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RUSSIA'S CHECHEN PROBLEM

Maciej Falkowski

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THESES

- The end of large-scale hostilities and the crushing of the armed underground resistance in Chechnya have, over the past few years, led to a stabilisation of the situation in the republic, which – alongside the improvements in Russia’s economic situation during the first period of Vladimir Putin’s government – has become a symbol of the success of his political system. However, the Chechen issue remains one of the Russian Federation’s major political problems. Moreover, in connection with the activity of the republic’s leader¹ Ramzan Kadyrov, and his conflict with the Russian power structures, the importance of the Chechen problem, together with questions about the sustainability of the peace in Chechnya, have become even more important in recent months.
- The face of Chechnya, and one of the inseparable symbols of Vladimir Putin’s presidency, is now Ramzan Kadyrov, the dictatorial leader of the republic, whose political ambitions run beyond the borders of Chechnya. The identification of contemporary Chechnya with Kadyrov derives from the fact that the situation in the republic has been determined for the last fifteen years by the informal pact concluded at the beginning of the second Chechen war (1999/2000) between the Kadyrovs (first Ahmad, then his son Ramzan) and Putin; the plan for governing Chechnya which remains valid to the present day; and the relationship between Moscow and Grozny. In exchange for stabilising the situation in the republic by using any and all means, Kadyrov has received a guarantee that he can remain in power, obtain regular funding from the federal budget, and have a free hand in the rule of Chechnya.

¹ From 2007-2011, Kadyrov held the title of President of Chechnya; in 2011 he was renamed ‘head of the republic’, as was done in other entities of the Russian Federation with the status of republic.

- Vladimir Putin's policy towards Chechnya has been dubbed 'Chechenisation'. Its most important result from the Kremlin's point of view has been the stabilisation of the situation in the republic, and its reconstruction from the devastation of war. It has also led to the creation in the republic of the dictatorial regime of Kadyrov, who dominates the Chechen political scene and has pacified society by applying terror and a whole spectrum of political, economic and ideological instruments. Apart from the aforementioned, short-term effects, Chechenisation has strengthened, and in many respects even accelerated the socio-political processes which had been taking place in Chechnya since the early nineties: the de-Russification of the republic, its Islamisation, the strengthening of Chechen nationalism, and nihilism in relation to the Russian legal system. As a result, Chechnya has evolved into a civilisationally alien enclave within the Russian Federation which lives by its own rules, a kind of 'Chechen world' which has little in common with the 'Russian world' which Vladimir Putin's policy towards the post-Soviet area draws on.
- The political activity and the growing independence of Ramzan Kadyrov, the increasing conflicts with the federal authorities he ostentatiously ignores, as well as the widespread recognition of the Chechen leader's irreplaceability, raise questions about his loyalty and the possibility that he may openly renounce his obedience to Moscow. However, such a scenario seems very unlikely due to the Kadyrov regime's dependence on Russia. Its financial dependence, the stigma of collaboration and the crimes he has committed against his own people, all of which are heavy burdens for Kadyrov, ensure that his regime cannot continue to exist without the support of Russia.
- From the Kremlin's point of view, the Kadyrov problem is compensated for by his usefulness, which goes beyond simply ensuring stability in Chechnya. Kadyrov and the military units subordinate to him are a convenient tool, both in the Kremlin's

hands in its internal policy and within the larger framework of Russian foreign policy. Inside Russia and the post-Soviet area, Chechens play a deterrent role, and are seen as brutal and ruthless 'henchmen of Putin' who can be used against opponents of the authoritarian rule or opponents of Russia's rapprochement with the countries of the former USSR. In the Middle East, in turn, an Islamic Chechnya constitutes a kind of 'visiting card' for an Islam-friendly Russia.

- Kadyrov's dependent relationship and the unlikelihood of his renouncing his obedience to Moscow, however, does not mean that the Chechenisation policy has brought lasting peace in Chechnya, or that President Putin has successfully resolved the Chechen issue. The current plan for governing a stable Chechnya and the relationship between Moscow and Grozny is a temporary solution, which does not have a sustainable basis, and is in fact based on a situational convergence of interests between Putin and Kadyrov. A change of power in the Kremlin - and to an even greater extent an internal crisis in Russia, weakening Russia's positions in the Caucasus - would effectively mean the fall of Kadyrov's regime (which is mainly based on terror and not public support), and the reactivation of calls for independence in Chechnya. Due to the strength and deep roots of the Chechen national liberation idea, and the likelihood of an internal crisis in Russia in the shorter or longer term, the above scenario seems inevitable.

I. THE PUTIN-KADYROV PACT

Vladimir Putin inherited the unresolved problem of Chechnya from Boris Yeltsin. Throughout the 1990s Chechnya was a symbol of collapse, a synonym for the humiliation of the Russian state that had lost the military and political confrontation with militants fighting to create an independent Chechen state². Dealing with the problem of Chechen separatism, which was destabilising the whole North Caucasus and threatening the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation was therefore a challenge of existential importance to Putin, who began the process while still prime minister. In the first months of the second Chechen war, which began in the late summer and autumn of 1999, and was conducted under the banner of the fight against international Islamist terrorism, the actions of Russian troops did not differ from those of 1994-1996 (the introduction of federal troops into the republic, massive bombing, the pacification of rebel-held areas). Unlike in the first Chechen war, however, the Russian forces defeated the militants' key divisions within a few months, and took control over the territory of the whole republic, although they did not break the resistance of the numerous guerrilla groups.

The guerrillas' military defeat obliged the Kremlin to rule Chechen territory directly. Contrary to expectations, Putin's administration rejected both cooperation with the traditionally pro-Russian Chechen groups (activists mainly derived from the communist *nomenklatura*, who opposed the independence movement) and a policy of occupation, that is, putting Chechnya

² Moscow lost control over Chechnya in 1991. In 1994-1996 the so-called first Chechen war was fought, which ended with the signing of agreements in Khasavyurt (31 August 1996), which effectively represented the Kremlin's admission of defeat. The agreement signed by representatives of the Russian authorities and the militants was based on recognition of the latter's authority in the republic, the withdrawal of federal troops, and a start to negotiations on the future status of Chechnya.

under the jurisdiction of the federal power structures, which had lobbied hard for this solution, and indeed tried to sabotage the Kremlin's policy. Unexpectedly, some former leaders of the independence movement became the Russian authorities' partners in Chechnya, either for opportunistic or ideological reasons (as they opposed the Islamic radicalism which was beginning to dominate among the armed guerrillas³), as they decided to collaborate with the Russian authorities. The leader of this group was the then mufti of the republic Ahmad Kadyrov, who had been the key and *de facto* sole partner of Vladimir Putin in Chechnya (after Ahmad's death in 2004 he was replaced by his son Ramzan). The other Chechen political groups have been moved into the shadows and marginalised, including Chechen politicians and commanders affiliated with the federal power structures (such as Bislan Gantamirov).

It was with Ahmad Kadyrov that Putin concluded an informal arrangement during the first few months of the second Chechen war (at the turn of 2000), the terms of which both parties have so far strictly adhered to. The agreement was a plan for the governance of Chechnya and the nature of the relationship between Moscow and Grozny. In exchange for ensuring stability in the republic by using any means he felt necessary, Kadyrov received power in Chechnya (initially as head of the administration, and from 2003 as president), which was granted him as a kind of fief, which he could manage at his own discretion. In addition, Moscow guaranteed the stable funding necessary for the economic reconstruction of the republic, and guaranteed a minimum subsistence level for its residents.

³ Rhetoric calling for the transformation of Chechnya into an Islamic state and for secular law to be replaced by *sharia* began to gain popularity in 1996-1999, when the republic remained outside the control of the federal government. During the second Chechen war, the armed underground underwent an ideological evolution from the struggle for national liberation to *jihād*, which culminated in the symbolic liquidation of Chechen Republic of Ichkeria and the proclamation of the Caucasus Emirate by Dokka Umarov in October 2007.

The Kremlin's policy toward Chechnya has been dubbed 'Chechenisation'. It has been implemented in several stages, and has involved the progressive transfer of competences and control over the republic to the Chechen authorities, while limiting the influence of the federal authorities, particularly the law enforcement agencies⁴. The symbolic culmination of this process was the abolition of the counter-terrorist operation regime in the republic in March 2009. Both Chechenisation and the Putin-Kadyrov pact have come under repeated threat. The most serious crisis arose after the death of Ahmad Kadyrov in a terrorist attack at a stadium in Grozny in May 2004, for which the Russian power structures, dissatisfied with the limitation of their power in Chechnya, were most probably responsible⁵. Vladimir Putin, however, decided to continue the current policy, and designated as Ahmad's successor his son, Ramzan, then an inexperienced 28-year-old⁶. Despite initial concerns about his lack of independence and experience, the younger Kadyrov proved to be an equally effective politician, who in his actions has not violated any of the basic conditions of his deal with the Russian president.

Another threat to the Chechenisation policy came from the repeated terrorist attacks in Russia and actions organised by the

⁴ The policy of Chechenisation is sometimes mistakenly defined as an attempt to 'Chechenise' the conflict, that is, to change its character from Russian/Chechen to an internal Chechen conflict.

⁵ See for example Viktor Uvierov, *Kto ubil Kadyrova?*, <http://analysisclub.ru/index.php?page=putin1&art=1391>; Mairbek Taramov, *Kto ubil Akhmada Kadyrova?*, <http://www.kackad.com/article.asp?article=542>; Yelena Rudnieva, *Biez uchastiya spietssluzhby Kadyrova bylo nie likvidirovat'*, http://www.gazeta.ru/2004/07/19/oa_127444.shtml; also the interview with journalist Yulia Latynina, <http://www.yulialatynina.by.ru/publ/echomsk2004-08-21.htm>

⁶ The live broadcast of a meeting between Putin and a tearful Ramzan Kadyrov dressed in a tracksuit at the Kremlin, a few hours after the death of Ahmad Kadyrov, has gone into history. It was an unequivocal signal that the policy of Chechenisation would continue. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7_7IUYSuGQ

underground forces⁷, which unleashed waves of criticism of both the Kremlin's policy towards Chechnya, and the authorities in Grozny, who were accused of inefficiency in their fight against the guerrillas.

⁷ In particular, the attacks which occurred during mass hostage-takings, for example at the Dubrovka theatre in Moscow in October 2002, or in Beslan, North Ossetia in September 2004.

II. THE EFFECTS OF CHECHENISATION

1. Stabilisation

From the Kremlin's point of view, the most important result of the Putin–Kadyrov pact and the last fifteen years of the Chechnya policy has been the stabilisation of the situation in the republic. Paradoxically, this has proceeded in parallel with the weakening influence of the federal power structures and the strengthening of Kadyrov's power, the best proof of which is the constant fall in the figures on armed incidents and victims of violence⁸. This stabilisation has been possible thanks to Kadyrov's application (with the Kremlin's approval) of an entire spectrum of political, military, economic and ideological measures which have led to the marginalisation and gradual crushing of the armed underground resistance. One such move involved bringing those active or former combatants who supported the ideas of independence, but opposed the establishment of a Caucasian Emirate, over to the Chechen authorities' side⁹. This was possible thanks to the promulgation of a succession of amnesties, and by the Kadyrovs (the process was begun by Ahmad and continued by Ramzan) winning over individuals and armed groups following negotiations and giving them personal guarantees. Most of the amnestied

⁸ See Maciej Falkowski, On the periphery of global jihad. The North Caucasus: the illusion of stabilisation, OSW, *Point of View*, November 2014, <http://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/point-view/2014-11-14/periphery-global-jihad-north-caucasus-illusion-stabilisation>

⁹ The Caucasian Emirate (CE), for the creation of which the militants are fighting, is ultimately to become an Islamic state covering all the republics of the North Caucasus and a large part of the Stavropol and Krasnodar krais. It is currently an underground military organisation.

Since the second half of 2013, it has been undergoing a serious ideological and organisational crisis associated with the abandonment of its ranks by many commanders and troops, and its declaration of allegiance to the Islamic State. In June 2015, even Aslan Biutukayev, commander of all the fighters in Chechnya, renounced his allegiance to the Emirate, which means that the latter's activity is now *de facto* limited to the mountains of Dagestan. See <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/263915/>

militants did not actually lay down their weapons, but began serving in various armed formations within Chechnya, which were formally part of Russian structures (mainly the Interior Ministry) but were in fact subordinate to Kadyrov¹⁰. At the same time, violent measures were taken against those who continued to resist: murder, torture, reprisals against relatives (taking them as hostages, demolishing their houses, etc.). The terror used by the Kadyrovs (Ramzan in particular; Ahmad tended to use milder methods) was significantly more effective than that which the Russian power structures resorted to; it was targeted specifically, and did not involve the blind repression resulting from hatred of the Chechens used by the Russian power structures.

The economic measures employed were also significant: the economic reconstruction (based on federal subsidies) of the whole republic (not just Grozny, but also other areas) from the devastation of war; and the guarantee of basic living standards for the population (for example by creating jobs in administration or the power structures, paying compensation for property destroyed during the war, etc.). At the same time, the Chechen authorities put up no obstacles to people wishing to emigrate (in recent years tens of thousands of people have left Chechnya, mainly heading to Europe¹¹), reducing the social problems resulting from the difficult economic situation (mainly from an unemployment rate of around 30%).

¹⁰ Currently, the largest Chechen armed formations include: the so-called oil regiment of Chechnya's Interior Ministry (around 3000 troops), the special regiment of Chechnya's Interior Ministry (around 1800), the Northern and Southern battalions (part of the 46th brigade of the Interior troops of the Russian Interior Ministry stationed in the Republic; around 2000), two special patrol regiments (around 3000), two special companies with the 42nd Mechanised Division (around 500), the Chechen OMON (special divisions of the militia; around 300 officials), Kadyrov's personal protection (around 500); and Chechen police (around 9000 troops).

¹¹ According to estimates, there are over 100,000 Russian citizens of Chechen nationality in the EU, mostly in Austria, France, Germany, Belgium and Poland; <http://www.ecre.org/component/downloads/downloads/161.html>; <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/integration-hard-road-young-chechen-men>

The ideological and religious dimension of Kadyrov's policy is no less important. Although he has abandoned the pro-independence slogans and proudly proclaims himself pro-Russian, the foundation of the ideology he promotes is nationalism (pride in being a Chechen, a sense of superiority towards other cultures) and the Sufi version of Islam, contrasted with 'Wahhabism'¹². The promotion of an idealised 'Chechenity' (in the dimensions of propaganda and practical example, for example by developing the Chechen language), the cult of violence and the patriarchal culture, the Islamisation of society, as well as Kadyrov's ostentatious religiosity, all correspond to social expectations, contributing to a weakening of support for the armed underground, and strengthening Kadyrov's own position.

2. The establishment of Kadyrov's dictatorship

Another effect of Kadyrov's activities has been the formation in Chechnya of an authoritarian political regime. Kadyrov has effectively got rid of political rivals and social activists, either by bringing them over to his side (for example Magomed Khanbiyev, the former defence minister of Ichkeria), having them murdered (for example the leaders of Chechen clans, and the leaders of power structures who were independent of Kadyrov, such as Ruslan and Sulim Yamadayev and Movladi Baysarov, and human rights defenders such as Natalia Estemirova¹³), or forcing them not to in-

¹² Sufism is a mystical movement in Islam strongly rooted in the Caucasus, which manifests itself outwardly in the activities of Sufi brotherhoods (in Chechnya, mainly the Qadiriyya brotherhoods). In the former USSR, it is described as a so-called 'traditional Islam', opposed to Salafism. Salafism for its part is called a religious movement within Sunni Islam which stresses the need for religious and moral rebirth within the spirit of 'pure' Islam (that is, one based solely on the Qur'an and classical Sunni traditions). In the post-Soviet area Salafism is often identified with Wahhabism, understood not as a historical school of Koranic law and political movement in Saudi Arabia, but rather as a synonym for terrorism.

¹³ Ruslan Yamadayev, a deputy to the Russian Duma and the leader of the Yamadayev brothers' clan which competed with Kadyrov, was shot dead in Moscow in September 2008. Sulim Yamadayev was assassinated in Dubai (March 2009), and Movladi Baysarov was shot in Moscow in November 2006. Meanwhile Natalia Estemirova, a member of the Russian Memorial group who

terfere in the internal affairs of the republic (for example, Chechen politicians whose roots lie in the old party *nomenklatura*, such as Aslambek Aslakhonov and Dokku Zavgayev, or Said-Magomed Kakiyev, the commander of the 'Zapad' battalion which was dissolved under pressure from Kadyrov). Kadyrov has also established cooperation with influential Chechen businessmen in Moscow (such as Umar Jabrailov and Ruslan Baysarov), who have co-financed a number of investments in the republic, but do not have any political influence. Political life in Chechnya is now subordinate to Kadyrov, who exercises power with the aid of loyal and dependent power structures, officials and Muslim clergy¹⁴. It is also significant that several key positions in the administration and security structures have been occupied by Kadyrov's relatives or people from his native village of Tsentoroy/Khosi-yurt (for example the Prime Minister Abubakar Edelgeriyev, the Chechen deputy to the Russian State Duma Adam Delimkhanov, the head of the Chechen Interior Ministry Ruslan Alkhanov, and the mayor of Grozny Islam Kadyrov).

By terrorising the population with the aid of armed subordinate units and the use of denunciations on a massive scale, and exploiting the Chechen population's fatigue at the long-lasting war, Kadyrov has sowed fear, apathy and conviction of the futility of opposing his rule among the public. The pacification of society has facilitated a crackdown on independent human rights organisations which, under pressure from the authorities in Grozny (often in the form

had criticised Kadyrov and systematically disclosed crimes committed in Chechnya, was murdered in Grozny in July 2009. Ramzan Kadyrov's people were probably behind all of these murders.

¹⁴ The Spiritual Board of Muslims of Chechnya, run by Salakh Mejiyev, is a *de facto* state body, whose activity is entirely subordinate to Kadyrov. At the same time its influence continues to grow; it controls all the mosques in the republic, and its imams and Islamic judges (the *kadi* of their respective regions) have great influence on politics at the local level, which is also associated with the increased importance of sharia in Chechnya. One of the important activities of the *muftiyat* is brokering negotiations between warring clans, with the aim of reconciling them and getting them to abandon vendettas.

of brutal violence, smashing up offices etc.), have been forced to stop operating on the republic's territory (such as the Russia-wide Memorial organisation and the Committee Against Torture¹⁵). The lack of any response from the Russian authorities to the above-mentioned actions, which have mostly been carried out under the propaganda shield of the 'battle' with a pro-Western 'fifth column', indicates that they have met with the approval of the Kremlin.

Realising the importance of information policy, Kadyrov has subjugated the republic's media (especially the TV channels) to him, and they are now mainly engaged – apart from promoting Chechen nationalism – in reporting on his activities, and spreading the cult of the leader of Chechnya and his father¹⁶.

Kadyrov has also taken control over the republic's economy, Chechen business and Chechen organised crime throughout Russia (and possibly even outside its borders). Key companies in the republic have been taken over by Kadyrov's people (outside the oil sector, which remains in federal hands¹⁷), and a number of new

¹⁵ The last human rights organisation in Chechnya which had to cease its activities was the Chechen branch of Committee Against Torture (<http://www.pytkam.net>), led by Igor Kalapin. Following the publication on the Internet of 'The Family', a film critical of Kadyrov, by the Open Russia opposition organisation (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T5PnqcYFCTg>; representatives of the Committee spoke in the film) a crowd stirred up and manipulated by the Chechen authorities broke up the Committee's office in Grozny. See <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2015/06/03/6744098.shtml>

¹⁶ The cult of personality in contemporary Chechnya has taken on bizarre forms, and in this respect the republic is beginning to resemble Turkmenistan. The names of Ahmad Kadyrov or his wife Ajman have been given to a number of institutions, buildings, roads, and even mosques (in clear violation of Islamic doctrine). Another manifestation of the cult of Ramzan's father was the decision to transfer the anniversary of the deportation of Chechens to Central Asia from 23 February (Defenders of the Fatherland Day in Russia; the deportations began on 23 February 1944) to 10 May (the anniversary of the death of Ahmad Kadyrov); this was particularly offensive to the Chechens' sense of national pride.

¹⁷ The Chechen oil sector is controlled by the Grozneftegaz company, created in 2000. 51% of its shares are owned by Rosneft, and 49% by the Chechen government, which in reality has no influence on Grozneftegaz.

business projects have been created (such as the Grozny Avia airlines, various construction companies¹⁸, and the Terek Grozny football club). However, the income from economic activities is not the main economic resource of Kadyrov's financial empire. This relies on subsidies from the Russian budget¹⁹ and the 'alternative tax system', which consists of extorting protection money from Chechen businessmen (including those living outside the republic), officials, bureaucrats etc., which is then transferred to the Ahmad Kadyrov Foundation created in 2007. The Foundation's budget is the *de facto* alternative budget of Chechnya, but it is not bound by the rule of law: the proceeds accumulated are used by the Chechen leadership both for private business investment (construction, the renovation of facilities such as mosques both within the republic and abroad) and charity (providing support to poor families, invalids, etc.)²⁰.

3. Chechnya: a foreign enclave within the Russian Federation

The results of the Chechenisation policy, which was intended more to isolate Chechnya within Russia rather than integrate it with the rest of the Russian Federation, go far beyond the stabilisation of the situation in the republic and the creation of a dictatorial regime. Under Kadyrov, a kind of 'Chechen world'

¹⁸ Construction companies linked to Kadyrov bring enormous profits in connection with the reconstruction of the republic funded from the federal budget, as well as the implementation of huge investment projects such as the Grozny City complex (several skyscrapers in the city centre including hotels, luxury condominiums, offices et al.; see <http://grozny-city.com/index.php/en/>) and giant mosques in cities like Grozny, Urus-Martan, Argun and others.

¹⁹ In 2014, Chechnya received a total of 56.8 billion roubles from the Russian budget, which accounted for 81.6% of the republic's budget (around 41,000 roubles *per capita*); for comparison, neighbouring Dagestan received 63 billion (21,000 roubles *per capita*), which accounted for 70% of the republic's budget, and Ingushetia 20 billion (45,000 roubles *per capita*), which accounted for 85% of the budget. http://info.minfin.ru/subj_analytics.php

²⁰ For more information about the foundation's activities, see Grigoriy Tumanov, *Robota na vznos, Kommersant*, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2736101>

has been created – a purely Chechen, civilisationally and culturally alien enclave within Russia, governed by its own rules and living its own life. Although Chechnya is a part of the political and constitutional framework of the Russian state, it is ceasing to be a part of the ‘Russian world’, closing itself away within its own hermetic culture, traditions and customs. Under Kadyrov Chechen national identity and Chechen nationalism have been strengthened. The Chechen language is gaining in importance, as it has moved from the private to the public sphere (in Soviet times and during the first years after the collapse of the USSR, the use of Russian predominated in public life; this is still the case in the neighbouring republics of the North Caucasus). Examples of this are the meetings of the republic’s cabinet, conducted in the Chechen language (and as such are incomprehensible to the Russian authorities), or statements by officials (including Kadyrov) to local media, which are not translated into Russian. The Islamisation of society is also deepening, and Islam has – besides nationalism – become not only a key component of Chechen identity, but also the regulator of family and social life. At the same time, demodernisation on the social level is being followed by a return to archaic traditions and customary rights (clan-based revenge, kidnapping women for marriage, etc.), wherein it is often difficult to draw a clear boundary between what is traditionally Chechen practice and what is Islamic (such as polygamy, which had not formerly been practiced by Chechens, but which is widespread today). These social processes are largely a continuation of earlier trends, which can be traced to the effects of the two Chechen wars (mainly the transformation of Chechnya into an ethnically and religiously homogenous republic²¹), and which the process of Chechenisation has only strengthened and *de facto* sanctioned.

²¹ While Russians accounted for around 30% of residents of the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic in 1989 (http://demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/rus_nac_89.php?reg=49), in 2010 they were no more than 2% of the population of Chechnya, and 0.7% of Ingushetia (http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/new_site/perepis2010/croc/Documents/Vol4/pub-04-04.pdf).

Chechnya's alienation within Russia is proceeding not only on the social level, but also within the institutional and legal sphere. Although Russian courts operate and federal legislation formally applies in Chechnya, the republic is *de facto* governed by a mixture of Chechen customary laws (*adats*), *sharia* and the rule of force. Moreover, the Chechen authorities (especially Kadyrov himself) do not even try to hide their ignorance of the Russian legal order, and prioritise Chechen customary rights and Islamic norms²². Examples of such activities include the promotion of polygamy, ordering women to wear Islamic dress in offices and colleges (headscarves, long skirts, shirts covering shoulders), prohibiting smoking during Ramadan, and introducing restrictions on the sale of alcohol. Some of Kadyrov's statements, publicised in the Russian media, also stand in sharp contrast to the Russian legal system, such as his announcement of reprisals against the relatives of militants (demolition of their houses, banishment from the republic²³), and his order to open fire on troops of the security structures from other entities of the Russian Federation who enter Chechnya without the prior agreement of the Chechen authorities²⁴.

²² One example of a clear violation of federal law was the case, widely reported in Russia, of the wedding between 17-year-old Luisa Goylabiyeva and Nazhud Guchigov, the 46-year-old chief of police of Nozhai-yurt village. Although the wedding was technically a crime in the light of Russian law (it occurred as a result of pressure from the chief of police on the family of the girl, who would become his second wife), Kadyrov openly supported Guchigov, and even attended the wedding. A few days later, Kadyrov's influential head of administration, Magomed Daudov proposed in an interview for the portal Gazeta.ru that polygamy should be legalised in Russia. See <http://www.gazeta.ru/social/2015/05/18/6692937.shtml>

²³ Numerous instances of the homes of militants' relatives being destroyed and their being forced to emigrate arose after the attack by militants in Grozny (4/5 December 2014); <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/253822/>. Kadyrov then announced a crackdown, repeatedly upholding his decision in interviews with Russian journalists. Kadyrov's action was *de facto* supported by President Putin, who when asked about the issue said that even though Kadyrov should obey the law, the use of non-standard measures in the fight against terrorism is justified, as in Israel, so in Chechnya. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QeS-vfCQVdE>

²⁴ Kadyrov's statement was a response to the special operation conducted in Chechen on 19 April 2015 by Interior Ministry troops of the Stavropol krai and

Republican institutions (ministries, branches of federal agencies, local administration etc.), while maintaining outward forms of compliance with the Russian legal system, in fact operate on the basis of local, informal arrangements and customs. Their loyalty to the federal authorities, which monitor their activities to only a limited extent, is also questionable, as they know about the real situation on the ground. Their actual superior is Ramzan Kadyrov, who as head of the republic does not formally exercise supervisory functions over many of them (except for the republican Federal Security Service, which the Kremlin has left in Russian hands, although it has little opportunity to influence the Chechen authorities). The most conspicuous example is the Chechen power structures, including the Chechen police, who while formally part of the federal system are in fact subject to Kadyrov. Their autonomy and arbitrariness are great enough that they can be described as a Chechen army.

A factor contributing to the processes described herein has been the consistent Chechenisation of the personnel in the republic over the last fifteen years, as approved of by the Kremlin: while in the early years of the Kadyrovs' rule most key positions in the Chechen administration were held by Russians, who were either local or drafted in from other regions of the Russian Federation, almost all these positions are now held by Chechens – people loyal to Kadyrov. A large part, if not the majority, of members of law enforcement agencies are former guerrillas who only a few years ago were fighting against the Russians. On the other hand, many officials (including senior ones) are young people who do not remember the Soviet era and were brought up in a hermetic Chechen culture, for whom Russia, Russian culture, and the Russian mentality are alien concepts.

the Russian military base in Khankala. During the action, which was probably carried out without the knowledge of the Chechen authorities, a certain Jambulat Dadayev, a Chechen sought under an arrest warrant, was shot. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHu6AOLz7zI>

Kadyrov has demonstratively broken with the Ichkerian past and its symbolism, but his internal policy as tolerated by the Kremlin is leading to the effective construction of ideological, institutional and personnel bases for Chechen statehood (although it is difficult to say to what extent this is a deliberate and planned action). In the Chechens' recent history, they have made two attempts to found an independent state: in 1991-1994 and 1996-1999. Both ended in failure, not only as a result of Russian military intervention, but also because of the inability of Chechnya's society and elites to lay the foundations to form a state (a functioning administration, guarantees of personal security, a functioning economy, etc.), which led to a double transformation of Chechnya into a 'black hole' (an area uncontrolled by any authority, and with a developed system of organised crime). Meanwhile, under Kadyrov (and financed by Moscow), the administration in Chechnya is functional, the authorities provide stability and order, and specific Chechen bureaucrats and officials are gaining experience in the administration of the republic, which may prove useful in the event of a hypothetical return to the idea of independence.

III. RAMZAN KADYROV: PUTIN'S PROBLEMATIC BUT USEFUL VASSAL

1. Kadyrov's activity: political ambitions and feudal logic

Having disposed of his most dangerous opponents and strengthened his power in Chechnya, Ramzan Kadyrov began to play a political game that goes beyond Chechnya. One of the most spectacular manifestations of Kadyrov's activity was the participation of troops from Chechen armed formations in armed conflicts outside the borders of Chechnya, in Georgia in 2008 (the 'Vostok' battalion, which was disbanded a year later²⁵) and in Crimea and the Donbas in 2014-2015 (Chechens serving in various armed formations subordinate to Kadyrov²⁶). Kadyrov has also repeatedly declared his willingness to let groups loyal to him combat terrorist threats across Russia, including in the neighbouring republics of the Caucasus (the Kremlin blocked attempts to carry out anti-terrorist actions in Ingushetia and Dagestan, for fear of negative reaction from the elites and societies of these republics).

Another equally spectacular example of Kadyrov's political activity is the demonstrations of his own power which he organises. In December 2014 a rally was held at a stadium in Grozny, during which around ten to twenty thousand armed troops of

²⁵ <http://www.vesti.ru/doc.html?id=201122&cid=1>

²⁶ Some of them travelled to Ukraine voluntarily, others were probably led by commanders. The *Kadyrovtsy* (probably a few hundred people) have participated in all the major military operations in Donbas. In the spring of 2015, however, the process of withdrawing them from Ukraine was begun, which seems to have been the result of concessions made by the Kremlin to the Russian power structures, who were dissatisfied at Kadyrov's growing influence (<http://nv.ua/publications/pochemu-kadyrovtsy-ushli-is-dnr-and-LNR-45671.html>). For more on the *Kadyrovtsy* in Ukraine, see e.g. <http://korrespondent.net/ukraine/3454071-chechentsy-rasskazaly-skolko-ykhvouiet-na-donbasse>; <http://gordonua.com/news/war/Doklad-Nemcova-Na-Donbasse-voyuyut-kadyrovtsy-80544.html> Chechens also took fought in the Donbas on the Ukrainian side, though less frequently (for example the so-called Jokhar Dudayev Battalion led by Isa Munayev).

the Chechen security structures swore an ‘oath of allegiance’ to President Putin, while Kadyrov declared that the Chechens are ready to obey every order from the Russian President, and to defend the interests of Russia wherever it is needed²⁷. Meanwhile in January 2015 Kadyrov organised a demonstration by several hundred thousand people in Grozny in connection with the attack on the office of *Charlie Hebdo*, during which the insult to the religious feelings of Muslims was condemned (the rally was attended not only by inhabitants of Chechnya, but also of Ingushetia and Dagestan, as well as several Russian Muslim leaders²⁸).

The Chechen leader also comments actively on the political situation in Russia (he supports President Putin unconditionally and criticises the opposition²⁹), the situation in the post-Soviet area (mainly in criticism of the ‘fascist’ regime in Kiev, and his cocky declarations of his personal involvement in the Donbas³⁰) and the international situation (usually in an anti-Western spirit), including the Middle East (for example, critique of the Islamic State and the US’s Middle Eastern policy). Regularly and most pompously, Kadyrov also reasserts his own loyalty to President Putin (for example, before the end of Putin’s second term in 2008, he expressed the opinion that Putin should be president for life of the Russian Federation³¹; Kadyrov has also reiterated that he is ready to not

²⁷ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6NAIrcAPbuA>

²⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gm5jLIqYdO4>

²⁹ One very skilful gambit by Kadyrov was his criticism of Mikhail Khodorkovsky for his statements concerning the murder of the editors of *Charlie Hebdo* (Khodorkovsky called on the world’s media to publish the Muhammad cartoons in solidarity with the French newspaper). Commenting on the statement by the former Russian oligarch, Kadyrov called him an enemy of all Muslims and his personal enemy; <http://lifenews.ru/news/148124>. With this declaration, he gained both in the eyes of Muslims (as a defender of Muhammad) and President Putin (thanks to his criticism of the West and Khodorkovsky).

³⁰ For example see <http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/1277258>, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7yO3Z6y_63g; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cEmbR4eBdaM>

³¹ <http://www.newsru.com/arch/russia/02oct2007/oputine.html>

only carry out every order Putin gives, but to lay down his own life for him³²).

One extremely important and skilfully played area of the Chechen leader's activity is his use of propaganda, which builds up his image as a strong, religious politician, fanatically faithful to the Russian president, but still with his own, often controversial opinions, as both a Chechen and Russian patriot. Kadyrov is very active on social media (mainly through his own profile on the Instagram site³³), and constantly appears in the Russian mass media (he frequently participates in talk shows, gives interviews to journalists, invites them to Chechnya). The Chechen leader's presence in the media is not only political in nature; Kadyrov can be described as a Chechen and Russian popular celebrity. He attracts attention by inviting well-known public figures to the republic (athletes, actors, singers) from Russia and abroad (including Mike Tyson, Gerard Depardieu, and Vanessa Mae); he promotes healthy living (sports, struggle with alcoholism and drug addiction, etc.), and 'traditional' Chechen and Islamic values. It is important to note here that Kadyrov is presented mostly positively in the Russian media, and he is seen as such by many Russians (despite the fact that Chechens generally have a negative image in Russia)³⁴.

Kadyrov has also established international contacts, mainly in the countries of the Middle East: he meets local politicians, businessmen, religious activists, pays visits to Middle Eastern countries³⁵

³² <http://lenta.ru/news/2015/03/10/kadyrov/>

³³ https://instagram.com/kadyrov_95/

³⁴ As many as 55% of respondents who took part in the Levada Centre poll of March 2015 stated that Ramzan Kadyrov is a politician who can be trusted, and 35% felt sympathy and respect towards him. See <http://www.levada.ru/31-03-2015/blagopoluchnoi-i-spokoinoi-situatsiyu-na-severnoi-kavkazeschitayut-54-rossiyan>

³⁵ For example, Saudi Arabia in August 2007 (<http://www.pravda.ru/news/politics/13-08-2007/234903-kadirov-0/>), the United Arab Emirates in March 2011 (<http://www.yuga.ru/news/221693/>), and in Jordan in March 2014 (<http://chechnyatoday.com/content/view/277959>).

and welcomes guests on their return visits to his region³⁶. Increasingly, Grozny is establishing direct cooperation with near-Eastern countries, primarily in the economic sphere (mainly Middle Eastern investments in Chechnya³⁷).

The Chechen leader is primarily motivated by his great personal ambitions – the desire to transform himself from a local to a federal politician (which he has succeeded in achieving³⁸), the leader of the North Caucasus, and also of all Russian Muslims. However, Kadyrov is also directed by the logic of the vassal, who is continually forced to demonstrate his usefulness to his superior (the Russian president), as well as by the fear of his own people. From this perspective, the aim of the Chechen leader's political and media activity is simply to survive, retain his position, keep control of the republic and his own people, and hold onto the favour of President Putin. The alternative is, at best, his political non-existence or exile, and at worst – although considering the nature of the Caucasus, the most probable – the loss of his own life and an existential threat to his entire clan. Kadyrov is forced to constantly prove his loyalty, irreplaceability and usefulness, by systematically rendering a kind of 'homage' to Vladimir Putin (sending Chechen troops to the Donbas, joining in with anti-Western criticism, swearing oaths of fidelity, etc.). Meanwhile, he uses the 'carrot and stick' method against his own people: terrorising the rebellious and manipulating the rest. Both audiences need dem-

³⁶ For example, King Abdullah II of Jordan (<http://www.eer.ru/a/article/u145/19-06-2014/22229>), a delegation from Kuwait (<http://chechnyatoday.com/content/view/274616>), and representatives of the Iranian Parliament (<http://www.regnum.ru/news/polit/1860425.html>).

³⁷ See for example <http://www.islamnews.ru/news-439148.html>; http://kavpolit.com/articles/arabskij_prints_postroit_v_groznom_otel_za_120 mln-2566/; <http://chechnyatoday.com/content/view/276982>; <http://www.vestikavkaza.ru/news/Zhurnalisty-iz-Kuveyta-i-Livana-nakhodyatsya-s-visitom-v-Chechne.html>; <http://www.kavkaz-uzel.ru/articles/242803/>

³⁸ For example, according to polls conducted by the Agency for Political and Economic Communications in June 2015, Kadyrov came second (after the mayor of Moscow Sergei Sobianin) in the ranking of the most influential regional leaders in Russia; <http://www.chechnya.gov.ru/page.php?r=126&id=16680>

onstrations of force: Putin's belief in Kadyrov's trustworthiness is thus reinforced, as is that of Chechen society in the futility of any resistance.

A classic example of the Chechen leader's behaviour in accordance with this scheme was his reaction to the militant attack in Grozny in early December 2014³⁹: a clearly concerned Kadyrov ordered the immediate liquidation of the militants regardless of the loss of life (as a result of the chaotic fighting, as many as 14 Chechen troops were killed and 36 were injured), after which he immediately submitted a report to President Putin. After the action he announced a crackdown on the militants' relatives; later a video appeared on the Internet in which Kadyrov negotiates with the militants by telephone, trying – using an Islamic argument – to prove to them that they were in error and should lay down their arms⁴⁰. A few weeks later (28 December), Kadyrov organised a parade in Grozny of local troops, which can be read as a demonstration of his own power after the militants' attack.

2. Moscow's problem with Kadyrov

Kadyrov's independence and arbitrary behaviour in Chechnya, his open disregard for Russian legislation and the federal authorities, and the activity of the Chechen leader and his men beyond the borders of the republic, are the object of frequent criticism from the Russian elite (in both the ruling and opposition camps), as has been manifested in numerous publications and statements by journalists and experts, and in increasingly open (by

³⁹ A group of more than a dozen fighters of the Caucasus Emirate stormed into the city centre on the night of 4/5 December 2014, shooting several Chechen policemen. They split into two groups and barricaded themselves in the Press House and a school in the centre of Grozny. After several hours of fierce fighting, Chechen government forces killed all 11 attackers. After the action a video appeared online in which the militants justified their action as revenge for the persecution of Muslims and the humiliation of Muslim women by the *Kadyrovtsy*; <http://checheninfo.com/2015/05/09/204/>

⁴⁰ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QF-TgG1Zus

the Russian opposition) or covert criticism (by the authorities). Both liberals and many pro-government politicians and experts see Kadyrov as ‘the reincarnation of Dudayev’, a politician who in the right conditions could openly work against Moscow, and who blackmails the Russian authorities to force them into further concessions. Some commentators even claim that Kadyrov and the Chechen armed formations subordinate to him have become one of the most important forces on the Russian political scene, and that in the future the Chechen leader could take up a position in the federal authorities⁴¹. Some believe that this threatens a kind of ‘Chechenisation’ of Russia, that is, the introduction of a cruel, authoritarian regime on the Chechen model⁴².

Ramzan Kadyrov’s principal and most serious opponents are the Russian power structures (including the Interior Ministry, the Federal Security Service, and the federal army), which since the beginning have been consistent opponents of the Chechenisation policy, seeing Ahmad and Ramzan Kadyrov as covert separatists. The ‘siloviki,’ who lost their dominant position in the republic as a result of the Chechenisation policy, are irritated not only by Kadyrov’s arbitrary rule of the republic and the desire to sanction his unwritten monopoly on the use of violence in Chechnya. The basis for their criticism is the special status Kadyrov enjoys in the Russian political system, that is, his effective subordination exclusively and directly to President Putin, bypassing the federal offices which he ostentatiously ignores. The power structures perceive Kadyrov’s political activity (his demonstrations of strength, his statements to the media, building up his own position by sending Chechen soldiers to the Donbas, etc.) as openly defiant of and threatening to their own positions, interests and prestige.

⁴¹ See for example <http://ria.ru/politics/20150424/1060761226.html>, <http://www.alaniatv.com/dolzhnostj-dlya-kadjyrova-v-mide.html>

⁴² See for example <http://www.svoboda.org/content/transcript/26586985.html>; <http://www.zvezda.ru/politics/2007/04/08/kadyrov.htm>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TIYe-46LsY8>; <http://www.politcom.ru/article.php?id=4243>; <http://polit.ru/article/2004/03/24/lokshina/>

Particularly dangerous from the power structures' point of view (mainly the special services) is the expansion of Chechen business controlled by Kadyrov – both legal, but especially illegal – throughout the Russian Federation, as well as outside its borders (including occupied Crimea⁴³). Gangs controlled by Kadyrov, and beyond the control of the Russian special services, are mainly engaged in extortion from businesses (along the lines of the Chechen organised crime syndicates operating in Russia in the 1990s)⁴⁴. The legality of the funding and functioning of the Ahmad Kadyrov Foundation, which conducts extensive activities in Chechnya, Russia and beyond, is also highly questionable. Grozny's contacts with the Chechen diaspora abroad (Europe, the former Soviet Union, the Middle East), including via unofficial representatives of Kadyrov in individual countries (for example France or Ukraine), are also seen as encroaching on the territory of the Russian special services.

The lawlessness of Chechen power structures beyond the borders of the republic is also unacceptable to the federal 'siloviki', mainly their alleged role in a series of killings in Russia (such as those of Anna Politkovskaya⁴⁵; the Russian officer Yuri Budanov, who was given a prison sentence for the brutal murder of a Chechen girl in 2000⁴⁶; and many Chechen activists opposed to Kadyrov, such as Sulim and Ruslan Yamadayev⁴⁷). The conflict between Kadyrov and the 'siloviki' exploded into public view thanks to one such killing – that of the Russian oppositionist Boris Nemtsov (who was gunned down in Moscow on 27 February 2015), which subordinates of Kadyrov were accused of organising (the prime suspect

⁴³ <http://www.bigcaucasus.com/events/topday/17-03-2014/89593-krim-o/>; http://news.liga.net/news/politics/1823609-putin_otdal_krym_kavkazskomu_kriminalitetu_informsoprotivlenthat.is.htm

⁴⁴ According to reports in the Russian media, Kadyrov's bodyguards were involved in criminal activity in Moscow; <http://www.pravda-tv.ru/2013/03/26/23236>

⁴⁵ <http://www.newsru.com/arch/russia/09oct2006/novaya.html>; http://echo.msk.ru/blog/a_goldfarb/1327160-echo/

⁴⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KF5Wtc1Ayiw>

⁴⁷ <http://region.urfo.org/incidents/280100.html>

is Zaur Dadayev, a high-ranking officer in the Chechen ‘Sever’ battalion⁴⁸).

The conflict between Kadyrov and the federal power structures poses a challenge to the domestic policy of President Putin, whose regime is based on the special services, and whose system for ruling Chechnya is based on Ramzan Kadyrov. Putin faces the following dilemma: he cannot deprive the Chechen leader of his position as this would destabilise the situation in Chechnya; however, ignoring the interests of the power structures would undermine his own power. This forces Putin to try to defuse tensions between the Russian ‘siloviki’ and Kadyrov by encouraging both sides to make tactical compromises, a method which is usually successful⁴⁹.

Although the above issue is a significant problem for Vladimir Putin in managing the political system, the risks posed by Kadyrov to Russia and President Putin personally have been exaggerated (possibly as a result of propaganda activities by the ‘siloviki’), and it does not seem justified to treat Kadyrov as a challenge to the Russian authorities in the Caucasus, or as a potential leader of the Chechens’ next revolt against Moscow. Although Kadyrov is independent, ambitious, and exercises full authority in the republic, the stability of which largely depends on his continued rule, he remains Putin’s vassal, and his regime is fully dependent on Russia both financially and politically. Nor does it seem likely – due to resistance among the Russian elite – that Kadyrov will be promoted or take up a high position in the federal government. Furthermore, there is no indication that the Chechen leader aspires to such a position himself, because it would mean

⁴⁸ http://lenta.ru/news/2015/03/13/kadyrov_dadaev/

⁴⁹ According to Russian media, examples of tactical compromise between the ‘siloviki’ and Kadyrov include the latter’s meeting with Nikolai Patrushev, the head of the National Security Council (March 2015, http://polit.ru/news/2015/03/11/kadyrov_patrushev/), and Igor Sechin, president of Rosneft (June 2015, http://kavpolit.com/articles/o_chem_dogovorilis_sechin_i_kadyrov-17718/).

his effective demotion by depriving him of support from the territory and the military units which are loyal to him.

The risk of Kadyrov openly rebelling against Moscow is also minimal because of how the Chechen people themselves perceive him. Chechen society, tired of long-term war and terrorised by Kadyrov's people, is forced to tolerate his authority. The people appreciate the stability, the reconstruction of the republic and the improvement of the economic situation under Kadyrov. Many, especially young Chechens, are also impressed by Kadyrov's strength, determination and lifestyle (including his ostentatious religiosity), in large part because of his effective propaganda. However, Kadyrov labours under the indelible mark of being a collaborator, a traitor to his own people, and of denying his history and the struggle for independence against Russia. It is also relevant that against the backdrop of Chechen history, Kadyrov's dictatorship and cult of personality represent a distortion and denial of the Chechen history and mentality (Chechen society has always been marked by strong egalitarianism; there were no dictatorial periods in the history of Chechnya, and the social order was based not on a political power governing with a criminal code and a monopoly on violence, but on customary law and relations between families and clans of equals). In traditional Chechen society, moreover, issues of honour (especially that of the family) and the duty to declare vendettas against injustice were of great importance. Kadyrov and his men have been committing crimes against thousands of Chechens for years. The immediate threat to the Chechen leader and his clan comes not only from his political opponents, but also from his personal enemies who, because of the circumstances, must postpone taking their compulsory act of revenge to a more favourable moment.

3. Kadyrov's usefulness

Moscow must pay a high price for the stability in Chechnya and meeting the conditions of the Putin-Kadyrov pact (the need to

retain Chechnya, conceding its civilisational distancing itself from Russia, etc.) and must bear specific risks (primarily related to Kadyrov's activities outside Chechnya and his conflict with the federal power structures). In the Kremlin's perception, the processes taking place in Chechnya (its distancing itself from Russia), although they adversely affect the integrity of the Russian Federation and reduce its internal cohesion and security, have now become irreversible (Chechnya will never become a 'normal' part of Russia). Besides, similar trends (Islamisation, de-Russification etc.), albeit not on such a large scale, have also occurred in other Caucasian republics (especially in Dagestan and Ingushetia), which also - like Chechnya - are supported by the federal budget. In many cases, federal law does not operate in other parts of the Russian Federation, and so lawlessness on the Caucasian periphery, a region often described as the 'internal abroad', is not seen as a serious problem. In addition, Russia's policy towards the post-Soviet area indicates that Russian elites do not see the problem of internal separatism as a serious, present threat. Moscow has inspired and exploited separatist tendencies in its own imperial policy for many years, actively and without fear of domestic repercussions, including separatism in the Caucasus (including Abkhazia, South Ossetia, northern Azerbaijan, the Georgian Javakheti, as well as Ukraine and Central Asia). The biggest problems are generated by the conflicts between Kadyrov and the federal power structures, but even these do not risk Grozny renouncing its obedience to Moscow.

The Kadyrov problem is superseded by his usefulness, which goes beyond simply guaranteeing stability in Chechnya. Kadyrov and the armed forces he controls are a convenient tool in the Kremlin's hands for its domestic policy, as well as in the framework of wider Russian policy towards the post-Soviet region and the Middle East.

Regarding the internal situation and the policy towards the post-Soviet area, Kadyrov and his people serve as a deterrent against

both domestic opponents (for example, the ability to use his troops to pacify anti-Putin demonstrations) and external ones (mostly in the post-Soviet area). The use of the Chechen factor is possible in that capacity because of the bad reputation and negative connotations which Chechens have in the eyes of the majority of the population of the former USSR. They are commonly seen as ruthless, cruel, rebellious, lacking any fear of consequences, closed-off, with an incomprehensible culture and mentality. They arouse popular resentment and fear. This deep-rooted image, which is derived from the nineteenth-century Caucasian wars, was reinforced by the bloody events in Chechnya after the collapse of the USSR (both real and those created by Russian propaganda), and is confirmed today by Ramzan Kadyrov through his actual and media activities.

Chechnya also plays a certain role in Russian policy in the Middle East and the Islamic world. While it represented a problem in Russia's relations with Islamic countries during the two wars (the elite and publics in those countries saw the Chechen wars as a defensive jihad, and as proof of the anti-Islamic nature of Russian policy), it has now evolved into a Russian asset. This Islamised Chechnya, in which *sharia* is becoming stronger, whose leader rebuilds mosques, pays visits to Islamic countries, and is seeking investment from Gulf states, and defends the good name of Muhammad, relics of whom he brought to Chechnya (see the demonstration in Grozny in January 2015), is a showcase for an 'Islam-friendly' Russia, a factor in the warming relations between Moscow and Islamic countries, leading away them from the ideas of supporting the armed underground resistance in the Caucasus. Kadyrov, who is anti-Salafi but flaunts his religion and favours the Islamisation of his republic, may also be presented by Russia as a 'good' Muslim, who in the name of God and under the Russian standard fights the 'greatest evil in the world' – terrorism⁵⁰.

⁵⁰ Moscow has even sent Chechens to security cooperation with Middle Eastern countries; in 2006, officers from the 'Vostok' battalion protected Rus-

Another of Kadyrov's advantages in this dimension is his extremely anti-Western views, which he parades every day.

sian engineers involved in the reconstruction of Lebanon after the war with Israel (<http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/710391>), and in 2015 representatives of Chechen armed formations took part in anti-terrorist exercises in Jordan for the first time (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Raly51pEZ_w).

IV. THE SYSTEMIC PROBLEM WITH CHECHNYA

The activity of Ramzan Kadyrov, his growing ambition and arbitrariness, his expanding conflicts with the federal power structures, his strong personification of the system of government in Chechnya – these are all major concerns for the Russian authorities, and are increasingly affecting the stability of Putin’s political system. They do not in themselves constitute a threat to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation, however, because the danger of Kadyrov openly rebelling against Moscow, upon which his power in Chechnya depends, is minimal.

However, the broader problem of Chechnya remains a serious challenge for Russia, a challenge which in the future may significantly affect the cohesion of the state and its internal security, and undermine its territorial integrity. The liquidation of the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, the crushing of the armed underground resistance in the republic and its stability under Kadyrov do not mean that a solution to the problem of Chechen separatism has been found. It has been only temporarily suspended, and relations between Moscow and Grozny – which in the past have often led to conflict – are currently based not on a systemic solution, but on the superficial (and inherently unstable) informal arrangement between Putin and Kadyrov, which is underpinned by a temporary convergence of interests between these two politicians. Under favourable conditions, the idea of Chechen independence could once again re-emerge.

The risk of the agreement between Moscow and Grozny being broken, and the re-emergence of Chechen pro-independence rhetoric, is linked to the possible replacement of the President of Russia or the leader of Chechnya (although this seems unlikely during the reign of Putin, it cannot be ruled out that for example Kadyrov could resign under pressure from the ‘siloviki’, or that he could be assassinated). However, since the costs of such developments would be extremely high for both parties (for Russia it

would mean the destabilisation of Chechnya, and for Chechnya the end of funding from the Russian budget and the republic's repacification by federal troops), this seems unrealistic (the successors to both politicians would probably strive to prolong the agreement between Grozny and Moscow). In particular, it seems very unlikely that Kadyrov would repudiate his allegiance to Moscow, as in such a situation his chances of remaining in power would be minimal (due to his low public support). Such a step would be an act of desperation, which could perhaps arise from attempts to remove him as a result of manoeuvring by the federal power structures.

A potential political and economic crisis in Russia carries with it a much higher risk, as this would lead to the weakening of Russian control over the Caucasus (including the need to suspend funding from Moscow, and the reduction or withdrawal of the Russian military presence). Such a development would most likely mean a reactivation of the idea of Chechnya's independence, and revive the rebellion by Chechens against Russia. It would also pose an existential threat to Ramzan Kadyrov himself; the weakening of Russian power in the Caucasus would most likely lead to the current regime in Grozny being swept away, and a bloody settling of accounts, not just with Kadyrov himself but with his entire clan. This scenario is also most likely if Kadyrov attempts to take over the pro-independence rhetoric for himself and lead a national liberation movement in the situation of a disintegrating Russia. Thus, there is little chance that Kadyrov would benefit politically from having laid (consciously or not) the foundations for possible future Chechen statehood.

Russia's loss of control over the Caucasus and the reactivation of the idea of Chechen independence would probably submerge the republic in internal clashes and chaos, as well as the outbreak of ethnic conflicts throughout the Caucasus (including Dagestani/Chechen, Ingush/Chechen, Ingush/Ossetian etc.). In addition, instability in the Caucasus resulting from regional clashes could

widen as a result of attempts to exploit the region in domestic Russian conflicts (as was seen repeatedly during the 1990s, for example Putin's position was reinforced as a result of the second Chechen war). The idea of independence would also have to compete with another, no less important idea with equally strong roots in the region – that of establishing an Islamic state in the North Caucasus (today this expresses itself in the idea promoted by the Caucasian Emirate, and by those armed forces operating in the Caucasus which acknowledge the sovereignty of the Islamic State). In addition to clan-, ethnic- and territorial-based conflicts, the rivalry (possibly armed) between these two concepts would become the driving force behind developments in the region.

In the version of events considered here, the Chechens, compared with other northern Caucasian nations, would certainly be much better prepared to fight for their independence and build an independent state than they were twenty-five years ago. In addition to their tradition of struggle for independence and their pantheon of fallen heroes, they will have institutional support and the experience accumulated by the officials and bureaucrats of the power structures in Kadyrov's Chechnya. Their human capital and the foreign contacts gained by several hundred thousand Chechens living in diaspora abroad, mainly in Europe and the Middle East, could also be of enormous importance. Although the Chechen *émigrés* are scattered around the world, they maintain intense, undiminished contacts with each other and with Chechnya, and their disunity and internal conflicts are compensated for by a sense of their own uniqueness and the deepening cultural isolation of the Chechen ethnos.

Given all these conditions, the reactivation of an open struggle by the Chechens to create an independent state (under the banners of both national liberation and Islam) seems to be just a matter of time, depending mostly on the internal stability of the Russian state. This is principally due to the conditions in Chechnya – that is, the strength and attractiveness of the idea of independence on

the one hand, and of *jihad* on the other – as well as the victims and sacrifices that the Chechens have suffered so far in their struggle for independence from Russia. Such a turn of events is also foreshadowed by the history of Russia, which is about to confront deep internal crises resulting in the weakening or loss of its control over the periphery, as well as the present, deteriorating state of Russia itself (its rising political, economic, social, demographic and ethnic problems).

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