

Chechnya and Russia: The significance of the Chechen problem for contemporary Russia

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Key points

1. The Chechen issue, which remains unresolved since the break-up of the Soviet Union, is one of the most difficult problems of today's Russia. Since 1991, the Chechen conflict has passed through four phases: the "Chechen revolution" and Dzhokhar Dudaev's rule (1991–1994), the first Chechen war (1994–1996), the period of Chechnya's quasi-independence (1996–1999) and the second Chechen war that began in 1999 and continues until now. Despite the fact that the Kremlin has taken certain measures to put an end to the conflict in the republic, these have not produced the desired results. On the contrary, the war is growing increasingly violent.

2. The impact of the rebellious Chechnya on contemporary Russia reaches far beyond the republic's territorial borders. Over the last twelve years, the events in the republic have resounded in Moscow, substantially influencing the shape of contemporary Russia. The Chechen conflict has had a considerable, largely negative impact on the process of the Russian transformation which followed the break-up of the Soviet Union and the events in the North Caucasus, closely connected with the situation on the Russian political scene, constituted landmarks in the history of post-Soviet Russia.

3. Even today, it is difficult to overestimate the impact of the Chechen conflict on certain areas of Russian politics, economy and social life, although this influence is certainly not dominant. Chechnya is an important factor among many other elements determining the shape of contemporary Russia. The ongoing war affects nearly all spheres: the internal situation, foreign policy, government system, elites, institutions and state structures, society, economy, media, etc. Chechnya is a threat to the state's security and an obstacle to reforms, a source of corruption, degeneration of the state administration and demoralisation of the Russian army. It affects the views of the Russian elites and society as well as the authorities' approach to citizens and such issues as human rights. Developments in the republic were among the main stimuli behind the reinforcement of the country's power depart-

ments, they also brought about the rise of authoritarianism and restrictions on freedom of speech during President Putin's rule, and promoted an increase of Caucasophobia and Islamophobia in the Russian society.

4. The solution of the Chechen problem is of immense importance to contemporary Russia. The experience of the last twelve years shows that so long as there is no peace and stability in the Caucasus, Russia will remain undemocratic and its future largely unpredictable. Even though the Kremlin is certainly aware of the pressing need to promptly solve the Chechen conflict, the measures taken by Putin's administration hardly appear to bring the prospects of a true peace in the Caucasus any closer.

Introduction

The purpose of this analysis is to examine the significance of the Chechen issue for contemporary Russia. Part I discusses the history of the conflict from 1991 to date and the impact of developments in the republic on Russia as a whole. Part II is an attempt to indicate the areas of Russian reality that are most deeply affected by the Chechen problem.

I. History of the Chechen conflict and its impact on developments in Russia

1. Origins of the conflict

The conflict in Chechnya, like all other conflicts within the former USSR, broke out in the early 1990s. Its causes are deeply rooted in history. Following are the events in mutual Russian-Chechen relations that have contributed to this conflict:

- conquering of the North Caucasus by Russia in the 19th century, preceded by the long and murderous Caucasian War during which Chechens greatly resisted the Tsar's army;
- repressions of Chechens carried out by Russians, who treated the Caucasus as a conquered colony rather than an integral part of the Russian empire and brutally put down numerous Chechen rebellions, the last of which broke out in 1944;
- repressions of the 1920s and 1930s which included compulsory collectivisation and the Stalinist purges among Chechen intellectuals, clergy and people whose authority was deeply respected in the republic;
- deportation of Chechens accused of collaboration with Germans to Central Asia decreed by Stalin in 1944;
- policy of the Soviet authorities towards the Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic following the Chechens' return from exile in 1957 (under this policy, Russians were favoured in the republic and Chechens had restricted access to education, administration offices, army, etc.) combined with Chechnya's economic underdevelopment and extensive unemployment

As the Soviet Union broke up, central authorities faltered and Russia slipped into an economic crisis, all these factors made the Chechen problem, suppressed for decades, explode with a renewed force¹.

2. The rule of Dzhokhar Dudaev (1991–1994)

When Mikhail Gorbachev announced the *perestroika*, a radical national movement began to develop in Chechnya. It soon proposed independence mottos and, in autumn 1990, Chechen democratic organisations established the Chechen National Congress (CNC). The Congress carried out a coup in Grozny a year later (August – September 1991), forcing the communist authorities of the then Chechen-Ingush Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, led by the head of the Supreme Council of Checheno-Ingushetia, Doku Zavgayev, to step down. Shortly afterwards, Chechnya proclaimed independence and Dzhokhar Dudaev, a retired general of the Soviet Army, became president of the new republic. The events of autumn 1991 came to be known as “the Chechen revolution”. Chechnya refused to sign the Federation Treaty of 31 March 1992 and remained outside the Russian state. Following a failed military intervention in November 1991 (when the Russians blew up landing troops at the Grozny airport but soon retreated peacefully), Moscow withdrew its forces from the republic, leaving behind substantial quantities of weapons.

After the separatists came to power, Russia imposed a very ineffective economic blockade on Chechnya, trying to force Dudaev into concessions. The dictatorial rule of the Chechen leader soon brought about an open conflict with the opposition. Opposition forces even attempted coups to overthrow Dudaev, several armed clashes also took place and Grozny witnessed thousands-strong demonstrations. In 1993, Moscow began to actively support the opposition Interim Council of Chechnya, hoping to topple Dudaev’s regime. However, the several attempts at armed coups by opposition forces all failed².

Initially, authorities in Moscow were not particularly interested in the situation in Chechnya as they focused on problems involved in the break-up of the USSR, the development of a new system of power in Russia, relations with former re-

publics of the empire and the rivalry between Mikhail Gorbachev, then president of the USSR, and Boris Yeltsin, the president of the Russian Federal Soviet Socialist Republic. These issues clearly overshadowed the situation in the regions. Besides, the events taking place in Chechnya in the early 1990s to some extent resembled the developments in other republics, such as Tatarstan or Bashkiria, which had also proclaimed independence and openly opposed the Kremlin³. At that time, Chechnya’s impact on Russia was mostly economic: the republic was gradually transforming into an economic “black hole” (it was becoming the centre of diverse types of illegal business) and destabilising the situation in the neighbouring entities of the Federation.

3. The first Chechen war (1994–1996)

The first Chechen war commenced when Russian troops invaded Chechnya on 11 December 1994. The official reason for the armed intervention was the need to “restore constitutional order” in Chechnya and prevent separatism and instability from spreading to the remaining republics of the North Caucasus. In fact, it was a large group of Russian generals who had pushed for war, intending to strengthen the position of the army, improve its prestige, prevent the downsizing of the force and conceal illegal businesses in which the military were involved with the Chechens. Deciding for military intervention, Yeltsin hoped that, with the rapid victory promised by the military, he would demonstrate Russia’s power on the international scene and show its strength and resolve in dealing with internal matters. Finally, Moscow also wished to regain control over the Chechen section of the oil pipeline from Azerbaijan to Novorossiysk⁴.

In the first months of the war, Russian troops seized Grozny and a major part of lowland Chechnya, but they were unable to break the resistance of Chechen guerrillas. The militants, widely supported by locals, carried out successful guerrilla warfare. They even managed to perpetrate several terrorist attacks beyond the Chechen borders and, eventually, recaptured Grozny from the Russians in August 1996. After Russians assassinated Dzhokhar Dudaev in April 1996, the Kremlin decided to meet the Chechens at the negotiating table and put an end to the war. This

task was assigned to the Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation General Aleksandr Lebed. After a few rounds of negotiations, on 31 August 1996 Lebed and General Aslan Maskhadov, Chief of the Chechen Staff, signed a peace agreement in Khasav-Yurt. Russia basically accepted Chechnya's independence, and the question of the republic's ultimate status was postponed for another five years. Shortly afterwards, all Russian troops withdrew from Chechnya and militants took over the rule⁵.

The outbreak of war, its development and conclusion were of immense significance to the Russian Federation. The year 1994, which marked the Russian invasion of Chechnya and 1996, when the Khasav-Yurt agreements were signed, were clear landmarks in the history of post-Soviet Russia. When Yeltsin declared the war, he hoped that the rapid victory expected by the military would afford him not only the opportunity to demonstrate Russia's power, but also crush separatism in the other republics and prevent the break-up of the Russian Federation, which many politicians and analysts were forecasting. However, it soon turned out that the war only exposed the weakness and disintegration of the Russian state. The Chechen issue, until then treated as a local problem, became one of Russia's gravest and most difficult problems. In addition, individual political parties and the Kremlin itself treated the Chechen issue as an instrument to serve their own needs and manipulated it to further their own interests. The negotiations with Chechen militants in mid 1996, which led to the conclusion of the Khasav-Yurt peace agreement, and the unilateral suspension of war operations in Chechnya announced by Boris Yeltsin, were closely connected with the presidential elections in Russia⁶. Putting an end to the Chechen conflict, extremely unpopular with Russian society, was intended to promote Boris Yeltsin's re-election as president. A prolonged war was also prejudicial to the interests of the fuel and energy resource lobby (because of the instability in the North Caucasus, Western investors in Azerbaijan preferred to export oil from the region using the southern route bypassing Russia). In 1996, the Russian oil lobby proved to be more influential than the power structures that wanted the war to continue.

The military and political defeat in the war against Chechen separatists was a shock to the entire state and to the Russian army in particular. The army's prestige was impaired by its withdrawal from Eastern European countries and most of the former Soviet republics, and it now took a further blow in the eyes of society. The Russian army proved to be completely unprepared for wars like the one in Chechnya. It suffered enormous losses and its morale melted at a frightening speed⁷. In times of the USSR, the Soviet army was prepared for a confrontation with the West and for a full-scale offensive military operation similar to the struggle with the German army during World War II. Following the break-up of the Soviet empire and the end of the Cold War, the Russian army faced new challenges and threats: local conflicts with an ethnic background and clashes with an internal enemy resorting to guerrilla warfare and enjoying the support of local people. The defeat in Chechnya opened Russia's eyes to the urgent need to reform the Russian army and prepare it to cope with new challenges⁸. The war in Chechnya also showed Moscow that major threats to state security were no longer rooted in the West, but in the regions south of Russia, mainly in the Caucasus and Central Asia⁹. Finally, it exposed the ideological vacuum left in the wake of communism. "Defence of the constitutional order" was hardly a motivation for the soldiers, most of whom treated service in the Caucasus as a necessary evil rather than patriotic duty. Chechen militants, on the other hand, saw their participation in the war as the fulfilment of a patriotic obligation. They were defending their homeland against an aggressor and were, therefore, highly motivated.

As a direct consequence of the war, the Kremlin's control over North Caucasian republics weakened and its sway over the South Caucasus also faltered. The Kremlin's efforts of 1993–1994 to restore control over Georgia and Azerbaijan were questioned. The leaders of these countries understood that they should not fear a Russian military intervention if they infringed on the interests of their northern neighbour. Undoubtedly, Russia's image in the West was damaged as well, as the country came in for frequent and harsh criticism over the war and human rights violations during military operations.

Further dangerous consequences of the war included the rise of Caucasophobia and Islamophobia, which largely replaced widespread anti-Semitism and rendered ethnic and religious relations within the Russian Federation tense. Even though the Chechens raised no Islamic slogans during the first war, the war contributed significantly to the radicalisation of Islam in Russia. From there on, Muslim fundamentalism developed hand in hand with the Islamic revival. Furthermore, the war brought about the mass migration of Chechens and Russians living in Chechnya to the southern districts of Russia, which bred conflicts between immigrants and the local populations. Finally, in the aftermath of the war, contemporary Russia had to face terrorism for the first time¹⁰.

4. The period of Chechnya's quasi-independence (1996–1999)

On 27 January 1997 presidential and parliamentary elections were held in Chechnya. Aslan Maskhadov, Chief of Staff of the Chechen army and the most moderate of all the candidates, was elected president. Initially, Maskhadov tried to govern the country taking into account the interests and ambitions of individual commanders and political groups, and was reluctant to rule with an iron fist. This had catastrophic consequences for the country: anarchy raged as field commanders refused to subordinate themselves to the central authorities and the opposition, which was growing in strength, pursued a destructive policy demanding that authorities step down and Chechnya be declared an Islamic state. In mid 1998, the country was on the brink of civil war. Even though Maskhadov advocated the peaceful establishment of Chechen-Russian relations, Russia itself offered him no assistance in dealing with the Islamic opposition and securing public order in Chechnya. On the contrary, Moscow would gladly use every opportunity to discredit the idea of an independent Chechnya¹¹. In early 1999, authorities in Grozny decided to crack down on anarchy, armed Islamic opposition and organised crime. In March, President Maskhadov proclaimed Chechnya an Islamic state and introduced elements of the sharia law into its legislation, while authorities began to combat groups kidnapping people for ransom.

However, this failed to produce the expected results. In late July and early August 1999, radical Islamic militant units (wahhabites), led by Shamil Basaev and Emir Khattab, invaded the neighbouring Dagestan from Chechnya in order to liberate the entire North Caucasus from Russian rule and proclaim an Islamic state.

As in 1991–1994, throughout the period of Chechnya's quasi-independence, the country remained a "black hole", i.e. a source of instability spreading to the entire region of the North Caucasus. Kidnapping of people for ransom and bringing them into Chechnya became one of the most serious problems facing Federation entities neighbouring the republic. Drug traffic, trading weapons and illegally extracted oil thrived, while Chechen militant units continued to invade Dagestan, Stavropol Krai and North Ossetia. Islamic fundamentalists established a network of training camps on Chechen territory, where young Muslims from the entire Caucasus received their training¹². Events in Chechnya also influenced the situation in the neighbouring Dagestan. There, increasingly powerful Islamic radicals demanded that the republic be transformed into an Islamic state modelled on Chechnya. In 1999, Dagestani supporters of radical Islam seized several villages near the Dagestani-Chechen border and proclaimed them to be an independent Islamic territory¹³. Moscow faced a real threat of losing control not only over Chechnya, but Dagestan as well.

After the Khasav-Yurt agreements were signed, Chechnya once again ceased to count among the Kremlin's key political problems. The attention of Russian authorities was focused on other issues such as President Yeltsin's illness and the problem of the succession of power, the economic crisis, relations with the West and the US in particular, or NATO's eastward enlargement. Besides, the vagueness and instability of the situation in Chechnya was in keeping with the interests of many Russian groups, politicians and businessmen (like the media magnate Boris Beresovsky) who had broad and usually illegal business relations with the Chechens.

In 1996–1999, the Kremlin failed to develop any political concept for Chechnya, and the question of the republic's status, which was supposed to

be resolved through bilateral negotiations, was caught in a dead end. It seems that only the federal army had a clear idea of its policy towards the republic during Chechnya's quasi-independence: namely, it was preparing to take revenge for the 1996 defeat. Most of the Russian military believed that politicians had betrayed the army in Khasav-Yurt and took away its victory. Hoping that war would break out again, the Russian General Staff reinforced the North Caucasian Military District, which was provided with the best equipment and manned with the most experienced commanders and officers, and developed a new war tactic: the first phase of Russia's second military intervention in Chechnya was modelled on the NATO operation in Kosovo. This secured the Russian army's success in the initial phase of the second Chechen war¹⁴.

5. The second Chechen war (from 1999)

A pretext for the second invasion of Chechnya by federal troops came with the raid of Islamic militants led by Basaev and Khattab on Dagestan and a series of bomb attacks in Russian cities (Moscow, Buinaksk, Volgodonsk) in September 1999, which claimed nearly 300 lives¹⁵. The Chechens were blamed for organising these attacks, and the new Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced an unrelenting campaign against terrorism, gaining wide popularity with the Russian society. In September 1999, Russia began mass bombings of Chechnya and on 1 October, Russian troops invaded the republic. The commencement of military action brought on a mass exodus of people, most of who fled from the republic primarily to the neighbouring Ingushetia, causing a humanitarian disaster there¹⁶. Over a few months, Russians crushed the main Chechen formations and gained control over most of Chechnya's territory. In spring 2000, the decimated Chechen militants began a guerrilla war, which still continues today.

In June 2000, the Kremlin announced the end of the "military phase" of the "anti-terrorist operation" and established an interim civil administration in the republic, led by the former "separatist" mufti of Chechnya Akhmed Kadyrov. From that point, Chechnya clearly ceased to occupy

a central position in the Kremlin's policy and Russia's policy towards the republic became uncoordinated and ineffective. Without taking any real measures to end the conflict, authorities tried to make society and the international community believe that a normalisation process was taking place in Chechnya, and that economic reconstruction and a gradual return to peaceful life were under way. Meanwhile, a brutal guerrilla war was ravaging the republic, and both sides were committing massive human rights violations. The repression of civilians by the federal army, and the military disintegration and weakening of the Chechen guerrillas (as compared to the first war) contributed to the radicalisation of actions taken by many militants, including resorting to acts of terrorism¹⁷.

On 23 October 2002, the Chechens perpetrated an act of terror unprecedented in the whole history of the Chechen conflict, evoking shock in Russia and abroad. A squad of suicide bombers led by Movsar Baraev seized the Moscow Dubrovka theatre taking some 800 hostages. The terrorists demanded an end to the war in Chechnya and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the republic. In the early morning of 25 October, Russian special forces stormed the theatre building killing all the terrorists and more than one hundred hostages. Shamil Basaev admitted to organising this attack. In the successive months, militants also organised several bloody terrorist attacks in Chechnya and North Ossetia killing several hundred people¹⁸. They announced their intention to move the war into Russian territory in the nearest future¹⁹.

Even though the terrorist attack on the Dubrovka theatre and the subsequent suicide bombings exposed the failure of the Kremlin's policy towards Chechnya, President Putin's administration resolved to continue with the "Chechenisation" policy launched in mid 2002. Its objective was to legitimise Akhmed Kadyrov's pro-Russian team and gradually transfer power in the republic to them, while firmly refusing to enter peace talks with militant representatives²⁰. The Kremlin tried to present "Chechenisation" as a genuine peace process taking place in the republic, but it is difficult to determine whether this policy was intended to end the war or just pretend to do so²¹. In November 2002, the Chechen Inte-

rior Ministry was established, in March 2003, the new constitution of the republic was passed (defining Chechnya as an inseparable part of Russia) and, in June 2003, amnesty was declared for the militants²². The Kremlin also announced that presidential elections would be held in the republic on 5 October 2003, to be followed by parliamentary elections within a year of the referendum, that an agreement on the division of powers between Moscow and Grozny would be signed and that more funding would be provided to finance Chechnya's economic reconstruction (including the payment of indemnities for homes lost in the course of military operations). Moscow also began to remove generals involved in illegal businesses and those refusing to cooperate with the republic's civil authorities. However, these measures did not produce the expected results, only strengthened the power of Chechnya's acting president Akhmed Kadyrov and increased tensions in internal relations within Chechnya (e.g. between Kadyrov and the Chechen diaspora in Moscow or between Kadyrov and the militants). Kadyrov, hated and considered a traitor by most of his compatriots, managed to subordinate nearly all central and regional civil authorities of the republic and gain a very strong position in relation to the Kremlin. Presently, Kadyrov also has a substantial military force – he controls the Chechen militia and a “bodyguard team” of several thousand, which recruits former militants and terrorises the Chechen people²³. Even though the present leader of the Chechen administration is inconvenient for nearly all major groups in the republic, the Kremlin continues to support him because Kadyrov seems to be the only guarantor of the implementation of the “Chechenisation” policy launched by the authorities²⁴.

There is direct link between the outbreak of the second Chechen war and the rise to power of Russia's current president Vladimir Putin. It may be the single most striking example of how the Chechen issue affects developments in today's Russia and how it is exploited as an instrument in Russian politics. While the first war had a negative impact on Boris Yeltsin's presidency, as most Russians were firmly opposed to it, the outbreak of the second war became a kind of springboard to power for the present Russian le-

ader. Yeltsin appointed the largely unknown Vladimir Putin as prime minister at the time when Russia was overwhelmed with fear following the raid of Islamic militants on Dagestan and the terrorist attacks of September 1999, and when the media were fanning an anti-Chechen hysteria. Shortly after coming to power, Putin announced a resolved decision to combat terrorism, gaining widespread popularity with the Russian society. The sense of being threatened by terrorist attacks, skilfully heated up through the use of propaganda, continued to convince people of the necessity to crack down on Chechen separatists. The successes of the federal army in Chechnya reassured Russians that the decision to intervene was right, and most of them began to see Putin as a providential man who saved their country. This was precisely what the ill Boris Yeltsin wanted to achieve when he nominated Vladimir Putin as his successor and sought a way to safeguard the latter's coming to power. On 31 December 1999, when Putin's popularity was at its peak, Boris Yeltsin stepped down and transferred his duties as head of state to the Prime Minister. On 26 March 2000, early presidential elections were held in Russia, of which Putin was the unquestionable winner. It appears that the problem of the succession of power in the Kremlin played a key role in the outbreak of the second Chechen war, though there was also some pressure towards a new confrontation on the part of the Russian army, humiliated by the defeat in the first war and the compulsory withdrawal from the republic in 1996, and eager to reinforce its position in the Russian power structures.

II. Chechnya's impact on Russia following the outbreak of the second Chechen war

1. Internal issues

The conflict in Chechnya is one of many factors presently influencing the internal situation in the Russian Federation. Developments in the republic are having an adverse affect on Russia, although the real scale of this influence is difficult to estimate. The Chechen issue is a serious problem for both the ruling team in the Kremlin and

the Russian state as a whole, as it is difficult to speak of a stable future and the balanced development of Russia until this issue is solved. On the other hand, the situation in Chechnya is being exploited by the Kremlin in order to reach its specific political goals both on the internal and international scenes.

1.1. A vision of Russia's future

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the Chechen conflict has been one of the most serious political problems of the Russian Federation affecting the country's internal and foreign policies alike. Russia's future as a modern, non-imperial and democratic state hinges on the solution of the Chechen issue. The present situation in Chechnya impedes Russia's transformation in this direction. The Kremlin's inability to cope with Chechnya (both under Boris Yeltsin's and Vladimir Putin's rule) and the inability of Russian political elites to develop a coherent and mature concept to end the conflict demonstrate the absence of a clear vision of post-imperial Russia.

As the Kremlin lacks a clearly defined policy towards Chechnya, the Russian central authorities are also unable to develop a coherent policy for the entire North Caucasus – the most turbulent region of the Russian Federation. Solving the Chechen issue is a necessary prerequisite for the development of Moscow's North Caucasian policy. So far, Moscow has only been implementing improvised manoeuvres and supporting local corrupted post-communist ruling elites dissociated from their communities. The North Caucasus' serious economic and social problems and the political, ethnic and religious conflicts prevailing in that area may soon seriously destabilise the region.

1.2. A threat to state security

Chechnya is a serious threat to Russia's internal security. The most evident proof of this was last year's attack on Dubrovka. It demonstrated that a group of armed terrorists arriving from Chechnya, thousands of kilometres away, is capable of carrying out a terrorist operation on this scale. Since the beginning of his presidency, Putin has been building his position and prestige on promises of ensuring security for the state and ordinary Russians. He began as Prime Minister by

promising the relentless prosecution of militants. Even though the attack in Dubrovka did not ruin his image as a guarantor of security, it certainly unsettled it. As successive events showed, Dubrovka was not an isolated case, but the beginning of a terrorist campaign on a broader scale. Suicide terrorist attacks modelled on those from Palestine became an inseparable element of the Chechen conflict and Russian political life. It seems that this "Palestinisation" of the conflict in Chechnya will be irreversible unless the situation in the republic undergoes a fundamental change²⁵.

1.3. An obstacle to reforms

After becoming President, Vladimir Putin undertook to carry out numerous important internal reforms in the state²⁶. However, the situation in Chechnya constitutes a major obstacle to the implementation of these reforms. Chechnya not only consumes a large amount of "energy" of the authorities, who have to respond to crises in the republic and push successive measures that are still failing to produce positive results. Maintaining such a large numbers of troops and amounts of weapons in the republic and providing logistic support for the army, etc. is an enormous burden on the state budget, consuming funds that could otherwise be spent on other purposes²⁷. The republic's "economic reconstruction" has been progressing since mid 2000, absorbing huge amounts of funding each year that fail to improve the situation in Chechnya in any measurable way²⁸. Most of the federal budget funds earmarked for the economic reconstruction of Chechnya are stolen "along the way" and the rest is appropriated directly by the pro-Russian Chechen authorities on site.

1.4. The degenerating effect on state structures

The existence of Chechnya in its present shape within the Russian Federation contributes to the degeneration of the Russian state structures in charge of Chechnya-related issues, i.e. sections of the state administration, the federal army, the militia, secret services, the administration of justice, etc. It also demoralises individual officials, functionaries and soldiers. This refers to institutions beyond the republic dealing with "Chechen issues", as well as state bodies operating direc-

tly in Chechnya²⁹. Corruption and stealing of budget funds for Chechnya (formally earmarked for the “anti-terrorist operation” and the reconstruction of the republic) are widespread throughout all levels of the state administration³⁰. In addition, for many years Chechnya has basically been a territory without any laws. Individual officials, the military, etc. do not need to abide by any rules. Consequently, lawlessness prevails, manifesting itself in the attitude of state bodies towards Chechen civilians (the life or death of ordinary people frequently hinges on the arbitrary decisions of individual representatives of the authorities). The military, officials and militia functionaries are frequently involved in criminal activities such as trade in illegally extracted oil, weapons and drugs, human trafficking, etc. The war in Chechnya is their private war, which they treat mainly as an opportunity to get rich. This is why they disregard their state’s interests, which they were sent to promote in the rebellious republic. Lower rank military or officials sometimes sabotage or disregard the decisions of higher instances. Individual Russian power departments (the Ministry of Defence and the federal army, the Interior Ministry and the Federal Security Service) compete for influence in Chechnya and for legal and illegal revenues from the war raging in that area. At the level of the government and heads of individual departments, this rivalry is more moderate and less apparent but in Chechnya, where various institutions operate on a parallel basis, it is distinctly visible.

All this leads to the demoralisation of Russian state structures. The problem is further exacerbated by the rotation of tens of thousands of people from all over Russia who arrive in, and leave Chechnya each year. For example, officers and soldiers usually stay in the republic for no longer than six months, following which they are replaced by others. They take the models of behaviour learnt there back to their permanent jobs and homes.

1.5. The increased influence of the power departments

In the aftermath of the second Chechen war there has been a dangerous expansion of the influence of Russian power departments, i.e. the Ministry of Defence, the General Staff alongside the

entire federal army, the Interior Ministry and the Federal Security Service. This new situation is hardly conducive to democratic reforms in Russia, as the power departments and the people forming them are direct heirs of the Soviet Army, the Soviet Interior Ministry and the KGB. Prevailing attitudes in these departments are a Soviet-style, imperial and superpower-like perception of the world and society, and a conviction that one should rule with an iron fist without taking public opinion or society’s interests into account. These attitudes impede the reform of the power departments themselves, which is at present urgently needed in Russia.

It is very difficult to estimate which of the power departments profited most from the war and which gained the most influence. It seems that compared to the other bodies, the federal army, humiliated by the 1996 defeat and the forced withdrawal from Chechnya, gained a lot. By starting a new military intervention in the republic in autumn 1999 and scoring the initial successes in the war against Chechen militants, the military took revenge for that defeat and the “betrayal of the politicians”. Having gained a strong position and taken control over Chechnya, the army is now the main opponent of any changes in the republic that could bring about a genuine ending to the war. For quite some time, the military have been trying to torpedo the Kremlin’s moves intended to end the war. The army is reluctant to accept the “Chechenisation” policy pursued by the Kremlin, which signifies a drop in their powers to the benefit of “Chechen civilians”. Army representatives have frequently stressed that they will not allow “another Khasav-Yurt” and will not let their victory be taken away from them.

Today, Chechnya is a closed military zone in which the federal army is the most influential body³¹. Troops are repressing civilians on a mass scale, most definitely with the approval of higher-rank commanders. It is in the best interest of the military to continue with the “anti-terrorist operation” for several reasons. Firstly, while the operation in Chechnya continues, the army’s position in the state will remain very strong, bringing in large amounts of funding and promotion opportunities for the army. Se-

condly, the unstable situation in Chechnya, treated by the army as conquered territory, and its isolation from the rest of the country, allow the military to engage in a multitude of illegal businesses, especially the sale of oil illegally extracted in Chechnya to destinations all over the North Caucasus³². To this end, Russian military leaders frequently co-operate with Chechen field commanders with whom they share the profits. They have unspoken agreements on mutual tolerance in a given area and, besides, the militants profit from the perpetuation of the present situation in the republic as well: for them, this provides an opportunity to get rich and retain control over certain groups of people in Chechnya. Finally, ever since the conflict began, the army has been robbing civilian property, mainly during the so-called *zachistki*, i.e. the pacification of Chechen villages accused of supporting the guerrillas. It has been accepting bribes without any limitations, chiefly at checkpoints on roads scattered all over the republic, trading in imprisoned people and selling the bodies of those killed to their families³³.

In many matters, President Putin, who came to power “thanks to” the war in Chechnya, must take into account the interests of the military who have become much more influential in the present phase of the conflict. The army has strengthened its position in relations with the remaining Russian power departments, especially the Interior Ministry and the Federal Security Service (these three institutions have a long history of competing for influence in Chechnya and in Russia as a whole). For many Russian generals, Chechnya was the beginning of a political career. For example, General Viktor Kazantsev, the former commander of federal troops in the Caucasus, is presently the Russian president’s envoy to the Southern Federal District; General Anatoli Kvashnin, the former commander of the North Caucasian Military District, is presently Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, and General Vladimir Shamanov, the former commander of the 58th Army in Chechnya, is Governor of the Ulyanovsk oblast. The federal army has gained an unquestionable and apparently permanent influence in the entire North Caucasus (especially in the eastern part), and the region is ever more frequently referred to as “the military republic”³⁴.

1.6. The rise of authoritarianism in Russia

The Chechen conflict, and especially the second Chechen war, helped the political forces striving to reinforce the authoritarian system of power and restrict civil rights in Russia. The outbreak of war against “Chechen terrorists” and the threat of “international terrorism” overemphasised by the Kremlin were among the factors allowing Vladimir Putin to create this kind of power system and, in particular, reduce the role of the regions and the media. The Kremlin has also used the threat of Chechen terrorism to integrate Russian society in the face of an internal and external danger and distract its attention from other important problems faced by the country.

Freedom of speech in Russia and the Russian media were hit especially badly by the second Chechen war. During the first war, Russian and foreign journalists faced no restrictions on access to Chechnya and there were no substantial interventions in the content of their coverage of the events in the republic (this refers both to press and television). Today, the situation has changed radically. Chechnya is a zone closed to independent reporters. Articles and TV news broadcasts on the situation there are censored or self-censored by most media³⁵. The state’s control over the media is not limited to coverage of the developments in Chechnya. The Kremlin has used the war in the republic and the threat of terrorism overemphasised by its propaganda machinery to restrict freedom of speech in Russia in general. Only a few Russian media can afford to criticise Russian policy in Chechnya and openly oppose the Kremlin on other issues, however, these are usually low-circulation newspapers or radio stations and websites with small audiences³⁶.

1.7. The political elites and Russian society

To some extent, the war in Chechnya is affecting the views and attitudes of the Russian political elites and the way they see Russia and the world. As regards Chechnya, most forces on the Russian political scene hold positions similar to that expressed in the Kremlin’s official policy. They firmly deny the Chechens their right to leave the Federation, refuse to allow negotiations with the militants, believe that a hard line policy should be implemented towards Chechnya

and negate crimes committed by Russian troops. This attitude to the Chechen issue influences the way politicians, journalists and analysts see Russia's other internal and external problems. It also shows that imperialist and superpower-like thinking still dominates the Russian political scene. The majority of Russian society thinks the same way. Politicians such as Sergei Kovalov, journalists like Anna Politkovska or social organisations like Memorial, who openly criticise Kremlin for its "iron fist" policy, for initiating the war in Chechnya and for massive human rights violations in the republic, and who call on authorities to stop the war and begin negotiations with the Chechens, constitute a small, if not marginal, section of the Russian political elite. They hold hardly any significance in Russian politics and have barely any support from society. The Chechen conflict is a major obstacle impeding the development of a democratic civil society in Russia. It perpetuates the traditional passivity of Russian society, the susceptibility of most people to official propaganda and the conviction that any objection against the doings of the authorities is pointless. Even though public opinion polls show that most Russians are behind the conclusion of the war in Chechnya and a large group would be willing to support negotiations with militants³⁷, people approve the Kremlin's policy towards Chechnya by failing to protest. This attitude, typical of the Russian society, manifested itself following the terrorist attack in Dubrovka in October 2002. Even though more than one hundred hostages died after the troops storming the building used an unknown gas and failed to organise the evacuation properly (exposing Russia to fierce criticism from the West), most Russians expressed their support for the president's decision and admitted that he had had no other choice³⁸.

There is also a link between the situation in Chechnya and the Russian authorities' attitude towards citizens and their rights. Unlike in democratic states of law, the Russian state and its leaders are above individual people, their rights, constitutional freedoms and frequently even above personal dignity. This model is perpetuated, for example, by the way the authorities treat the soldiers fighting in the Caucasus (they are compulsorily sent to the conflict region where their commanders disrespect their rights and

frequently unnecessarily expose them to the risk of death), ordinary people incidentally involved in the conflict (e.g. the hostages in Dubrovka), Chechen refugees in Ingushetia (denied assistance by the state and forced to return to the war-ravaged republic) and civilians in Chechnya (whose basic rights are constantly being violated and who are, after all, citizens of the Russian Federation).

1.8. Caucasophobia and Islamophobia in Russia

The war in Chechnya stimulates the rise of nationalist and xenophobic sentiments in Russia, which leads to national or even racial and religious conflicts. The steady growth of the Caucasian diaspora in the "Russian" regions of the Russian Federation, especially in Moscow, is conducive to these types of developments³⁹. Tensions are arising between the local Slavic population and newcomers from the North and South Caucasus and Central Asia. Conflicts between different nationalities are superimposed on religious clashes, as most of the immigrants from these regions are Muslims. Hatred of Chechens, fanned by Russian propaganda and the media-promoted Chechen stereotype defining them as being bandits, terrorists and kidnappers (this kind of propaganda reached its peak in autumn 1999 following attacks in Russian cities) is automatically extended to all "persons of Caucasian nationality"⁴⁰. Contemptuously referred to as "black" in everyday speech, emigrants from the Caucasus are permanently persecuted by the militia. There are also anti-Caucasian pogroms, to which public security services usually respond passively. A substantial role in the dissemination of chauvinistic, anti-Caucasian and anti-Muslim attitudes in society is played by various nationalistic or Cossack organisations and some high officials and clergy of the Russian Orthodox Church. The growing aversion towards Muslims is also fuelled by the Kremlin's official propaganda, which represents Russia as a victim of "international Islamic terrorism". It is a justified claim that, at the moment, Caucasophobia and, to a smaller extent, Islamophobia, are widespread in Russia⁴¹. This poses a major threat to the state's stability, given the fact that the percentage of non-Slavic and Muslim people in Russia's population is increasing rapidly. The exact number of Mu-

slims in the Russian Federation is difficult to establish, but they probably account for seven to 15 percent of the population⁴².

1.9. The impact of Chechnya on the North Caucasus

The Russian North Caucasus is the region most affected by the situation in Chechnya⁴³. The Caucasus, which always used to be one region, is presently broken into many isolated parts and divided by dozens of borders. The situation in Chechnya has contributed to this. Constituent republics of the Russian Federation neighbouring Chechnya have remained in the frontline zone for over ten years. Huge numbers of troops, militia forces and detachments of other Russian power structures are stationed there, and the entire region is covered with a network of road checkpoints resembling state borders. People have a limited ability to move from one republic to another and they have to undergo endless checks by public security services. The territories of Ingushetia, Dagestan and North Ossetia sometimes witness clashes with Chechen militants trying to reach Chechnya from Georgia (Russia has repeatedly accused the latter of tolerating separatist bases in its territory) or hiding from the Russian army. There is a serious risk that the war could spread to the neighbouring republics, as the radical militants have frequently announced (in June 2003, the first serious terrorist attack was carried out in North Ossetia). The situation is particularly complicated in Ingushetia, temporary home for 70 to 100 thousand Chechen refugees whom the authorities are trying to force to return to Chechnya. There are also large groups of Chechen refugees in Dagestan, South Ossetia, Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar Krai and the Rostov Oblast. This situation breeds serious ethnic and religious tensions that may transform into open conflict. The Chechen issue is straining relations between Chechens and Russians, as well as between the native Slavic people of southern Russia and "Caucasian" immigrants⁴⁴.

Because of the proximity of Chechnya, the North Caucasus has become the region with the highest rates of organised crime in the entire Russian Federation⁴⁵. The evident radicalisation of Chechen Islam observed since the mid 1990s has also contributed substantially to the develop-

ment of extremist Muslim organisations in the republics of the North Caucasus, particularly in Dagestan and Karachay-Cherkessia⁴⁶. Because of the disastrous economic situation of the region and the widespread conviction that Moscow has left the Caucasian republics to fend for themselves, such groups are increasingly popular, especially with young people. In the nearest future, this fact may play a substantial destabilising role in entire North Caucasus.

The Chechen conflict is also having an adverse effect on the economic situation in the North Caucasus. The disintegration of the socialist economy, the closing down of thousands of factories and businesses, breaking off of economic links with the South Caucasus, corruption of authorities and other factors have caused a steadily deepening economic crisis in the region. The poverty-stricken North Caucasian republics can function solely with subsidies from the federal budget. The Chechen conflict, which has been continuing for more than a decade, has exacerbated the catastrophic economic situation of the North Caucasus. The region has been split into two parts: Dagestan in the East and the remaining republics in the West. Economic contacts between these two parts have been largely restricted because of transport difficulties, among other factors. Following the outbreak of war in Chechnya, it became impossible to use several important roads crossing the republic, including the railway main and the motorway from Rostov on Don to Makhachkala and Baku⁴⁷. Because of the instability in Chechnya (and the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia), the borders between the Russian Federation, on the one hand, and Georgia and Azerbaijan, on the other, have actually been closed. Only a small number of people is able to cross them, hence the inhabitants of the North Caucasus being deprived of the opportunity to make a living on cross-border trade⁴⁸. The second war in Chechnya has "disciplined" the remaining North Caucasus republics and weakened separatist tendencies emerging there. With his war "scare", President Putin has been able to get rid of troublesome republic leaders, e.g. the long-time (1991–2001) president of Ingushetia Ruslan Aushev was replaced by a general of the Federal Security Service, Murat Ziazikov⁴⁹. Finally, the war has contributed to the erosion of the sense of a Caucasian community. During the

first war, Chechens enjoyed universal sympathy and support in the region, but today people tend to blame them for the conflict and largely approve of the military solution to the Chechen problem.

2. Foreign policy

Ever since the first war broke out in 1994, the Chechen issue has had a substantial influence on the foreign policy of the Russian Federation, both in terms of its general direction, and relations with individual states. The conflict in Chechnya not only made Moscow aware of the threats from the South (the Caucasus, Central Asia, Near and Middle East and Arab countries), but it also had a substantial and largely negative effect on its relations with Western Europe, the United States and other countries.

2.1. New challenges in the South

Throughout the history of the USSR, the relations (confrontation) with the West were the most important area of Moscow's foreign policy. This changed with the break-up of the Soviet empire: Russia no longer had to fear any threats from the West. On the contrary, it appeared that the interests of Moscow and the Western world were convergent in many ways. However, the situation in countries and regions south of Russia also changed radically. A number of new states emerged, ethnic and religious conflicts broke out, geopolitical relations in Afghanistan, the Caucasus and Central Asia were complicated, and the menace of Muslim fundamentalism, separatism and terrorism came into view. Consequently, threats from the southern direction became an increasingly difficult problem and challenge for Russia. Even though the failed Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was the first indication of the changing geopolitical situation in the South, Moscow did not realise the proportions of the problem until the Chechen war broke out. Before, conflicts on the Empire's southern outskirts were treated as marginal troubles and the problems emerging there were seen as being of secondary importance. The Kremlin had to face an escalation of the Chechen conflict and especially the raid of Islamic militants on Dagestan, the outbreak of the second Chechen war, the increasingly tense situation in Central Asia and

the activities of Islamic radicals in the Fergana Valley and, finally, the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, in order to realise that the real international challenge for today's Russia was the "southern problem"⁵⁰.

2.2. Chechnya vs. Russia's relations with the West

Western Europe

When Russia initiated the first Chechen war, it came in for severe criticism from the West, which continued until the signing of the Khasav-Yurt agreements in 1996. On its part, Russia accused European countries and organisations of lawless interference in its internal affairs and suspected that the criticism was intended to undermine its position in the continent. Initial enthusiasm for Europe displayed by the Russian elites and authorities gradually waned and gave way to distrust, lack of understanding and aversion in the aftermath of the Chechen war and the Western countries' disapproval of Russia's human rights violations. A similar situation took place after the Kremlin started the second war in Chechnya in October 1999. At that time, the European Union even imposed some limited sanctions on Russia, while the OSCE and the Council of Europe threatened that Moscow could be expelled from these organisations. Things began to change with time, following the Russian army's successes in the Caucasus.

The emergence of a new, energetic and modern Russian leader and the desire to maintain good economic relations with Russia overshadowed the European values of democracy and human rights. The Chechen issue gradually lost prominence in relations between Russia and Western European states, and European politicians were loath to openly criticise Moscow for its Chechen policy. Nevertheless, the Chechen issue does affect the Kremlin relations with the West: it undermines the European countries' and the European Union's confidence in Russia as a partner for cooperation, especially when it comes to security. European organisations such as OSCE and the Council of Europe have adopted a stricter attitude towards Russia's Chechen policy. They are systematically criticising and even condemning Moscow over the inadequate use of force against Chechen separatists and human rights violations

in the republic, which brings on frequent crises and tensions in mutual relations⁵¹. Even though Russia formally co-operates with these organisations on issues relating to Chechnya, it actually tries to minimise their presence in the republic and rejects the possibility that they could play a role in the regulation of the Chechen conflict.

The United States

During the first Chechen war, the attitude adopted by Washington towards the Russian policy in Chechnya differed from the one prevailing in Europe. Bill Clinton's administration was much less inclined to criticise Moscow for initiating a military operation in the Caucasus, emphasising that the Chechen issue was the RF's internal problem. The outbreak of the second Chechen war coincided with a crisis in Russian-US relations caused by NATO's eastward enlargement and its operation in Kosovo, of which Moscow strongly disapproved. Washington condemned the Kremlin for initiating the anti-terrorist operation in Chechnya and repeatedly criticised Russia for human rights violations in the republic calling on Moscow to begin negotiations with militants. There was a link between this stand of the United States and the fact that, at that time, Russia and the United States were competing for influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia over Caspian oil and gas resources.

However, the situation began to change gradually even before 11 September 2001. The rivalry over oil resources in the Caspian region was no longer as heated and Washington began to see the positive sides of Russia's influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia. A breakthrough in Russian-US relations came with the terrorist attacks on the United States and Russia's joining of the anti-terrorist coalition formed by George W. Bush. From that moment on, the Kremlin could represent its "anti-terrorist operation" in Chechnya as part of the worldwide struggle against terrorism and claim that Russia was the first country to have faced the challenge of international terrorism. At the same time, President Putin had the opportunity to justify the Russian army's activities in the Caucasus⁵². In return for the support granted by the Kremlin to Washington following 11 September 2001, the United States adopted a less critical disapproving attitude towards Russia's policy in Chechnya⁵³.

2.3. Chechnya vs. Moscow's relations with other CIS countries

The first Chechen war weakened Russia's position in the entire post-Soviet region, especially in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Russia's defeat showed the leaders of Georgia, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, the Baltic states and Ukraine that it was not possible to rebuild the empire through the use of military power: Moscow had neither enough political will nor sufficient military force. The role of the Commonwealth of Independent States lost a good deal of its significance, and Russia began to prefer bilateral relations with the former Soviet republics to co-operation within the CIS. In 1994–1996, the CIS countries refused to back Moscow in its dispute with NATO and an organisation uniting post-Soviet states but excluding Russia, i.e. the GUUAM, began to form within the Commonwealth⁵⁴.

The second war in Chechnya and Vladimir Putin's rise to power changed the situation in the CIS radically. By initiating a new intervention in Chechnya and launching its hard line policy towards the republic, Russia demonstrated its power and made it clear that the Kremlin could respond resolutely to those opposing it. In 1999, Russia also began to press CIS countries (especially Georgia and Azerbaijan), demanding their unequivocal support for the "anti-terrorist operation" in Chechnya and co-operative policies taking into account Moscow's interests in the region⁵⁵. This instigated many tensions, mainly in Russian-Georgian relations⁵⁶. In the end, countries of the region adopted more pro-Russian policies and began to seek rapprochement with Moscow, while GUUAM lost its significance. This way, the second Chechen war constituted a factor contributing to the strengthening of Russia's position in the post-Soviet region during Putin's rule.

2.4. Russia's relations with other countries

Arab countries and Israel

The Chechen conflict has been one of the main factors bringing about a change in Russia's traditional policy towards the Near East, i.e. Arab countries and Israel. Throughout the Cold War, Soviet foreign policy was distinctly anti-Israeli and pro-Arab. However, the support granted to

Chechen separatists by many Arab countries including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Kuwait, and their backing of wahhabism and Islamic fundamentalism in Russia and the entire post-Soviet area, led to a change in Russia's attitude towards these countries⁵⁷. While Arab countries officially maintained that Chechnya was Russia's internal problem and that the Kremlin had legitimate jurisdiction over the republic, they were unable or unwilling to stop the numerous organisations and individuals supporting the separatists or sending volunteers into Chechnya. In the aftermath of the Chechen wars, relations between Russia and Israel improved for the first time in history. Tel Aviv and Moscow began to develop official contacts, co-operated in the field of secret services and mutually backed each other's hard line policies on terrorism⁵⁸.

China

The conflict in Chechnya has also influenced relations between Moscow and Beijing. From the very beginning, China resolutely backed the firm policy of Russian authorities towards the rebellious republic. In return, the Chinese hoped to win Russia's support for their policies on Tibet, Taiwan and Xinjiang (where they struggled over Uygur irredentism). Beijing's position is that each state has the full right to use military force in its territory and other countries should not interfere with such state's internal affairs, especially when it comes to separatism and human rights. This is in keeping with the Russian standpoint. This way, the Chechen conflict served to bring the positions of Moscow and Beijing closer on the international scene⁵⁹.

III. Outlook for the future

The conflict in Chechnya, which dates back to the early 1990s, has become one of the symbols of post-Soviet Russia and its transformation. Although it is just one of many factors determining the present and future shape of this country, it is difficult to overestimate the significance of the Chechen issue for today's Russia. The two Chechen wars have not only affected the internal situation in the Russian Federation, but also

Moscow's foreign policy and Russian society. Recent events in Chechnya, and especially the series of suicide attacks in the republic, the North Caucasus and the Russian capital suggest that Chechnya may play a significant role in influencing developments in the Russian Federation over the nearest future. Even though the Kremlin is taking some measures to normalise the situation in the republic (amnesty, presidential elections, the agreement on the division of powers between Moscow and Grozny), these measures appear unlikely to bring about an end to the conflict as they aim to eliminate its sources (separatism) in a unilateral manner rather than through dialogue with the Chechen society and the anti-Russian opposition. However, one can expect continued instability in the republic and new terrorist attacks both in Chechnya and beyond its borders. This means that the Chechen issue will continue to affect Russia similarly to how it does today, and the adverse processes stimulated by the conflict in Chechnya will continue. The republic will remain a threat to Russia's security, a barrier to reforms and a source for the degeneration and demoralisation of the state administration and the Russian army.

It appears that the Chechen problem will also affect the future of the Russian Federation. The nature of this influence will depend mainly on whether the Kremlin manages to develop and carry out a practical plan to end the conflict in the longer term, or whether it continues with the current policy involving the "anti-terrorist operation" and strengthening pro-Russian authorities in the republic, which seems to be doomed to failure in its present shape. It seems that, as long as there is no peace and stability in the Caucasus, Russia will not become a democratic country respecting human rights and civil freedoms, and its political situation will remain susceptible to destabilisation.

Maciej Falkowski

¹ The reasons why the Russian-Chechen conflict turned into the longest and most bloody war in the entire post-Soviet area include the specific traits of Chechen society, i.e. its division into competing clans (teips) that unite when facing a common enemy; and the absence of modern elites, and the system of Chechen values, including freedom verging on anarchy, egalitarianism, aversion to externally imposed authority, a preference for clan laws based on the principle of bloody vendetta over written laws, a sense of honour and irrational behaviour of individuals and entire communities, etc. For more information on problems regarding the social structure of contemporary Chechnya see: Dmitri Furman (ed.), *Chechnia i Rossiia: obshchestva igosudarstva*, Moscow 1999.

² For more information on the history of the Chechen conflict from the early 1990s until the end of the first Chechen war see: Piotr Grochmalski, *Czeczenia: rys prawdziwy*, Wrocław: atla2 1999.

³ Troops were not withdrawn from any of the other republics and, following the initial period of conflict with the Kremlin, all of them ultimately signed the Federation Treaty of March 1992 (by 1994). There are grounds to believe that Dudaev did not aspire for Chechnya's full independence either. It seems that he played a kind of game with the Kremlin hoping to elicit a good deal of independence by making far-reaching demands. The developments in Chechnya and, above all, the shaping of the political situation in the Kremlin (the increased influence of advocates of military intervention) brought about the transformation of the Russian-Chechen conflict into an open war.

⁴ Other causes for the outbreak of the Chechen war include ill-considered, illogical and venturesome moves of Chechen and Russian leaders motivated by an excess of ambition, the failure of many politicians on both sides, including Dzhokhar Dudaev, to objectively assess the situation, the pursuit of private, usually economic, interests and a lack of professionalism among both Chechen and Russian politicians, etc.

⁵ The outcome of the almost two-year-long war was tragic. The war claimed approx. 60 thousand lives, including approx. five thousand Russian soldiers and approx. ten thousand militants. Hundreds of thousands of people fled Chechnya (most of the refugees were Russians). As a result of the war, Chechnya became almost ethnically homogeneous, as most Russians and Ingush people left permanently. The war also brought about a deep transformation of Chechen society. The original clan structure and clan elders lost their former significance and were replaced by young field commanders who rose to power in the aftermath of the victorious first war. See: Jacek Cichoński, *Konflikt rosyjsko-czeński*, Warsaw: CES 1997; V. A. Tishkov, *Obshchestvo v voruzhennom konflikte: Etnografiia chechenskoi voiny*, Moscow: Nauka 2001.

⁶ Nevertheless, the Khasav-Yurt peace agreement wasn't signed until after the presidential elections of June 1996, in August 1996.

⁷ The fact that the Soviet Army was not prepared to deal with guerrillas had been previously exposed by the intervention in Afghanistan; however, the poor style and

extent of the Army's defeat in Chechnya were considerably greater. During the Afghan war, the Soviet Army failed to overpower the mujaheddin who received massive support from the West and the Arab world. In Chechnya, however, the Russian Army gave in to the levy of masses of highlanders defending their villages.

⁸ For more information on the impact of the first Chechen war on the Russian army see: Witold Pasek, *Armia rosyjska po Czeczenii*, Eurazja: CES No. 5/1995; Andrzej Grajewski, *Federalni po Czeczenii*, Eurazja: CES No. 5/1995.

⁹ See: Aleksei Malashenko, Dmitri Trenin, *Vremia yuga*, Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center 2002, p. 180–188.

¹⁰ During the first Chechen war, several major terrorist acts were committed, including hijackings of planes and buses. The greatest acts of terror in 1994–1996 were two raids carried out by Chechen militants and the taking of hundreds of hostages. The first one was carried out in June 1995 by Shamil Basaev's detachment that seized a hospital in the town of Budennovsk in Stavropol Krai taking some one thousand hostages. This operation was a success for the Chechens: they were allowed to safely return to Chechnya where the Russians and the Chechens entered into negotiations concerning the terms of a cease-fire. The other operation took place in January 1996 when militants led by Salman Raduev seized a hospital in Kizlar, Dagestan, once again taking hundreds of hostages. This time the Russians refused to negotiate with the militants who withdrew to Chechnya following a few days of fighting near the village of Pervomaiskoye.

¹¹ To this end, Russia would publicise the cases of people, mainly foreigners, being kidnapped for ransom. These types of kidnappings were widespread in Chechnya in 1996–1999. There was considerable evidence suggesting that some of them were perpetrated by the Russian secret services trying to destabilise the situation in Chechnya and prepare the ground for a new military intervention. There were also documented instances of secret services co-operating with Islamic radicals in Chechnya, even following the outbreak of the second war in the republic (Sanobar Shermatova, *Tainaia voina spetssluzhb*, *Moskovskie Novosti*, 8 August 2000).

¹² A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *op. cit.*, p. 101–105.

¹³ This was a group of several villages in western Dagestan in the "Kadar zone" (the Botlichsk and Tsumadin regions), which included Kadar, Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi.

¹⁴ In 1999 and 2000, Russian troops in Chechnya pursued a different tactic than during the first war: first, they bombed the positions of militants and civilian facilities for over a month in order to hit the Chechen forces as hard as possible and force civilians to leave Chechnya; next, they seized the lowland part of Chechnya and Grozny and finally blew up landing troops on the Chechen-Georgian border preventing Chechens from advancing towards Georgia. In spring 2000, nearly all of Chechnya was in Russian hands.

¹⁵ Russian authorities have blamed these attacks on the Chechens, but it remains unclear to date just who was actually behind them. There is substantial evidence indicating that these attacks may have been perpetrated by the Russian secret services. This is the opinion of Aleksandr Litvinenko,

a former Federal Security Services (FSS) officer who fled to Great Britain (he presents his view in the book *Chechen-skoye koleso* by Aleksandr Mikhailov, Moscow: Sovershenno sekretno 2002) and the media magnate and political opponent of president Putin, Boris Berezovsky (he attempts to prove his case in the movie "Assassination of Russia").

¹⁶ In the early phase of the war, approx. 350 thousand people fled Chechnya, most of which went to Ingushetia. Presently, some 70 to 100 thousand Chechen refugees remain in the republic, of which approx. 20 thousand live in refugee camps (source: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/N-Caucas/ingush/winter2002.htm>). Since mid October 2002, they are being forced to return to Chechnya. In this manner, the Kremlin is trying to demonstrate that the situation in the republic is becoming normalised. There are also several thousand or several tens of thousands Chechen refugees in Dagestan, Georgia and Stavropol Krai. Increasingly more Chechens who managed to leave the republic are heading to the West, to destinations such as Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany and Belgium.

¹⁷ In the present war, Chechens are avoiding open confrontation with the federal troops and are not attempting to reclaim individual villages, as was the case during the first war. They are focusing on planting landmines along routes used by Russian military columns, firing at posts of federal troops and assassinating Chechens collaborating with Moscow. For a while now some militants have been resorting to Palestinian-style suicide attacks.

¹⁸ On 27 December 2002, suicide bombers blew up the building of the pro-Russian administration in Grozny using a truck loaded with explosives, killing over 70 people. In May 2003, the regional administration and FSS building in the village of Znamenskoye (northern Chechnya) was destroyed in a similar way. This attack claimed approx. 60 lives. Several days later, female suicide bombers detonated explosives during a religious ceremony in Iliskhan-Yurt (the Gudermes region) killing approx. 20 people. On 5 June a female suicide bomber blew up a bus in Mozdok (North Ossetia) carrying Russian airmen as it drove by, killing some 20 people. Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility for all of these attacks.

¹⁹ On 5 July, a suicide terrorist attack was carried out in the Tushino airport in Moscow where a rock music festival was taking place. It claimed 16 lives. Russian authorities blamed this attack on the Chechens, but there has been no convincing evidence to substantiate this, and none of the Chechen groups has claimed responsibility.

²⁰ President Aslan Maskhadov was accused of organising the attack in Dubrovka and was rejected as a potential partner in negotiations. Nevertheless, behind-the-scenes talks have taken place with some Chechen leaders who were promised to be admitted into political life in Chechnya.

²¹ For more information on the Chechenisation policy see: Aleksei Makarkin, *Chechenizatsya: proiekt Putina-Kadyrova*, http://www.politcom.ru/2002/spec_pr3.php; Aleksei Makarkin, *Krizisnoie upravlenie chechenizatsyei*, <http://www.politcom.ru/2003/pvz72.php>

²² According to official figures, turnout in the constitutional referendum of 23 March 2003 exceeded 80 percent. Ninety-

six percent of voters said "yes" to the passing of the constitution. The results of the vote appear to have been falsified. The amnesty passed in June 2003 by the Russian Duma is supposed to cover persons who committed offences in the territory of the former Chechen-Ingush ASSR after 1 August 1993. The precondition is that militants surrender their arms by 1 September this year. The amnesty will also cover Russian soldiers who committed offences against civilians. The amnesty will not include perpetrators of serious crimes such as murder, robbery, rape, kidnapping and acts of terrorism. Because of the absence of security guarantees for former militants, the short duration of the amnesty and the exclusion of persons convicted for serious crimes, there is a question mark over how effective the amnesty will be for Chechen militants (the amnesty will probably mainly apply to Russian soldiers).

²³ The present strength of the Chechen militia is approx. 11 thousand people (<http://www.politcom.ru/2003/zloba2297.php>), while Akhmed Kadyrov's personal body-guard led by his son Ramzan totals approx. four thousand (<http://www.gazeta.ru/2003/05/20/kadyrovstalb.shtml>).

²⁴ For more information on this topic see Maciej Falkowski, *Chechnya: suicide attacks and the Kremlin's pre-election propaganda*, *Tydzien na Wschodzie* 314, CES 2003.

²⁵ For more information on the "Palestinisation" of the Chechen conflict see: Anna Politkovska, *Palestina nr 2: terakty kotorykh ne byt uzhe ne moglo*, *Novaia Gazeta*, 15 May 2003; Anna Politkovska, *Novaia, posleNord-Ostovskaia ideologia v Chechnie: vozmite menia otomstit*, *Novaia Gazeta*, 13 February 2003; Vitaly Portnikov, *Strana shakhidia*, <http://www.politcom.ru/2003/pvz180.php>

²⁶ See: Jadwiga Rogoza, Iwona Wiśniewska, *A summary of the politico-economic changes taking place during Vladimir Putin's first time of office*, "CES Studies" 10, CES 2003.

²⁷ According to the *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* daily, the "anti-terrorist operation" costs the Russian budget US\$ 1.3 billion to 1.4 billion a year (Petr Orekhin, *Chechnia stanet ofshorom*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 22.04.2003). According to *Novaia Gazeta*, costs of the operation amount to approx. US\$ 10 billion (Yuri Baulin, *Skolko stoit den voyny vChechnie?*, *Novaia Gazeta*, 20 November 2002).

²⁸ According to estimates of the *Nezavisimaia Gazeta* daily, which quotes the Minister of Finance of the Russian Federation Aleksei Kudrin, the Russian budget earmarks US\$ 600 to 700 million annually for the reconstruction of the war-ravaged Chechnya (Pert Orekhin, *op. cit.*).

²⁹ Chechnya-related issues are the responsibility of several bodies of the Russian Federation, including the Ministry for Chechen Affairs, the envoy of the president of the Russian Federation to the Southern Federal District, the Federal Security Service and individual ministries.

³⁰ For more information on corruption in Chechnya see: Svetlana Ofitova, Maxim Glinkin, *Voruiut vse!*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 13 March 2003.

³¹ Presently, some 80 thousand Russian troops are stationed in Chechnya, of which nearly half are detachments of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (Musa Muradov, *Ogrnichennyi izbytochnyi kontingent*, *Kommersant*, 3 March 2003). For more information on the composition of the Rus-

sian contingent in Chechnya see: *Kak voiska vvodilis v Chechniu*, <http://www.gazeta.ru/2003/03/05/kakvojskavvo.shtml>

³² For more information see: Wojciech Górecki, Ewa Paszyc, *Walka o czeczeńską ropę*, *Tydzień na Wschodzie* 208, CES 2001.

³³ Many NGOs are trying to bring about the awareness of crimes committed by Russian troops in Chechnya; the Moscow-based Memorial appears to be the most reliable of these. In its reports, Memorial publishes evidence of specific crimes committed by Russian troops and expresses its own views on the Kremlin's policy towards the republic and the terms on which the war should be concluded. For more information see: <http://www.memo.ru/hr/hotpoints/caucas1/index.htm>

³⁴ For more information on the expanding influence of the military following the outbreak of the second Chechen war see: Wojciech Górecki, Andrzej Wilk, *A year of war in Chechnya*, *Tydzień na Wschodzie* 198, CES 2000.

³⁵ On 8 April 2003, editors in chief of major Russian media signed the "Anti-terrorist convention", which is in fact an obligation to self-censor information on anti-terrorist operations. The convention governs the work of the media in emergency situations such as terrorist acts and anti-terrorist operations. Journalists are obligated to withhold information that could impede the battling of terrorists, as the convention gives priority to the protection of life over the right to information. *Interfax*, 8 April 2003.

³⁶ For example: *Novaia Gazeta*, *Gazeta*, *Radio Svoboda*, *Echo Moskvy*, www.grani.ru, www.apn.ru, www.newsru.com, www.kolokol.ru

³⁷ According to research carried out by VCIOM (Russian Centre for Public Opinion and Market Research) in February 2003, 26 percent of Russians believe the war in Chechnya should continue, while 70 percent support peace talks with the Chechen separatists. Source: "Putin stoit na chechenskom rasputii", <http://www.polit.ru/docs/612059.html>

³⁸ *Vzglad na sobytia w zdanii Nord-Osta mesiaty spustia...*, public opinion research carried out in November 2002 by VCIOM; <http://www.polit.ru/docs/477459.html>

³⁹ It is very difficult to estimate the number of immigrants from the Caucasus who stay in Russia permanently or seasonally, but this number certainly reaches several million. According to different sources, approx. 100 thousand Chechens probably live in the Russian capital alone.

⁴⁰ This term was made popular by the media in Russia in mid 1990s. "Persons of Caucasian nationality" refers to all inhabitants of the Caucasus, irrespective of nationality or religion. They themselves find this phrase offensive and racist.

⁴¹ For more information on the problem of Caucasophobia and Islamophobia in Russia see: Aleksei Levinson, *Kavkaz podo mnoiu. Kratke zametki po formirovaniu i prakticheskomu ispolzovaniu "obraza vraga" v otnoshenii lits kavkazskoi natsionalnosti*, <http://www.polit.ru/docs/618834.html>; *O polozhenii etnicheskikh Chechentsev v Moskve*, a report published on 23 February 2003 by Human Rights Watch (<http://www.hrw.org/russian/reports/russia/2003/chech-moscow.html>).

⁴² Aleksei Malashenko, *Islamskoye Vozrozhdenie v Sovremennoi Rossii*, Moscow: Moscow Carnegie Center 1998.

⁴³ This refers to both the autonomous Northern Caucasian republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachay-Cherkessia, Adigea, and areas predominantly inhabited by ethnic Russians, i.e. Stavropol Krai, Krasnodar Krai and the Rostov oblast.

⁴⁴ For more information on the problem of migrations in the south of Russia and related conflicts see: Dmitri Nikitin, Aleksandr Khalmukhamedov, *Migratsionnyie potoki kak faktor destabilizatsii polozhenia na Severnom Kavkaze*, *Tsentralnaia Azia i Kavkaz* No. 2 (20)/2002.

⁴⁵ Ilia Maksakov, *Kavkazski barometr*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 18 March 2003.

⁴⁶ See: Vadim Ilich, Ismail Radzhabov, *Sovetskoye nasledstvo ne dayot pokoya Zapadu*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 9 April 2002; Akhmet Yarlykapov, *Poklonniki dzhihadu*, *Nezavisimoie Voiennoie Obozrenie*, 11 April 2003.

⁴⁷ In Soviet times, Grozny was an important administrative, economic and educational centre for the entire North Caucasus and one of the region's key transport nodes.

⁴⁸ Maria Bondarenko, *Ekonomika Severnogo Kavkaza ostayotsia zalozhnitsei voiny*, *Nezavisimaia Gazeta*, 14 January 2003.

⁴⁹ Wojciech Górecki, *Człowiek Kremla prezydentem Inguszetii*, *Tydzień na Wschodzie* 267, CES 2002.

⁵⁰ Russian policy towards regions and states south of Russia and the threats they pose are widely discussed in: Aleksei Malashenko, Dmitri Trenin, *op. cit.*

⁵¹ The Council of Europe most actively deals with the Chechen issue. It expressed its most recent position on the situation in the republic (and especially the human rights situation) in the report of the Human Rights Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe; see: *Situatsiya s sobludeniem prav cheloveka v Chechenskoj Respublike*, <http://kavkaz.memo.ru/analyticstext/analytics/id/563978.html>

⁵² For more information see: Gail W. Lapidus, *Putin's war on terrorism: lessons from Chechnya*, "Post-Soviet Affairs", Volume 18/January-March 2002.

⁵³ Nevertheless, Washington repeatedly emphasised that, from its point of view, the war in Chechnya could not be identified with the war against international terrorism because of the different background and nature of both conflicts. Such statements, however, were not reflected in any specific political activities.

⁵⁴ GUUAM: Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova.

⁵⁵ See: Wojciech Górecki, *Kaukaz Południowy w polityce międzynarodowej*, *Tydzień na Wschodzie* 235, CES 2001.

⁵⁶ Russia demanded that Georgia liquidate the bases of Chechen militants on its territory (located mainly in the Pankisi Gorge) and allow Russian forces to patrol the Russian-Georgian border. Moscow also demanded that Tbilisi give away Chechens detained in Georgia. In order to press Georgia, Russia introduced visas for Georgians going to Russia, frequently interrupted gas and electricity supplies to Georgia and even threatened to carry out a limited military intervention (the "Pankisi crisis" of October 2002).

⁵⁷ The Russian press published numerous articles on the support offered by Muslim states, Saudi Arabia in particular, for the subversive activities of Muslim radicals in Russia, the activities of Arab countries' secret services in the Caucasus and Central Asia, etc.

⁵⁸ For more information see A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *op. cit.*, p. 209–213.

⁵⁹ A. Malashenko, D. Trenin, *op. cit.*, p. 222–224.

