regions and European countries is not in the list of acceptable risks defined by Russian elites in the Caucasus” (*Текушев И. Капкан для Канокова // Ислам на Северном Кавказе: история и современность*. Прага: Medium Orient, 2011. С. 178 – 179 [*Tekushev I. A trap for Kanokov // Islam in the North Caucasus: History and Modern Times*. Prague: Medium Orient, 2011. pp. 178 – 179]). There is a widespread view in the Republic that this upsurge of violence is directly related to the struggle for control over the tourist business.

it seriously questions feasibility of the selected strategy. It is obvious that successful development of the tourist cluster, let alone the outcomes of the Strategy in general, would remain doubtful unless totally new approaches towards security arrangements are introduced in the region. No such approaches have been offered to date.

For instance, not a single alternative option was offered vs. the hardline strong-arm solution in response to the upsurge of violence in Kabardino Balkariya. As always, the solution included gross human rights violation; murder of innocent people allegedly accused of being militants; damages to the property owned by peaceful population. Repressions against ‘those who pray’, in other words, go to mosque and practice religious observance, were enhanced again. The mosques were empty in the Elbrus District when the CTO was underway, because people were afraid to go there. The Memorial Society provides an illustration of unsuccessful initiative of the Kabardino Balkariyan administrative authorities to involve militants’ families to help their children go back home. A video appeal in which mothers called upon their children to stop the civil war was followed by another one, from which it appeared that the sons of two women who participated in the summer video appeal were killed before their mothers’ very eyes during a special operation conducted in the town of Baksan¹⁹. It is these situations that lead to the ‘vicious circle of violence’, when sorrow and death of innocent people, most of whom are relatives, friends, acquaintances, strengthen the feeling of revenge in combating terrorism and provoke active warfare instead of curtailing it.

In addition, there are more potential risks the NCFD Strategy is exposed to: the ‘corruption markup’ may increase in response to big money inflow into the district; unstable results of investment projects relying upon the administrative leverage rather than secured guarantees of ownership protection (at least within a single jurisdiction). However, it seems to be more reasonable to talk about potential measures which can enhance the effectiveness of federal government’s strategic course in the North Caucasus of Russia.

3. Is there a way out?

The period of collapse of the traditional society, active urbanization, economic changes is hard and painful for any kind of society. According to researchers, “...transformation of the society was painful even for western nations. They went through almost four hundred years of political and often bloody revolutions, dominance of terror, genocide, terrible religious wars, rural decay, major social cataclysms, worker exploitation, spiritual weakness, and complete loneliness in new urban agglomerations. What we see today is the same violence, cruelty, revolutions and lack of guidance in developing countries going through a much more difficult process of transition towards a modern society”²⁰. One should realize that high level of violence at this stage is, to a certain degree, unavoidable. It doesn’t mean, however, that there is no way whatsoever to influence (both positively and adversely) the situation. Regretfully, the attempts which have been

¹⁹ Бюллетень Правозащитного центра «Мемориал»: Ситуация в зоне конфликта на Северном Кавказе: оценка правозащитников. Лето 2011 года / Правозащитный центр «Мемориал» // Кавказский Узел. 2011. 18 октября [Memorial Human Rights Center Bulletin: The situation in the conflict zone in the North Caucasus: human rights experts’ assessment. The summer of 2011/ Memorial Human Rights Center // The Caucasian Knot. October 18, 2011]. www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/194174.

²⁰ Армстронг К. Ислам: краткая история от начала до наших дней. М.: Эксмо, 2011. С. 197 – 198. [Karen Armstrong, Islam: A Short History. M. Eksmo, 2011. pp. 197 – 198]

made over the past 1.5 – 2 decades to address such a situation resemble pouring gasoline into a fire. Let's check into measures which could work in the opposite direction.

NCFD's strategic course

The authors of *The North Caucasus: Modernization Challenge* proposed approaches towards promoting modernization in the North Caucasus as an alternative to those included into the NCFD Strategy. However, it seems to be late to make changes to the set up strategic course today, when the implementation of the Strategy is moving into top gear. Therefore, there is a much more moderate objective to be achieved, i.e. having taken for granted the current policy, offer measures which can ease conflictability as the policy is being underway. There are two groups of such measures which are worth describing.

First, the NCFD Strategy should be supplemented with information campaign and public opinion consideration requirements to proposed projects. Furthermore, criteria for refusal to provide public support of projects which might have most adverse effect on social stability in the Federal District should be defined. For instance, it seems to be reasonable to totally deny proposals which provide for removing substantial areas of fertile land from economic turnover (e.g., as a result of their flooding) on the assumption that such projects, while destroying traditional life strategies without offering new alternatives, may provoke marginal forms of extremism in the region. Moreover, in-depth consultations with local communities and their leaders are needed in cases when projects implemented as part of the NCFD Strategy may have an adverse effect on competitiveness and prospects of forms of economic activity developing in the Federal District. Such consultations are intended to cover up contradictions of interests and make sure that the existing 'growth points' are connected to projects supported 'from above'.

Second, the NCFD Strategy should be supplemented with mechanisms supporting 'modernization from below', with allowance for assistance in the implementation of projects as part of local communities, which are intended to promote sustainability and enhance the effectiveness of their economic activity. Such projects have a special feature as compared with those supported as part of the Strategy for the time being. In particular, with regard to such projects,:

- A minimum project cost must be lowered;
- Assistance must be provided to local communities in developing projects;
- Provision of mechanisms of institutional control and local community's (or a group of its members) liability for project implementation should be made;
- More adequate forms of support must be used with regard to such projects;
- Forms of conveying support to project participants, thereby excluding or at least minimizing the value detraction (which seems to be the greatest challenge), must be developed

In developing such mechanisms, it is reasonable to use the practice of international financial institutions which have gained both positive and negative experience in implementing similar projects related to local communities' activity.

Combating terrorism

Counter-terror activity includes a strong-arm component in any case, whose role, however, differs largely between countries counteracting the terrorist threat. Researchers highlight two types of the counter-terror policy:

1) some countries use strong-arm measures to destroy the terrorist infrastructure in conjunction with reforms aimed at curing diseases of the society which encourage people to support or accept violence and extremism;

2) other countries basically rely upon repressions rather than reforms²¹.

Russian's policy in the North Caucasus can easily be attributed to the latter. Obviously, widespread use of long history strong-arm methods against terrorist underworld has demonstrated both its advantages and weaknesses, and costs. It appears that such methods show too many weaknesses:

- no substantial success has been achieved in narrowing the scale of terrorism and violence in the Federal District;
- people's discontent with the incumbent government authorities has been growing against the backdrop of both ungrounded repressions and lack of impressive results in combating terrorism;
- all of the confronting parties have been involved in a widespread practice of using 'conflict as asset';

Furthermore, speaking of potential alternatives, it should be taken into account that the key factor which encourages a widespread use of strong-arm methods in the North Caucasus is a tiny difference between 'extremist (terrorist)' or 'extremist sympathizer' from a) the person in opposition to incumbent government authorities, irrespective of his/her views and methods of confrontation; b) the believer who strictly observes the ceremonial part of Islam; c) the follower of a specific dimension of Islam, *Salaf*. There is no way to go beyond the strong-arm option without having a well-defined differentiation between acts of violence which violate Russia's Constitution and Laws, and adherence to certain political or religious views. There is vague division between those who may be potential negotiating partners and those against whom military actions are quite reasonable and legitimate.

Therefore, abolition of 'antiwahhabite' and similar regional laws could be a logical initial step towards normalization of the situation. The term *Wahhabism* is no good not because it doesn't fit in self-identification of radical Islamists but it simultaneously refers to the follower of a certain religious dimension and the person within an extremist group engaged in illegal acts of violence. Such a confusion, which is unacceptable in concept, is a widespread view, even in the public conscience. There is no doubt that it is supported by certain groups interested in using the conflict as asset, because this allows for strong-arm methods against ideological opponents and even competitors. This is why this step is so difficult. At the same time, it could become a serious symbolic act which makes a division between a new stage of the counter-terror policy and those overreactions and mistakes committed during the previous hardline, strong-arm course.

In this paper the author will make a clear division between counter-terror problems and the national policy towards radical religious ideology. This subparagraph is only devoted to the former.

The North-Caucasian republics have begun to realize that strong-arm solution of the problem has no prospects. Some of the republics are making attempts to

²¹ See: *Crenshaw M. Thoughts on Relating Terrorism to Historical Contexts // Terrorism in Context / M. Crenshaw (ed.). Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995. C. 22.*

encourage militants to leave the woods and adapt them to peaceful life, including the use of family ties. Perhaps, it is the Republic of Dagestan that has made most serious attempts to break the vicious circle of violence. A *Commission for the assistance in adapting to peaceful life of the persons who decide to stop their terrorist and extremist activities in the Republic of Dagestan* under the President of the Republic of Dagestan was established in November 2010. The Commission is headed by Vice prime minister of the Republic of Dagestan Rizvan Kurbanov. The Commission also includes heads of defense and law enforcement agencies of the Federal District, heads of various ministries, representatives of the civil society and religious community in Dagestan. Furthermore, Salafit leader Abbas Kebedov is a member of the Commission. The Commission is intended to make it easier to leave ‘the woods’ for those who want to give up their resistance activity as members of illegal opposition groups and lay down arms. Last year the Commission considered several dozens of cases on militants and their accomplices, some of which were accused of supporting armed opposition groups, others gave up resistance during special operations, and some of them (a small group though) did get back from the woods.

At the same time, since the inception of the Commission it has become clear that peaceful agreements is great challenge. For instance, the Commission identified the barriers interfering with the peace-making process at the regional level alone. It is related to at least two factors:

- first, there is no well-defined legal framework for the Commission. Unlike many countries facing the issue of violence and seeking a civil peace, where such bodies are very common, this approach is a big novelty for Russia which needs to be comprehended from the legal point of view. Therefore, the principles of its legitimization need to be well-defined;
- second, a mixed position of the defense and law enforcement agencies in this process. On the one hand, the heads of such agencies are members of the Commission who take part in making decisions on the destiny of militants who want to give up their militant activity. On the other hand, Commission’s decisions are by no means mandatory for the agencies, at least from the official point of view.

Therefore, the Commission enjoys little confidence²², conflicts are reproduced within its framework²³ slowing down the process of settlement.

²² For instance, this can be supported by the point of view of religious opposition leader Abbas Kebedov: “It should be realized that no real militant from ‘the woods’ has passed through the Commission to date”. The point is that we don’t have the required powers, today we simply ask respective authorities to take into account that a certain person has passed through the Commission. That’s it. ...For instance, I don’t wish to submit to the Commission the case of any person who approaches me, because I can’t guarantee that such person will be subject to safety and observation of laws. A militant may go through the Commission today and be killed tomorrow. Who is going to assume liability for his death?” (Ахмеднабиев А. Кебедов: в Дагестане через комиссию по адаптации не прошел ни один реальный боевик // Кавказский узел. 2011. 11 декабря. [Akhmednabiyev A., Kebedov A.. No real militant has passed through the Commission in Dagestan // The Caucasian Knot. December 11, 2011] dagestan.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/197442/).

²³ It appears to be the reason for tough comments made by the Chairman of the Commission after a meeting held on February 21, 2012: “The Chairman of the Commission considers wrong the position of certain representatives of law enforcement agencies who believe that strong-arm methods is the only way to deal with those engaged in militant activity. According to the Chairman, internal affairs agencies shouldn’t rely only on strong-arm solution of the militant issue, but also seek pacific settlement at negotiations with militants who want to lay down arms. According to Rizvan Kurbanov, those who refuse to negotiate with militants and prefer arms to dialogue, don’t fit in defense and law enforcement agencies” (Ризван Курбанов: «Тем, кто не согласен вести переговоры с боевиками, тем, кто предпочитает диалогу оружие, не место в силовых структурах» // RIA Dagestan. 2012. 24 февраля. [Rizvan Kurbanov: “Those who refuse to negotiate with militants and prefers arms to dialogue, don’t

A solution could be found in supporting at the federal level of initiatives towards easing of confrontation and adaptation to peaceful life of former militants which emerge in the North-Caucasian regions. Furthermore, well-known federal-level political figures should act as key persons in the peace-making process. Federal government's engagement in such processes as mediator and guarantor of observation of achieved agreements can enhance legitimacy and sustainability of the dialogue, ensure better coordination between the defense and law enforcement agencies and the objectives of peaceful settlement in the Federal District. In addition, such activity could change, at least partly, the image of the federal government itself in the eyes of the North-Caucasian people, thereby making radical views less appealing to the local population.

Engagement of local communities in the combat against terrorism is another option of new approaches towards solution of the problem. "Strong-arm methods" are virtually accompanied by the use of the collective responsibility mechanism. Those who live in local communities – which are either the homeland or the battlefield for militants – suffer in most cases, irrespective of whether they do or don't belong to illegal armed groups²⁴. This inevitably strengthens the effect of 'vicious circle of violence', but simultaneously creates conditions for negotiations as part of a 'nonzero game' (i.e. when both parties win): discontinuance of repressive measures against local communities 'in exchange' for active work with young people with a view to preventing them from running away to the "woods". Obviously, such negotiations are extremely important too: lack of mutual confidence between negotiating parties; not every local community is able to handle the situation; special efforts are needed to get defense and law enforcement agencies engaged in the process. Nevertheless, such practice has been in use on occasions.

The only practical example of such a process which the author herself happened to witness was a meeting of the Sogratl Society (a powerful social organization which represent the inhabitants of Sogratl Village of the Gunib District in Makhachkala) with a new administrative authorities of the Gunib District. The meeting represented an open discussion about the need to normalize the situation around the village by relieving the pressure of defense and law enforcement agencies upon the local population. The administration of the Society emphasized the need to revise and update the 'list of suspects' and delist those whose links with the militants is not proved. Furthermore, there should be no more talking about conducting special operations in the village. In return, the leaders of the Society promised to activate the work with local young people, counteracting any attempts of the latter to heat up the situation. The leaders of the district responded constructively to the proposals and began to negotiate specific procedures which might help implement the proposals. If this interaction keeps developing, it would become an example of 'best practice', and the experience could be propagated on a larger scale.

Islam and national policy

fit in defense and law enforcement agencies // RIA Dagestan. February 24, 2012] www.riadagestan.ru/news/2012/2/24/132816).

²⁴ Some of those who live in the vicinity of the Mt. Elbrus quoted with great indignation the phrase of a high-ranking federal government official: "You will be starving for as long as the very last Wahhabi remains alive!"

Potential alternatives have been worked out in a surprisingly weak manner amid prevalence of strong-arm methods in counteracting religious fundamentalism. Generally, it means counting on the traditional Islam, restricting external impact on Russia's Muslims (in particular through the development and standardization of religious education within the country), strengthening ideological activity. Due to poor knowledge of the basics of Islam as well as ideological influence by Arab and other Muslim countries such approaches proceed from the premise that counteracting the radical Islam is basically of ideological nature.

However, recent researches show that in this case ideology serves as the cover for a much deeper protest of social nature. Three groups of sources of such protest can be distinguished.

1. Ongoing competition between radical Islam advocates and official Islamic bodies for the right to determine which Islam is 'true'. This right is currently being monopolized by incumbent spiritual bodies, and it is competition for resources rather than doctrinal beliefs that is likely to play at least the same, or even bigger, role in the tough struggle with opponents.

"Tension arises when the status of priests is impinged. It has nothing to do with dogmatism".

With regard to the official religion, many people are discontent with clerical leaders' hypocrisy, private selfishness, subordination to government authorities and collaboration with defense and law enforcement agencies²⁵. Neither are they satisfied with the way the hierarchic social structure, subordinate status of believers as part of the Tarikatist Islam²⁶ (they "wash Sheikh's feet and drink the water") are copied in the religious domain.

2. The issue of social differentiation, enrichment of the rich and impoverishment of the poor. Not accepted is the comprehension that money is substitution for morals and religion – "God is referred to money for the most", "The bribe is a gift of God" – which has been gaining ground in the North Caucasus. Perception of illicit nature of wealth is supported by widespread corruption in the Federal District. In this context, Islam is set as social solidarity ideal against greed for gain:

"People must spare *zakah* [poor-due] from their wealth, it is obligatory. It serves to prevent hatred, envy between people. Islam, Sharia law. And when people spare their money they help each other, there is brotherhood, unity, solidarity, not envy and hatred. This is the law of Allah the Almighty..."

²⁵ For instance, it is noted in the case of Kabardino-Balkaria that "Those in opposition accused and still accuse Russia's Central Spiritual Governance for Muslims of being loyal to the government authorities in Dagestan which in their point of view is disastrous for Islam, and of that the Muslim Spiritual Authority fails to protect Muslims' interests against the government authorities, and the respective leaders fail to follow the orthodox Islam" (Роцин М., Лункин Р. Мусульмане в Кабардино-Балкарской Республике // Ислам на Северном Кавказе: история и современность. Прага: Medium Orient, 2011. С. 62 [Roschin M., Lunkin R. Muslims in the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria // Islam in the North Caucasus: History and modern times. Prague. Medium Orient, 2011. P. 62]). In the mid-2000s, the Head of Spiritual Governance for Muslims in the Republic of North Ossetia-Alania failed to resolve the issues faced by the republican Muslim community, because in particular "most of the Muslims in the republic suspected him of corruption and misappropriation of the assets allocated by various Muslim foundations to support Islam in Ossetia" (Роцин М. Мусульмане в Северной Осетии // Там же. С. 84 [Roschin M. Muslims in the North Ossetia // ibid. p. 84]).

²⁶ Sufism (tarikatism) is the mystical dimension in Islam, which in particular provides for absolute obedience of adherents (Murids) to their spiritual leader (sheikh), the holder of Mystical Knowledge.

3. There is non-acceptance of the system of power as a whole. A good illustration of this is given in a paper about radical Islam written by a young Dagestani Salafist. In his description of general features of ‘Wahhabism’ which look appealing for young people, namely mass unemployment, economic crisis, lack of any well-defined national policy towards religion, he added the following sources of discontent in the case of Dagestan:

- Enormous level of bribery and corrupt practices among government authorities
- The government don’t care about the people;
- All tangible and other resources are concentrated in the hands of a small elite group and there is no power of law whatsoever in the republic.

He believes that “because of all this, not only young people, but also the rest of the society are forced to turn their back on the people in power in search for purity and justice, which they do find in Islam”²⁷.

If one accepts such view of the sources of radical religious ideology, issues of ideological counteraction should be considered in a different way. Supporting the traditional, ‘formal’ Islam can hardly be regarded as efficient antidote, because most of young people see links with the same government which generates protest moods. It is important to offer opportunities for free choice as part of those religious dimensions which comply with the laws, regulations, and the Constitution of the Russian Federation, and incite no violence. This makes radically different the role played by the state in the process, reducing the principles of national policy towards religion to the following provisions:

- Clear division between the area of religious ideology (where the secular state remains neutral) and the area of political extremism (where the secular state must protect individuals’ and proprietary rights);
- Positioning state institutions as guarantor of the freedom of faith within the framework defined in the Constitution of the Russian Federation;
- State support of a dialogue between different dimensions in Islam.

It is quite obvious that actual realization of such a practice may lead to massive problems, and very high barriers can be found on the way towards changing the paradigm in this field. At the same time, it could play a substantial positive role in normalizing the situation in the Federal District along with changing the paradigm of the counter-terror policy.

However, a linear, non-differentiate approach towards the ‘external impact’ is counterproductive too. For instance, Turkish lyceums in the Caucasus where according to unanimous assessments children received high-quality and basically secular education, were shut down in the name of combating extremism²⁸. I

²⁷ Цит. по: *Абдулагатов З.М.* Исламское сознание в глобализационных процессах: проблемы адаптации. Махачкала: ИИАЭ ДНЦ РАН, 2010. С. 123 [A quote from *Abdulagatov Z.M.* Islamic mindset in globalization processes: Adaptation issues. Makhachkala: The institute of history, archeology and ethnography of the Dagestan Research Center under the Russian Academy of Science, 2010. p. 123.]

²⁸ Let’s provide a very typical quote: “To attract and recruit young people in the North Caucasus, over more than two decades recruiters from extremist organizations have been using two principal information and ideological models and sort of two geopolitical projects dedicated to the future in the region: 1) the Arab and Wahhabite, aka Panislamic Project, and 2) the Panturkish or Turkish Project. In fact, however, there is no choice at all, because both modifications have long been used to achieve US goals, namely NATO and the Big Caucasus Project”²⁸ (*Добаев И.П., Мурклинская Г.А., Сухов А.В., Ханбабаев К.М.* Радикализация исламских движений в Центральной Азии и на Северном Кавказе. Ростов на Дону: Изд-во СКНЦ ВШ ЮФУ, 2010. С. 125 [*Dobayev I. P., Murklinskaya G. A., Sukhov A. V., Khanbabayev K. M.* Radicalization of Islamic movements in the

hesitate to make the flat assertion about whether the Turkish version of Islam, with certain dimensions being tolerant and close to the modern world's values, could at least to some extent become an ideological counterbalance to the radical fundamentalism following the 'Arab-Wahhabite' doctrine. It is quite obvious, however, that the lack of serious analysis of the effects and risks related to certain decisions which can have an impact on the ideological situation in the Federal District, simplicity and uniformity of the approaches in use (e.g., all Wahhabis are considered extremists, all foreign centers are regarded as being basically engaged in subversive activities, etc.) fed upon the conspiracy theory and constant search for enemies isn't the best principal policy to pursue in such a difficult situation.

Finally, one may ask whether the secular ideology is able to counteract the radical Islam? It seems to be able under certain circumstances, provided that the North-Caucasian elite (above all, young people) follow the path towards secular, western values through available modern educational programs making it possible for individuals to feel themselves a part of a free and modern world, especially if such programs become a 'vertical mobility' channel bypassing the existing clannish and clientele relations. The special presidential initiative *Human Resources Reserve of the North Caucasus* may be an option to follow this way.

As part of the initiative, young people from the North-Caucasian republics selected against clearly defined criteria (an age requirement, e.g., up to 40 years, should be established) could be granted access to elite educational programs at top higher educational establishments located in the European part of Russia (Moscow, St. Petersburg) where they can:

- Learn foreign languages at a good level;
- Have access to modern administrative knowledge and practices (both in business and state administration);
- Have an opportunity to participate in various study tours in foreign countries;
- Broaden their humanitarian education, perception towards various nations and cultures.

Education should take place in multinational groups consisting of representatives of different nationalities from the North-Caucasian republics and provide for intensive communication with their peers (agemates) from other regions.

It is obvious that such a program is unlikely to produce instant results in terms of the currently prevailing ideology in the society. Nevertheless, it may have a very serious impact. Those participants in the initiative who decide not to return to the North-Caucasian region will be able to find themselves in other Russia's regions and territories and compete on equal ground with those who live there. Those who decide to return to the region will have a chance to take administrative offices in their native republics, join leading business entities, and their mindset will be directly influencing ongoing processes in the Caucasus. And, finally, it is crucially important to have a new community of young ambitious people from the North-Caucasian republics united by the common practice of adaptation to unfamiliar circumstances, intellectual growth, intensive and creative intercommunication. Such a community can't fail to engage in resolving the pressing issues faced by the North Caucasus which they will view through the obtained intellectual equipment,

Central Asia and the North Caucasus). It is obvious that the fear of 'global conspiracy' prevents from at least noticing the fundamental difference between the Turkish position and the so-called 'Arab and Wahhabite Project'.

analyzing ongoing processes in a more global perspective, having wider perception of players' incentives, thereby extending the range of potential solutions.

Factoring in that radicalization of Islam is also supported and triggered by a generally negative attitude towards and discrimination of the Caucasians in Russia's regions outside the North-Caucasian republics, and stronger division into 'us' vs. 'them' is typical of both parties to the conflict, makes it necessary to activate a policy of making a more adequate image of the Caucasus and the Caucasian population in the Russian public conscience. A few dimensions of such policy could be suggested here.

First, demonization of Islam as a religion in the public conscience should be counteracted. Starting a serious discussion to the point of the issue is the best way to cope with such fears. A forum is needed for square discussion about Islam as a religion and ideology, how it responds to different challenges, with the participation of well-known Islamic religious leaders representing different points of view. Such a forum could play a dual role. On the one hand, it can provide introduction of Islam free from conventional clichés to the general public, representatives of different ideologies and religious confession, on the other hand, make it possible for the Muslims to obtain fuller information on a variety of views and dimensions in Islam. Factoring in these needs, a regular TV program could initially be an ideal form for the forum which subsequently could be diversified in other media and non-media formats. It is obvious, however, that it is a very delicate issue amid the current situation with the Islamic clergy in Russia and its internal conflicts. Therefore, the task should be achieved as part of a broad dialogue with all stakeholders.

Second, a positive image of North-Caucasian products, above all agricultural ones, as well as different types of craft should be made. Different forms can be used here. For a start, fairs of North-Caucasian products may be organized in large cities presenting respective 'brand names', e.g., Levash cabbage, Kakhun tomatoes, Magarbkent date plum, Andi meat, Gatsatlin arms, Balkhar painted clay toys, Cherkess knitted fabric, etc. Later, such fairs could be organized on a regular basis and facilitate finding solution for not only image-making tasks, but also purely economic objectives: provide more intensive access of Caucasian products to the markets in the Central Russia, Siberia and other regions.

Finally, third, an explicitly negative perception towards the Caucasus and the Caucasians should be changed by providing more adequate information about current events, population, cultural and political life, customs and traditions in the region. However, reliable information is regarded as the mandatory but insufficient precondition for achieving this objective. Such information should be supplemented with making realistic images in order to supersede prevailing clichés and defy stereotypes. For instance, an art project can be set up to cope with the 'Transcaucasian national' cliché and show realistic images of the Caucasians (photos, sketches etc.) at different forums. This could help revive the Caucasian theme in the art depicting the Caucasians in more varied formats, not just terrorists in crime and action movies.

Land reform

Logically, everything that concerns land reform should be considered as part of the 'economic block' of proposals. This theme, however, deserves a special

attention, since it carries so many ambiguous connotations and is subject to such a serious discussions. There are quite opposite perceptions of the effect of land reform on conflictability in the North Caucasus: some consider it a serious step towards normalization of the situation, others forecast a social fallout at the initial stages of the reform. The author tends towards the former and will try to substantiate her position.

Speaking of definitions, in this case, the land reform is referred to as a set of the following measures:

- Complete demarcation of parcels of land between federal, regional and local levels of power in the North-Caucasian districts;
- Finish the allotment of land shares in the areas where it is uncompleted or was not even started;
- Lift the moratorium on land turnover;
- Create as favorable as possible conditions for official registration of private land ownership;
- Address the issues related to the status of lands whose actual utilization fails to meet their official designation (first of all, free-range animal husbandry land).

What kind of arguments are used against the idea of land reform? Let's discuss the principal ones.

1. *There is no sense to allot land shares amid land scarcity in the Caucasus, because such shares will be unreasonably very small.* There is no hard links between the scope of land ownership and actual land utilization. The land reform experience shows that in the regions when utilization of large parcels of land is economically feasible, concentration occurs anyway, in particular through land share leasing. Unlikewise, in the regions when such utilization is economically unfeasible, a large land owner (holder) can lease out small parcels of land. In general, harmonization of land ownerships, with all other things being equal, should enhance the effectiveness of utilization of land parcels and finally determine actual scales of land scarcity in the North Caucasus which are currently can't be subject to a single-value estimation²⁹.

2. *Permission to purchase and sale land against the backdrop of Caucasian traditions treating the land not simply as economic asset but also the basis of life will further drastically aggravate rather than ease conflicts.* The land turnover moratorium failed to prevent purchase and sale of land in practice. Title to land is legally obtained through long-term leasehold rights, in which case a major part of parcels of land are appropriated illegally through bribes and actually supported by law enforcement and security authorities. Uncertainty in ownership creates a situation which inspires abuses in this field, including allotment of the same parcel of land to different land users, unjustified manipulations with land rentals, etc. In the absence of land shares and with administrative control over land recourses the local population have no benefits from land transfer, whereas the entire benefit is

²⁹ Conclusion about prevailing land scarcity in the North Caucasus are often based on historical studies which show severe competition for land in the region. At the same time, active migration processes and urbanization in modern times have a substantial and multidirectional effect on the situation, thereby making it even more controversial:

“Land scarcity. Yes, land scarcity too. There is sufficient land, and there is a lot of waste land too”.
However, there is no way to obtain the real picture unless land ownership becomes clearly defined.

appropriated in the form of administrative markup³⁰. At the same time, with land shares in place, the better registered is land ownership, the higher is compensation to local population as part of unavoidable ‘fencing’ processes³¹.

3. *Cross-ownership of land, multiple land-related conflicts create a situation in which any attempts to streamline ownership relations through changes in the existing fragile balance of interests may lead to a social fallout.* This argument seems to support land reform as such but oppose any rapid and uniform implementation of the same. Indeed, the reform should be implemented consistently and gradually, legally enshrining duly concluded agreements which finally may be concluded by all stakeholders under originally equivocal land ownerships, encouraging them to reach such agreements and searching for ‘nonzero game’ options. For instance, in the case of free-range animal husbandry land in Dagestan, an option of replacement of the land entitlement of migrants from highlands – their houses and farms on this land are illegal for the time being – with their waiver of a part of the land in favor of lowlanders suffering from land scarcity can technically be considered (again, not as universal option). Land reform may be postponed on certain territories where cross-ownership of land was formed as a result of deportation and subsequent return of the repressed nationalities. In general, however, an option of initiating land reform seems to be more preferable to preservation of *status quo*, because the current situation is unstable, bearing a high conflict potential tending to increase with occasional spikes of violence and may result in major disorders.

There is no shared vision in the North-Caucasian republics with regard to land reform. Some believe it is not the right time to address land reform issues, especially in the case of free-range animal husbandry lands. Others believe that lack of reforms is the principal cause of the current land-related conflicts:

“Land issues occurred here because ...the Regulation [which refers to land allotment] of the Russian Government of that time failed to be executed in Dagestan”. “It is a blunder that [land] ownership was delayed over 50 years. It is a huge mistake”. Moreover, arguments in favor of the reform seem to be more forcible now than in the 1990s: “Had it been implemented in Dagestan, ...there would have been a big war. ...Because there is no awareness of private land ownership, although it was before the revolution, but too many things happened in the Soviet period, so the issue passed to the history. ...However, today we begin to realize that it can’t be this way any longer. Today we realize that with private land ownership all around we should have some kind of owners too. Even the fact that land demarcation has been left uncompleted has an adverse effect, we have squandering, inefficient utilization. ... If there was private land ownership, the issue wouldn’t turn up at all. It has a serious impact on ensuring socio-political stability in the republic. I think we should follow this way, slowly...”.

In practice, however, the struggle for ownership is an integral part of many land-related conflicts. Let’s provide a few practical examples which clearly demonstrate how land ownership can change the state of the parties to a conflict and whose interests are protected in the first place through land reform protraction.

³⁰ It generates reasonable protest among the population. For instance, a major part of the land in a district in Kabardino-Balkaria was transferred to a business entity from Karachay-Cherkessia which triggered resentment among the population of the district: “When it comes to the allotment of land shares they say there is not enough land, but they instantly find sufficient land for business purposes.” The local people referred to the practice in the Stavropol Territory where land shares were allotted and the situation radically improved (they transfer the meat to Cherkessk, leaving the dung for us // *Gazeta Yugra*. September 1, 2011. p. 2).

³¹ This conclusion was made in particular on the basis of the studies conducted by Denis Sokolov in the Stavropol Territory of Russia.

During a land-flood period local authorities at the Untsukulsk District, the Republic of Dagestan, did their best to prevent in every possible way official registration of land ownership:

“When the land was allotted, a lot of people wished to register land ownership ...on legal grounds. ...I know 100–150 persons who wished to register ownership of these land parcels. However, the head of... He didn’t let the people register land ownership. Those whose land was flooded, their land was underwater, don’t have the green paper [in ordinary parlance it refers to the color of a document – the certificate of land ownership – in the North Caucasus]”.

“State owned farms held it in the Soviet period. Later, during perestroika,... the land was allotted among the people who became owners. In fact, it was some kind of unregistered ownership, there was no registration on paper whatsoever. And there was no way to obtain the green paper like we do now”.

Illustrative is the following dialogue:

– If the land was privately owned, your position would be far much stronger?

– Indeed, there would be no problems. This is why there was no private land ownership here, because if it was, no one could be dispossessed of his land. This is why it was not here”.

In those few cases when land ownership was registered, land owners found themselves in a much better situation during the land-flood. For instance, our respondent who managed to resolve the issue, received a compensation which was five times the compensation of his fellow villages.

At Cossack village Ispravenskaya (where land shares were officially allotted) which is located in Karachay-Cherkessia, registration of land ownership became a method to counteract the process of driving the ethnic Russians out of the village. The real need for specification of land ownership emerged when other ethnic group, the Karachay, began to claim the land of undefined legal status.

“Neither could we use our pasture land, nor make hay. Haylands have been transferred as ownership across the generations here”.

They had to fight for private ownership – they called for convocation of a meeting of land holders to resolve the issue, blocked the motor road.

“Well, we finally succeeded and won the battle, held a meeting of land holders, made a resolution, and portioned out the land”.

Reportedly, a bit more than 1,000 ha of 5,000 ha of the land was allotted on private ownership grounds in the village as of 2011.

“All the rest is no man’s land, yet every year more and more people come here and say: „I have a permit”. – “Show it”. – “Actually, I don’t have it”. ...When we required documents for this sheep barn, he said: “I bought it ”. – “From whom? How could you buy it if there is no owner?”... “Well, I just bought it ””.

Basically tilled fields and some haylands were allotted, whereas they refuse to allot the pasture land. In general, initiators of this process encounter not only numerous administrative obstacles, but also more powerful pressure which is definitely related to somebody’s financial interests.

– How many fallow pasture lands?

– There is no fallow pastures, but nobody knows who use them, this cattle is unregistered, no taxes paid, the owner is unknown”.

There are plenty of such examples to present. The land reform initiated from below has been gaining momentum as politicians are thinking on what to do. The process will be governed by the formats which are traditional for the North Caucasus – through conflicts and violence – unless it is brought into a legal framework, through a dialogue.